One Anothering

Thirty "one another" texts, four headings, and a holy kiss

SPEAKER	Geno Hildebrandt
DATE	Sunday, May 17, 2020
PASSAGES	John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7-12; Romans 12:16; Romans 15:5-7; Ephesians 4:32; Galatians 6:2; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 3:13; Hebrews 10:24-25; James 5:16; Romans 16:16
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:52:25 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The Greek pronoun *allēlōn* – "one another" – appears over 130 times in the New Testament. Its commands gather under four headings: love one another, live in harmony, help one another mature in Christ, and greet one another with a holy kiss. Lived together, they make the church a place where broken people are healed and outsiders ask how they can join.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- We have heard "love one another" so often we suffer from "repetitive blindness" and skim right past it.
- The first Christians did not start with the word *agape*; they watched Jesus give himself for his enemies and reached for the closest word to describe it.
- *Agape* means seeking the well-being of others, enemies included, without expecting anything in return.
- Harmony is many different parts put in a pleasing order. If we walk in love, living in harmony comes far more easily.
- Helping one another mature is not optional. The "one another" verses are imperatives, addressed to the whole body, not just its leaders.

- Asking for help is even better than offering it: “Can you pray with me? Does the Bible speak to this?”
- Whatever form it takes, God’s people should be marked by deep, concrete, practical affection for one another.

▶ 0:52:25

The previous week’s message on disputable matters – don’t judge, don’t cause a brother to stumble, pay attention to your own walk – drew more feedback than anything Geno had preached in roughly thirty-three years, most of it warmly positive. After days of fielding questions, he wondered whether the church needed more than a warning against judgment. What are the positive commands for how we treat each other?

Why now

▶ 0:53:59

The pandemic had everyone under pressure – anxiety, fear, worry about jobs – and it had seeped into the church. People were shorter with each other and more irritable; “the cracks in our relationships are widening.” So he set out to review the New Testament’s one-another commands, organized under four headings of his own, reading about thirty of the more than 130 uses of the reciprocal pronoun *allēlōn*.

1. Love one another

▶ 0:56:54

The trouble with this one is familiarity. We have heard it at youth camp, in Bible studies and from the pulpit, and the majesty slips away. Geno called it “repetitive blindness”: an idea repeated so often that we nod – “oh yeah, love one another, got it” – and skim past.

▶ 0:58:18

The dictionary calls love an intense feeling of deep affection, or great interest and pleasure in something – which you could have for hot dogs or for Mom. Greek had four words for love, and the early Christians settled on *agape*. But they did not set out to find a technical term. They described what they saw in Jesus, and over time *agape* came to mean “seeking the well-being of others without expecting anything in return” – and most of all, how we treat our enemies.

▶ 1:00:55

Jesus gave himself freely for his enemies, praying even on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," and he taught that we must forgive in order to be forgiven (Matthew 6:12–15). We were his enemies, and he gave himself as a ransom for many, trading his life and taking our punishment. "This is the gospel, and this is what the word *agape* is attempting to embrace."

▶ 1:03:27

Then he asked everyone to close their eyes – shutting one sense sharpens another – and simply listen as the texts rolled past.

> "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."
>
> JOHN 13:34–35 ↗

On they went: John 15:12 and 15:17; "love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor" (Romans 12:10); "may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another" (1 Thessalonians 3:12); "you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another" (1 Thessalonians 4:9), which Geno found fascinating; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; "love one another earnestly from a pure heart" (1 Peter 1:22); 1 John 3:11 and 3:23.

> "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God… Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."
>
> 1 JOHN 4:7–12 ↗

The more we walk in this, Geno said, the closer we come to seeing and understanding God in our midst.

2. Live in harmony with one another

▶ 1:06:48

Why is it hard to walk with people? "Because people are selfish and mean and greedy and lazy – not everybody all the time, but all of us some of the time." The Greek *harmonia* means a consistent, orderly, pleasing arrangement of parts – congruity, agreement, accord. Music is one example, but the idea is

wider: many members of the body set in order, in relationships that are pleasing, not people jammed anonymously into a boxcar.

▶ 1:09:00

> "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight."
>
> ROMANS 12:16 ↗

He read again the text that framed the previous week's sermon, that "together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you" (Romans 15:5–7). If we are walking in love, living in harmony is pretty easy. The verses that follow show how: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32); "see that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone" (1 Thessalonians 5:15).

▶ 1:10:33

"Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door" (James 5:9) – you are not the judge. And "clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble'" (1 Peter 5:5), along with a word to the younger to be subject to the elders – whether church elders or simply those further along in Christ. Geno admitted he was biting his tongue: he wanted to preach on every one of these. "Let's just do what it says."

3. Help one another mature in Christ

▶ 1:11:35

This one is not optional; the verses are imperatives. It can mean offering to buy someone coffee to talk about something. But it is even better, Geno said, to go to someone whose walk you respect and say, "I'm struggling in this area. I'm staying awake at night worrying. Does the Bible speak to this? Would you pray with me?" And, yes, some people answer, "Don't talk to me – everybody's already talked to me about that."

▶ 1:13:12

Paul tells the whole church in Rome that they are "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another" (Romans 15:14). That is not a verse for leaders only. When we walk with Christ, our lives start to straighten out, and we can say to someone wrestling with the same thing: this is what

Jesus taught me, this is where I found help in the Bible. "It's one beggar helping another beggar find bread." And not just able – responsible.

