

Pastor Jim Lloyd

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Title: Love One Another

Text: 1 John 3:11-18

I believe there are like 59 different “one anothers” in the New Testament. “ONE ANOTHER” is two words in English. It’s only one word in Greek. It is used 100 times in 94 verses. 47 of those verses give instructions to the followers of Jesus. Paul wrote 60% of the “one another” commands. Four of them are about kissing. About one third of the “one another” commands deal with the church getting along. About 15% stress an attitude of humility and deference among believers. And another third of these commands instruct Christians to love one another. Today we’re continuing our series called *Fixed Focus*. This series is about maximizing the power of intentional living – doing what matters most. If you have a camera that boasts the feature called “fixed focus,” it means that the lens is automatically able to identify and zero in on the subject of the photograph, to make sure that that object is sharper and clearer than the other objects in the image. It’s a rather amazing feature for a camera. It’s even more amazing when you live your life that way.

Last week, we talked about the focus of living a one-Lord lifestyle. You cannot serve two masters, so Jesus is your boss above all others.

Today, we’ll talk about what I have said many times before should be the defining characteristic of Christianity everywhere. What’s that defining characteristic? Knowledge? A political agenda? A culturally relevant social media presence? NO. The defining characteristic for Christianity, for this church, and for each one of us, is LOVE. Do you remember when we used to sing, “We are one in the Spirit. We are one in the Lord.”? Then the song goes on to say – “And they’ll know we are Christians by our love.” The song may be slightly outdated, but the idea behind it isn’t. This is the quality that separates us from everyone else, from all other religions and ideologies. We’re about love, first and foremost. We know, of course, that our first love is God – above all else. One time a teacher of the law approached Jesus and asked, “*Of all the commandments, which is the most important?*” “*The most important one,*” Jesus answered, “*is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength’*” (Mark 12:29-30). Love God with EVERYTHING you’ve got. People in church will not argue with this idea; we all understand its significance. Where we sometimes drop the ball, however, is with the follow-up, where Jesus said... “*The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’*” (Mark 12:31). And then He said... “*There is no commandment greater than these.*” This is why Jesus later said... “*By this all men will know that you are my disciples, IF you love one another*” (John 13:35). Many times we try to make our primary identification something else. As if He said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples – by the way you vote. Or by the way you judge. Or by the way you set people straight on Twitter. Or by your bumper stickers. Or by your boycotts.” And on and on. There are many things that people do in an attempt to signal their virtue to the rest of the world, but really it comes down to this. This is the defining characteristic! “*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love*” (1 John 4:7-8). We know we’re supposed to love God, and we know we’re supposed to love others – but what we sometimes fail to grasp is that we’re NOT talking about two different KINDS of love, or two different LEVELS of love. Yes, our love for God is above all else – but the love we demonstrate for others is not a lesser quality, lower grade kind of love. It’s the same pure, holy, sacrificial kind of love. Some may think that God gets the name brand version of our love and devotion – while everyone else gets the off-brand version. Jesus made it clear that our expression of love for one another reflects the extent of our love for God. This truth is spelled out in the text that we will look at today. Take your Bible and turn to 1 John 3. Today, we’ll talk about living a FIXED FOCUS life of LOVE – specifically love for one another. We’ll talk about three things that the command “love one another” requires.

1. Loving One Another Requires That You Open Your Eyes. What do I mean? First of all, I mean that it requires that we open our eyes to the non-negotiable nature of the love-one-another command. “*Love one another*” is NOT just a suggestion, NOT just a guideline, NOT just a random idea that Jesus has submitted for our approval. Instead, it is a plainly-stated, cut-and-dried, no-two-ways-about-it direct charge – “THIS IS WHAT I WANT YOU TO DO: I WANT YOU TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.” John wrote... “*This is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another.*” He is referencing the words of Jesus... “*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another*” (John 13:34). If your attitude has been, “Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know we’re supposed to love one another in

theory, but in practice it's okay to despise this group or that group because they're such terrible people...", then you're missing the point, because it's never OKAY to despise one collective group or one specific person. The "one another" in Jesus' command does not refer only to the people you like or only to the people whose opinions are identical to yours. This was quite the week. In the last 7 days we had The Super Bowl, The State of the Union Address, AND The National Day of Prayer. Christian Patriots fans, you need to love the Ram players. Christian Ram fans, you need to love the Patriot players. Christian Democrats, you need to love the Republicans. Christian Republicans, you need to love the Democrats. I watched a portion of the National Day of Prayer. A host of politicians were there. The President was there. The Vice President was there. Mrs. Pelosi was there. I think Mr. Schumer was there. I listened to some pointed praying addressed to this Jesus who said, *"Love one another."* I trust there was some LOVE in the room. Again, the "one another" in Jesus' command does not refer only to the people you like or only the people whose opinions are like yours. "One another" is EVERYBODY, PERIOD. Until we open our eyes to the fact that the defining characteristic of the Christian life is love, we will be ineffective in fulfilling the call of God in our lives. This goes for us as individuals and us as a church. We are to follow God's example. GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD! The command to love one another is non-negotiable. We need to open our eyes to this. We also need to open our eyes to the NEEDS of others. Living a life of love means that we learn to look beyond our little cocoon to recognize what is going on in the lives of those around us. People who are in need. There are many hurting people, and sometimes they don't feel comfortable broadcasting their pain. They don't know how to share with others all that they're going through. The signs may be there, but they just don't know how to come out and say, "Hey, my life is in shambles. I'm falling apart. I need your help." Our challenge then, in loving one another, is to keep our eyes open to those around us, so that we can see what's going on in their lives, even when they're able to come out and say it. In verse 17, John says... *"[If anyone] sees his brother in need..."*. The key word is "sees." That means our eyes are open. It means we're paying attention to what is going on around us. Love is always looking for the next opportunity to show love. That's why loving one another REQUIRES that we KEEP OUR EYES OPEN!

