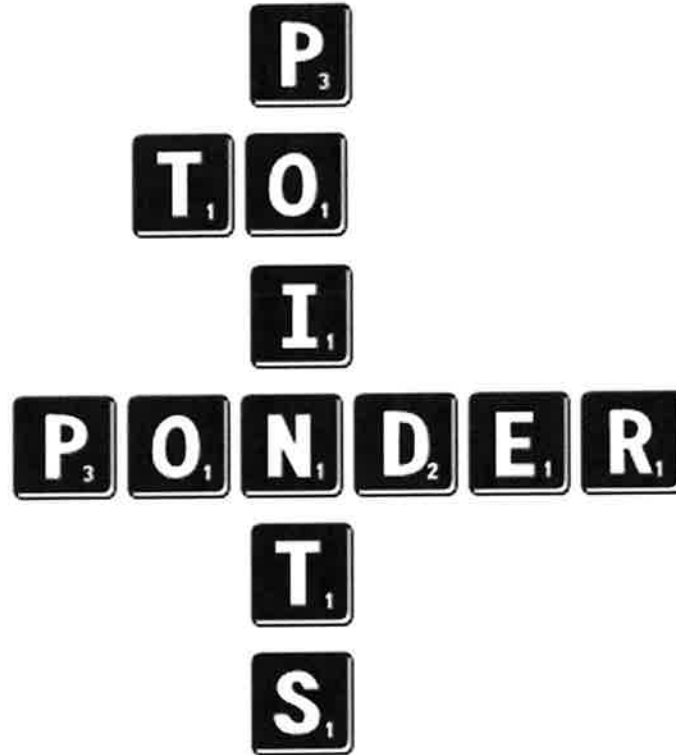




# 2026 Weekly Devotions

Week of: September 14<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup>

Sermon: September 13<sup>th</sup>





September 14

**Galatians 5:13**

We began our 6-week series entitled “Life in the Body” on Sunday morning. I am looking forward to covering some of the core distinctives of what makes a church’s fellowship fruitful, and I believe that we started in a great place yesterday with a relatively deep dive into the biblical concept of membership.

I pray that yesterday’s message helped you understand the way that the idea of membership is woven into the very fabric of New Testament teaching. I further hope and pray that you were strengthened and encouraged to live in light of your calling to join and contribute to a local church and these desires inform my strategy in writing this week’s devotions. The goal for this week is to demonstrate to you the ample biblical teaching that motivates and compels us to consider one another.

Scholars have pointed out that there are 59 “one another” commands in the New Testament. When one considers the fact that there are only 27 books, we can see that God has repeated Himself quite often on the topic of His expectation that we would live our lives in consideration of others. This week, I would like for us to examine 7 of the “one another” commands in the hopes that we would gain a fuller understanding of what a faithful member of a local assembly should be busy doing.

Today’s passage connects our actions with our affections. Paul exhorts the Galatians (men and women who are converted Christians and called to live with each other in a local church) to “serve one another in love”. Notice that there are two components to this command. First, is the call to action. Church members are to serve! The Christian life is a life of service. There is no getting around this fact. Service can take on many forms. We serve our fellow saints by helping with manual labor when they are physically in need, praying for them as they endure trials, offering biblical counsel when they are trying to navigate life’s difficulties and coming alongside of them in their time of financial need (just to name a few).

This representative list of service opportunities begs a question... why would anyone do such a thing? After all, praying and counseling and serving take time and energy! The answer, according to Paul, is that we serve our fellow members because we love them. Just as we naturally serve our nuclear family members in love, so we are called to help our fellow Christians in the local congregation in love. Do you? One of the great indicators of conversion is love for our brothers and sisters in Christ (1 John 4:21) and one of the greatest indicators of the presence of love is service!

September 15

**Ephesians 4:2**

If you were to ask me to list the greatest blessings in my life, near the very top of the list (behind salvation in Christ and my beautiful wife) would be my children. I love all three of my girls deeply! They are a rich blessing, and it is a great joy to have the privilege to watch them grow. I have an enduring desire to provide for them, protect them and invest in them such that they can become all that God has designed them to be as disciple-makers, wives and mothers (to name a few).

Nevertheless, I would be lying if I did not admit that there have been times that they have tried my patience! I hope that I am not alone as a parent in offering such a terrible confession. Sometimes I have to remind myself that I need to be patient with them as there are days that I am either not in the right frame of mind OR they are simply doing things that need correction. In those moments, my love for them must shine through in my willingness to extend grace.

In the same way, you and I are members of a church full of people we love. I truly enjoy the beauty and appreciate the rich blessing of being a member of Smyrna Baptist Church. you all bless me deeply, you encourage me and inspire me to be a better pastor, husband and father. Nevertheless, there are times that I need to extend grace and be patient with you even as you are patient with me.

Why would I do such a thing? The answer, according to Paul, is love. In the same way that I love my kids which informs and motivates me to be gracious to them, I love you and this love causes me to bear with you as you struggle and mature and I have learned that this requirement of patience is a great tool in God's hands to mature and grow me! Stated differently, God uses the imperfections of others to show me my own imperfections, and this leads me to seek His transforming power even as I earnestly pray for sanctification to continue to progress in your life.

