

Eastwood Baptist (AM, 23/7/'17) **LOVE ONE ANOTHER** (Reading: John 15:9-17)

Introduction This morning I want to look at the exhortation to “love one another”. This is by far the most common New Testament expression using the words “one another”, being used frequently by both Paul and John. But what does it mean to us as Christians? There have been attempts to answer this by focusing on the Greek verb *agapaō* and the related noun *agapē*. But the noun is very rare in Greek before the New Testament, while the verb is used in a variety of ways before the New Testament, rather like our English verb. What seems to have happened is that the early Christians have seized on this rather colourless word group and filled it with a meaning of their own, a meaning profoundly influenced by the life and teaching of Jesus himself. Therefore we can do no better in seeking to understand the exhortation to love one another than look at how these words are used in the New Testament.

Love deeply, from the heart I have said that it is mainly John and Paul who call upon Christians to love one another, but I would like to begin with a single instance in the letters of Peter. **Read 1 Peter 1:22.** This instance does not take us very far, but it does teach us two important things. First, this love is not just any kind of love which we might see in our world, but it is a love which springs from obeying from the truth and a determination to live a purified life. In context, this truth is clearly the truth found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. So a full understanding of this love requires a full understanding of the gospel. We will go further with this soon, although it is the work of a lifetime of discipleship to reach full understanding. Secondly, this love is not a matter of making a good show or conforming to conventions of behaviour. It is sincere and deep and from the heart. If we had lots of time we might go a little further with Peter, but we don't and there is greater help available in the writings of Paul and John.

Love continually, and more and more I have chosen to look next at Paul, mainly because I think that John provides a great place to finish. And I want to look at three letters in which Paul calls upon his readers to love one another. First, at Romans – **read Romans 13:8.** Paul says that we are to pay our debts, but that we can never pay in full the debt to love one another – it is a continuing debt, and we must love one another continually. In the following verses Paul supports this by saying that love is the fulfilment of God's law, and sums up all the specific laws concerning how we should act toward other people. And in v.10 he says that “love does no harm to its neighbour”. In the light of Jesus' teaching about loving one's neighbour, we could turn that into a positive statement, and say

that the love required of the Christian always seeks to do good to other people. This love is not only required toward other Christians, but it is among Christians that it should be reciprocal, a love for one another.

Paul has something similar to say to the Galatians, but with an interesting variation. **Read Galatians 5:13.** We are to “serve one another in love”. This conveys that loving one another as Christians involves service, involves actively doing things to help one another. This is reinforced just a little later in the letter – **read Galatians 6:2.** We should never say to another Christian, “That is your problem – it’s got nothing to do with me.” We are called to help one another. Our third letter by Paul is 1 Thessalonians, beginning with its third verse – **read 1 Thessalonians 1:3.** Paul here introduces three key marks of the Christian life (faith, love and hope), and he will come back to each of them during the letter. And he adds another word to each of these key words to indicate that each of these marks of the Christian life is acted out. In the case of love he adds “labour of”, expanded in the NIV to “labour prompted by”. So the love which Paul has in mind involves work – it puts effort into expressing itself toward one another. Later in this letter Paul comes back to the theme of love, using the expression “one another”, although the NIV here uses the near equivalent “each other”. **Read 1 Thessalonians 3:12 and 4:9-10.** The most interesting feature of these two examples is the language about increase. Paul acknowledges that the Christians of Thessalonica do show such love, but he urges them to do so more and more. Even the most loving Christian among us has further to go. We are not to congratulate ourselves on the measure of love which we have shown to others, but to seek to do so more and more.

Love as Jesus has loved us When we turn to John’s Gospel we see most clearly what this love with which we are to love one another is like. **Read John 13:34.** Jesus gives his disciples a new command, to love one another, a command not only for the disciples who were physically present as he spoke, but for all his disciples of all times, including us. But what makes it new? After all, there is a command to love one’s neighbour in Leviticus. What makes it new is the second half of v.34: we are to love one another as Jesus first loved us. These words draw power from their context. Look at how this chapter begins – **read John 13:1.** A more literal translation of the final words of the verse is that Jesus loved them to the end. This probably has a double meaning, that is, that Jesus loved them right up to the end of his time on earth and that Jesus loved them right up to the Cross. So we need to look at two things. We need to look first at this chapter, and the next few chapters. If we do this we see Jesus facing a terrible death but focusing in what he says and does on his disciples and their need. He washes their feet, the action of a humble servant; he

speaks words of comfort and encouragement; and he prays for them. He thus shows us what his kind of love looks like. It is a love which is not full of itself but focused on the needs of others. It is a love which serves in the humble way which no-one else is willing to take on. It is a love which puts aside its own grief to prepare others for their coming grief.

Then we need to look beyond these few chapters to Jesus' crucifixion. This is a love which goes all the way, a love which goes willingly to death. This is, of course, an act of obedience to God the Father. But it is also an act of love toward sinful human beings. We can't duplicate what Jesus did. We can't offer a sinless life on behalf of sinners. But we can learn from his love. We can learn to serve others humbly; we can learn to think of the needs of others when we are tempted to focus on ourselves. We can learn to do things that are difficult when we see that God wants us to do them for the sake of others.