2. Loving One Another Requires That You Take Action. Listen to what John said... *"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?"* (vs. 17). He goes on to say... *"Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."* He is not telling us to refrain from using words or our tongue to declare our love. He IS reminding us that talk can be cheap. For our talk to have value, it must be MORE than saying "I love you." For it to be genuine love, it must be demonstrated by our actions. Sometimes we think that if we feel bad enough for someone's problem, that's good enough. We think we've done our part. We'll say something like, "Hey, brother, I hate that you're going through that, but I want you to know that you're in my thoughts." And if we're spiritual, we'll say, "You're in my thoughts AND prayers." If, in fact, they are in our prayers, and we truly are interceding on their behalf before the throne, that's a very good thing. It's the right thing to do. But if we're honest, many times we say, "You're in my prayers," when the truth is that they're barely in our thoughts, and when we walk away we quickly forget about what they're going through. Here's what I'm saying – When people we know are going through a difficult time, of course we need to pray that God will meet their needs. And THEN, we need to be willing to do what we can to be the answer to that prayer. If you know someone who is in need of a job, you certainly can pray that God will meet that need. And maybe, you could make a phone call or two, because you might just know someone who knows someone who can help them out. If you know someone who is going through a health crisis, you'll certainly want to pray for them. And, maybe you could visit them, too. And perhaps you could take some books or DVDs or a list of things to talk about. If you know someone whose life is spinning out of control, or someone who has lost their way, or someone who is struggling with despair – you surely want to pray for them. And maybe, you can offer to baby sit or shovel some snow or take them out to dinner or any number of things. THE POINT – love is expressed through the things we DO. It's an ACTION. When Jesus said that we are to love one another, He wasn't saying, "These are the FEELINGS I want you to have." He was saying, "These are the ACTIONS I want you to take." To paraphrase Forest Gump's mother: Love is as love does. Love requires action on our part.

3. Loving One Another Requires That You Make A Sacrifice. John said... *"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers"* (vs. 16). STORY – On October 20, 2009 a suicide bomber entered the women's campus of Islamabad's International Islamic University. He shot the guard on duty and made his approach toward the cafeteria, which was packed with hundreds of female students. The janitor on duty that day was a young man named Pervaiz Masih. It was his first week on the job. His salary was less than \$60 a month. Pervaiz intercepted the bomber in the doorway and prevented him from going further. The terrorist then detonated his device, killing the janitor and three others. Had he made it into the cafeteria, the damage would have been much worse. The twist on this story is that Pervaiz was a Christian. In Pakistan, believers are in the minority, and traditionally are among

the poorest communities. But, this man came to be considered a hero. He gave his life to save the lives of hundreds of female students. As one professor said, "He rose above the barriers of caste, creed and sectarian terrorism. Despite being a Christian, he sacrificed his life to save the Muslim girls." As one of the students said a short time after the attack, "He's now a legend to us." What a great story! What a great man! I'm guessing that statistically none of us will ever be called upon to make such a sacrifice – to give our life for another. BUT, I'll tell you what most certainly will happen. You will be called upon to sacrifice NOT your life, but your time, your money, and your attention. You may be called upon to sacrifice your day off. Or maybe your vacation plans. Or a purchase you wanted to make. You might even have to sacrifice some level of comfort – all for the love of another. In the book of Philippians, Paul said... *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others"* (2:3-4). When he said this, he was saying, in effect, "This is what it looks like to love one another." You look out for one another, and you're even willing to put your own wants aside, for the good of someone else. Loving one another calls for sacrifice.

CONCLUSION. Throughout the New Testament we're told again and again: Love one another. Love one another. Love one another. And we're not to love one another with a second-rate, off-brand kind of love – surface level and convenient. No, we're to love one another with the same kind of sacrificial love with which we love our Lord Jesus Christ. Once when Jesus was speaking of the final judgment, he told a story of how that day would be. And he said that there would be those to whom the King would say... *"...to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'* Then the righteous will answer him, *'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'* The King will reply, *'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me'"* (Matthew 25:34-40). Jesus made it clear that our expression of love for others reflects the extent of our love for God. If there's no love for others, there's really no love for God. We are to love one another in the same non-negotiable way that we strive to love Him: a love that expresses itself through what we do – even to the point of sacrifice. This is the message, John said, the command you have heard from the beginning: we are to LOVE ONE ANOTHER. Let our lives, then, be focused on expressing God's love at every opportunity.