One of my great fears with "Christians" who claim to have no need of the church is rooted in this very principle. Often times (though not always), the lack of a desire to spend time with other believers within a congregation is rooted in a lack of loving compassion. There is a deep consumerism that permeates the hearts of many today which looks upon life in the body as something that is unnecessary because it is inconvenient and trying! The problem with this mentality is that it betrays a serious ignorance, or lack of concern, with the biblical teaching that we are to walk in love towards others and that love covers a multitude of sins. Folks, if you are annoyed, frustrated or unconcerned with Christ's bride know that you are walking in opposition to the One who gave Himself for sinners in order to purify them! God's plan is to transform us from lowly, undeserving and filthy wretches to glorified, adopted saints. He is doing so at the moment and He invites us to see His work both in us and in others as we patiently bear with each other in love.

September 16

**Colossians 3:13**

I can almost hear the objection to yesterday's devotion in my mind. It goes something like this, "Pastor, it may seem easy to say that we should be patient with those who are not yet what they will become but... they hurt me!" I hope that my words yesterday didn't suggest that patience was necessarily easy! There is a way to be flippant about the trials and tribulations of walking with other sinners. It is simply unavoidable that loving and patiently serving our brothers and sisters in Christ will cost us and, sometimes, they will sin against us!

Many people have experienced deep "church hurt", me included! Some of the most difficult and hurtful experiences of my life have come at the hands of church members. Sometimes I contributed to the issue with my own sin and other times their lashing out had very little to do with me. What does God expect of us in these moments? Today's passage answers that question rather clearly.

Paul says that we are to "forgive one another". The implication of the text is clear as day... we forgive one another because they have sinned against us! Jesus taught us to pray for the forgiveness of others in the Lord's prayer, and He demonstrated the proper way to forgive on numerous occasions. Sometimes He prayed for the forgiveness of His enemies (like when He hung on the cross and asked God to forgive the sins of those who were seeking His crucifixion) but there were other instances where He forgave those who were His friends.

The clearest example of this is probably the story of His encounter with Peter after the resurrection. You will recall that Peter had publicly and vociferously denied Jesus just before the crucifixion. Although Christ predicted Peter's failure, the pain must have been real. Nevertheless, Jesus sought Peter and restored fellowship with Peter even after such a horrible act.

How about you? Some of you are holding on to hurts and grudges today. The problem for many is not that they are wrong in their assessment that another party was in the wrong, the problem is that you are wrong in your response. We must forgive! Why? Well, God has forgiven us! If we desire God's grace, we must be willing conduits of that grace to others. There is no biblical category for the man or woman of God who has been forgiven and yet refuses to forgive. If you are a recipient of grace, you must be a dispenser of mercy as well. Is this challenging? Absolutely! Is it necessary? Yes! We must see the sins of others as opportunities for Gospel proclamation and embodiment. Oh how much clearer of a witness of the grace of God would we have if we simply forgave others as He forgave us?

September 17

**1 Peter 4:9**

If I could hone in on a few critiques of the modern American church, I do believe that I would quickly focus on the lack of corporate, organic fellowship. Church has become an event with a start time and an ending time in many contexts today. People approach church like a movie (“we need to get there a few minutes before it starts and clean up your trash as you exit the rear doors of the sanctuary, we will see you next week!”).

As we consider the biblical teaching on the life of the body (see for example Acts 2:42-47) we can discern that this way of thinking is radically different than biblical Christianity. God’s design and desire is that we would welcome one another into our very lives and, therefore, into our free time and homes.

Peter exhorts believers to show “hospitality” to one another. The word hospitality essentially means welcoming others for fellowship. What interests me here is that Peter commands Christians to do so “without grumbling”. Why would hospitality make us grumble? Well, showing hospitality is costly and stubbornly unpredictable! When I welcome someone into my home, for instance, I am opening the door to their problems, habits and schedule.

How many of you have had a family over only to watch them destroy portions of your home or talk about things that don’t really interest you or stay until the middle of the night! These are real obstacles to hospitality, and they inform why Peter would implore disciples to show kindness and warmth even when it hurts.

It is easier to live at arms distance from others. It preserves our things, guards our time and allows us to avoid awkward conversations altogether. Nevertheless, the lack of hospitality robs us of joy, and it harms our witness to a world that needs to see the beauty of fellowship that only Christ can create.

Are you a hospitable person? Do you welcome people to join you as you go about your daily tasks? Do you have folks over to your home? Are you willing to engage in conversations that are difficult or not your cup of tea? Do you sacrifice for the wellbeing of others, and do you do so without grumbling? There are people at Smyrna who could use your help, but they will never receive it unless you open your proverbial door to them. Could things get messy or weird? Yes! Nevertheless, the overall result of such a venture is a community of faith that is strengthened and a people that grow strong in love and affection for one another.

September 18

**James 5:16**

I would like to open this devotion with a confession. I've always been taught that confession is good for the soul after all! I would like to confess to you that I am very nervous to confess my sins to others. I do repent before God often (I have many reasons to repent) but I am not all that keen on confessing to some of you.