▶ 1:14:45

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2) – a command, not a suggestion. "Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Ephesians 5:19) is about more than worship; it says *one another*. "Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21) belongs here too: don't be too proud to hear an exhortation from someone less far along. A community that practices mutual submission grows up, because it hears things it otherwise never would.

▶ 1:16:15

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom" (Colossians 3:16) – again, worship and mutual help sit close together. "Encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11). "Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13) – which, he admitted, may fall painfully on some ears.

> "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."
>
> HEBREWS 10:24–25 ↗

▶ 1:17:42

> "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."
>
> JAMES 5:16 ↗

This takes us deep into each other's lives, Geno said, and it says "to one another," not "to an elder," on purpose. And "if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

▶ 1:18:15

Taken together, loving, living in harmony and helping one another mature will form a community into "something marvelous, something deeply spiritual" – a place where broken people have their wounds healed, those far from God are embraced, and sheep who have fallen down rise to their feet. If people

saw that, they would ask what it costs to join. “It’s pretty easy. Just lay your life down. Give up your life, follow Jesus.”

4. Greet one another with a holy kiss

▶ 1:19:27

Geno had been waiting the whole sermon for this one. When he arrived at Hope in 2006, a couple of gray-haired veteran saints greeted people with a kiss on the cheek; some Sundays he got two, and felt surprised and very blessed. He was not proposing Hope revive the practice – a hug or a hearty handshake would do – but he prayed that once health officials said it was safe, the church would return to human contact, because it matters. He was “not a fan of no handshakes, no hugs.”

▶ 1:21:34

Why bring it up? “The people who call Jesus Lord should be marked out by deep and caring affection for one another” – concrete and practical as well as heartfelt. The kiss, the handshake, the hug are outward markers of an inner embrace. For now that might be an air high five, or the crinkle of a smile above a mask. The apostles say it four times: Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:11–12 – “rejoice, aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace” – and 1 Peter 5:14, “greet one another with the kiss of love.”

▶ 1:23:50

He prayed that Hope would be a safe, healthy place and “a beacon on a hill” for those watching how its people treat and talk to each other – so that someone would say, “There’s nowhere else I’ve seen people treat one another so well. Can I join your company?”

Questions

▶ 1:27:25

Asked first, of course, whether he wanted to be greeted with kisses: no – and certainly not by Matt. On *agape*: if we are to love even enemies, that includes friends; enemies are simply the hardest case. Why treat each other well? Because every person bears the image of God, and among believers because we honor Christ’s work in them. Should we try to be easy to love? “Dang right.” Jesus was – his inner circle loved him, and little children wanted to be near him, “probably the best truth-o-meter for a person’s character.”

▶ 1:32:04

He described the coming outdoor service in the courtyard – about a hundred people, six feet apart, masks strongly recommended but not required, paper song sheets one per person, canopies saved for older saints – and how even waving to neighbors from his front porch with PJ had cheered them up. “Human interaction” still matters.

▶ 1:37:11

The last question: intensely loving communities can be unsustainable – how do we keep it up? No magic bullet, Geno said, except walking in all those exhortations. He pointed to forty-two or forty-three years with PJ: highly committed, quick to help, still able to irritate each other, and learning to listen, confess faults quickly and ask forgiveness. He admitted he has really hurt her feelings at times. Commitment is crucial – and commitment to Christ comes first and carries the commitment to one another. “We can’t just conjure love. We commit to love, and love comes out of that.” As John says, we know love by this: Christ died for us.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Luke 23:34
- Matthew 6:12–15
- Mark 10:45
- John 13:34–35
- John 15:12
- John 15:17
- Romans 12:10
- 1 Thessalonians 3:12
- 1 Thessalonians 4:9
- 2 Thessalonians 1:3
- 1 Peter 1:22
- 1 John 3:11
- 1 John 3:23
- 1 John 4:7–12
- Romans 12:16
- Romans 15:5–7
- Ephesians 4:32
- 1 Thessalonians 5:15
- James 5:9
- 1 Peter 5:5
- Romans 15:14
- Galatians 6:2
- Ephesians 5:19
- Ephesians 5:21
- Colossians 3:16
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11
- Hebrews 3:13
- Hebrews 10:24–25
- James 5:16
- 1 John 1:7
- Romans 16:16
- 1 Corinthians 16:20
- 2 Corinthians 13:11–12
- 1 Peter 5:14

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Which “one another” command have you heard so often that repetitive blindness has set in, and what happens when you hear it fresh?
2. Geno defined agape as seeking someone’s good without expecting anything back. Who is the hardest person in your life to love that way?
3. What makes it hard for you to go to someone and ask for help in your walk with Christ?
4. Confessing sins “to one another” takes us deep into each other’s lives. What would make this group a safe place to do that?
5. What is one concrete, practical way you could show affection to someone in the church this week, even at a distance?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Geno Hildebrandt is Hope Chapel’s senior pastor, having come to the church in 2006, and had been preaching for some thirty-three years at the time of this message. He has been married to PJ for more than four decades. During the pandemic he answered live questions after each Sunday message and helped plan the church’s first outdoor gatherings.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBkgbFRtYzM&t=3145s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.