There are many reasons for this reticence to confess. I don't like to be vulnerable. I fear how someone might leverage my honesty for harmful purposes. I fear that others might look down on me and question my qualification to be a pastor. These are a few of the numerous reasons why I fear confession, but I must admit that it is a command that is clearly taught in Scripture.

Today's passage exhorts us to confess our sins to one another, but it also provides what I believe to be a motivation or explanation for why this is critical to our spiritual health and the well-being of the flock. Notice that James says we are both to confess AND pray for one another. What's the connection?

I believe the answer is that our prayers are better informed when we know the struggles of those we are praying for! I cannot pray for you with confidence and insight if I do not know what is going on. Conversely, when I know what is happening in your life and the struggles that you are enduring, my prayers can be more specific and, by God's grace, powerful.

Do you have a few folks in the church that you regularly speak to about the struggles and difficulties in your life? If not, I would implore you to find them quickly. We need brothers and sisters in Christ in our corner. We are desperate for all the help that we can get, and we should understand that the church is one of the resources God has given us to assist us in the journey.

Additionally, do you have people who have confessed their struggles to you? If so, please remember that their vulnerability is an act of faith and not to be leveraged by you for their harm. Far be it from us to turn that which is beautiful and necessary into something that is hurtful and carnal. Guard your brother's reputation, pray for them earnestly, check on them often and trust that God can use our fellowship to grow them for His glory and their good.

September 19

### **Hebrews 10:24**

This life has a way of draining you! The struggle to be faithful to Christ and responsible to fulfill all of our obligations before Him and others is difficult. It is a real challenge to walk in holiness and love when we are constantly assaulted by a world that opposes us at every turn. What should we do?

One answer is that we should belong to a church! Hebrews 10 is a familiar text to many of us. We often cite it here at Smyrna and we do so because of the difficulty of life! The author of Hebrews shares with us that one of the functions of the church is to “stir us up to good works”. The word translated “stir” can also be rendered “spur”. The idea of a spur is that it provides motivation to move forward!

God has designed the world to operate in such a way that we gather once every seven days to be encouraged, equipped and exhorted to obedience and He has told us that we need this time of refilling if we are going to be faithful. I have often heard people say that they can tell the difference when they haven’t been in church. There is something “off” when I don’t gather with the saints and, I believe, that something is a lack of stirring or spurring.

I need to be refueled and reminded of the truth. I need your encouragement and strengthening. I need to be shown that I am not in this alone. When I show up to gather with my church family on a Sunday morning, I walk into a visible declaration that I am apart of the family of God and that He is faithful!

Oh church, it breaks my heart to see how many folks don’t seem to understand this or even care! It blows my mind to consider how few really equate the gathering of the saints with faithfulness to Christ. Church was not my idea (or Pastor Robert’s), church is something that Christ died to establish and designed to help us in ways that we desperately need.

I pray that you are not neglecting the sweet grace He provides for us in the gathering of the saints. We realize that its messy (see some of our previous devotions) but don’t let the imperfections alter the fundamental truth that God is gracious to us in giving us a gathering of saints and a Word to strengthen and encourage us as we set out to make Him known.

September 20

**Romans 12:10**

As we prepare ourselves for corporate worship today, I pray that yesterday's devotion motivates you to show up for today's service. I can't wait to be together, and I pray that you feel the same way. One of the things that encourages me the most about our church is the numerous faithful disciples that are a part of our congregation. I love to see the godly senior adults, the growing young men and the hoards of children who show up to glorify Christ. Their presence gives me cause to sing and savor Jesus all the more as I see in them evidence of His power and grace but I their presence should also motivate me to faithfully obey this final "one another" command in our weeklong devotional study.

Today, let us reflect upon the command to "outdo one another in showing honor". The word translated honor means to show respect or dignity. It denotes the very activity of identifying that which is commendable and treating it as such. In this context, Paul is exhorting believers to show respect towards those in their midst who are walking in the truth.

I earnestly believe that our church does a good job of this, and I believe it has started from the top. Pastor Robert has always shown the leaders of this church honor. He has loved and respected me and our teachers and our volunteers and faithful members for years. Our relationship is one of mutual honor and respect. I think so highly of my co-laborer and friend as I see in him so many things that are commendable and indicative of Christ in him! He is a faithful expositor and a wonderful husband and father and a great friend and he's not alone!

There are many people at Smyrna who are faithful and vibrant Christians and our job is to see this and call attention to them for God's glory. Note here that showing honor is not meant to puff up the individual in question, instead showing honor is meant to exalt the work of Christ in the lives of those we know. When I see the fruit of the Spirit in your life, I am to show honor because it's clear that God is at work in you! Therefore, you don't get the credit, but you do serve as the example of Jesus' power and faithfulness.

Today let us seek to give honor to whom honor is due. Honor your Sunday school teacher by listening to the lesson that they have prayerfully and carefully prepared. Honor your godly friends by listening to their wisdom and praising God for the work that He is doing in their lives. Honor others by esteeming their input and calling attention to their successes. In all these things, God is exalted and we are reminded that He is a good and precious Father.