

Twentieth Annual

TRUTH IN LOVE

LECTURESHIP

Theme:

“One Another”

**Our
Relationship
In Christ**

May 19-23, 2010

PAUL SAIN, DIRECTOR

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INTRODUCTION

What a blessing and joy to be a part of the family of God! Christians are rich beyond measure or description. Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, we are walking together toward glory, with the continual help of our Saviour through His Word.

The word “family” produces tender emotions within our hearts. Especially when we are referring to our spiritual family, we are mindful of the peace and happiness found in Christ (Phil. 4:7; Col. 3:15).

The church of Christ in the first century serves as an example to God’s people today. What they did when they become members of the church is exactly what we must do today to become members. The way they worshipped almost two thousand years ago should involve the same actions and attitudes in our worship today. The work in which they were involved should be the work in which we are involved. Consider for a moment the treasured relationship Christians of the first century enjoyed. They “had all things common” (Acts 2:42). They were known for their work of faith and labor of love and patience of hope (1 Thess. 1:3). They gave of themselves sacrificially to help one another (2 Cor. 8:5ff; Rom. 12:1-2).

As we study the Scriptures, walking through the pages of the New Testament in particular, we are impressed and inspired by the “ONE ANOTHER” passages found in the Word of God.

In this volume (as well as during the oral presentation at the East Hill church [2010]) we will examine over a dozen of these prized passages. Obviously it will not be an exhaustive study of any one phrase; as well as it is impossible to examine

every reference to “one another” found in Scripture.

Our plea is simple – With an eager thirst for righteousness, let us approach this study and challenge ourselves to be more like our Saviour day by day. Looking into our hearts individually, may we resolve to apply these Christ-like qualities to our lives.

Paul Sain
Director of the Lectureship

DEDICATION

With the greatest respect and appreciation this *Truth In Love Lectureship* volume is dedicated to
Willard and Judy Carr

Congregations of the Lord's church in this area (East Hill and surrounding sister congregations) are truly blessed with an outstanding library at their finger tips. This powerful resource has over 3,000 volumes presently and is continually expanding.

Years ago, the eldership at East Hill placed brother



Willard Carr over this work. Willard (with the faithful help of his wife Judy) organized and established the books under the system that continues to this day. The card file system affords you to ease of searching by author or title

the exact subject or writer you desire.

A large portion of the volumes have been added through "*Memorials*" donations. The Carrs efficiently care for this work also. Receiving the funds, sending a notice of appreciation to the one donating, mailing information cards to the family of the one remembered, memorial cards placed in the books all require diligence and faithfulness.

Obviously the extensive hours necessary to maintain

this work is unknown. When books are checked out or returned, Willard and Judy regularly and with precision take care of this task.

In 2008 the Library was moved into the new facilities of the East Hill church, near the offices. The Carrs again worked tirelessly to make the transition into the new spacious area.

Some of the latest additions are DVD lessons from recent lectureships. Also, some excellent lessons from series presented several years ago are available for your benefit and use.

Christians in this area are blessed with the available material in the East Hill Library because of the efforts of these faithful workers. The principle of honoring ones who serve well is Scriptural. Thus it is our desire to honor *Willard and Judy Carr* at this time.

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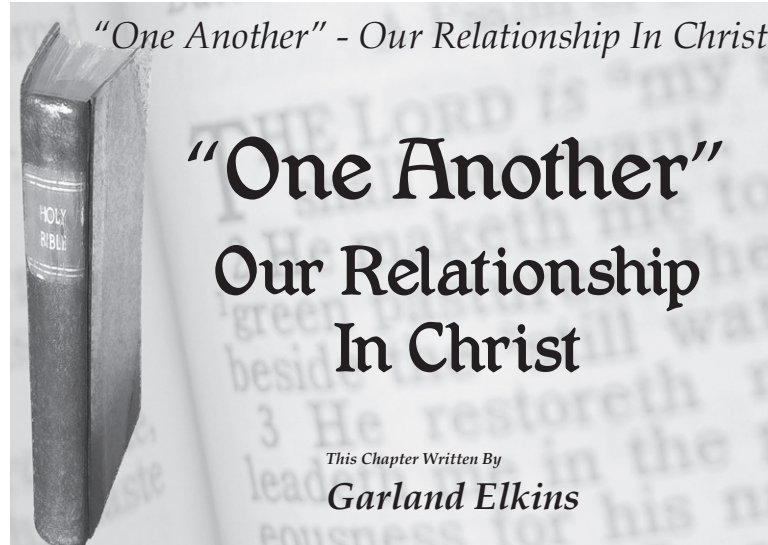
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A Study
Of
“One Another”
Our Relationship
In Christ

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The *“One Another”* attitude and action is vital and of utmost importance to all Christians. We shall study in a brief overview this great subject.

“Forgive” one another.

In the parable of the two debtors, Jesus reminds us of two lessons on forgiveness: (1) We must be willing to forgive in order to be forgiven; (2) nothing we forgive can compare to how God has forgiven us. Every relationship in life will need a lot of forgiveness (Matt. 18:21-35).

“Comfort” one another.

Regardless of how deep our faith in God may be the loss of a loved one causes a sense of aching void as we think of the one that we loved who is gone. We miss the companionship of our loved one and our grief is deeply personal. Just as Jesus wept with the sisters of Lazarus and the grieving friends by the tomb so the tears come down

our cheeks unbidden in time of death (John 11:35).

God understands and knows our sorrows and helps us in time of grief in His everlasting arms of support (Deut. 33:27).

The Comfort of Friends and Loved Ones

A certain strength comes by the presence of those who are dear to us. Paul records the fact that in the coming of Titus he was comforted (2 Cor. 7:6, 7). This is another reason why he desired Timothy to come to his side with haste as he faced the last winter of his life (2 Tim. 4:21). Because we all belong to the great fellowship of Jesus Christ we are able to encourage and strengthen one another (1 Thes. 5:11; Rom. 12:15; Gal. 6:2). Time is also a great comforter.

God is our Supreme Comforter

Whatever friends and loved ones may do, or time may bring, God is our supreme source of comfort (2 Cor. 1:3-4). As the mother comforts her child in time of hurt, so God brings strength, courage and hope in the time of our tragic need. Isaiah wrote for God:

Fear thou not: for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness (Isa. 41:10).

Peter wrote, “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

“Exhort” one another.

After Peter preached Christ to the people on the

day of Pentecost of Acts chapter 2:22, then about three thousand souls obeyed the gospel and were added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:41). Then it is recorded that Peter said “And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40). Paul wrote, among other things, “Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation” (Rom. 12:8). Paul wrote to Timothy and said, “Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). He also wrote elders and said, “Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Titus 1:9). As the writer of Hebrews concluded the epistle he said, “But I exhort you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written unto you in few words” (Heb. 13:22). He wrote to Jude and said, “Beloved, while I was giving all diligence to write unto you of our common salvation, I was constrained to write unto you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints (Jude 1:3). To the Thessalonians Paul wrote, “and that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you (1 Thes. 4:11). He also exhorted the brethren: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:25).

“Rebuke” one another.

We all from time to time need rebuking, but we, like David pray, “O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure” (Psm. 6:1). Solomon wrote, “Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee:

rebuke a wise man and, he will love thee” (Prov. 9:8). He also wrote: “Open rebuke is better than secret love” (Prov. 27:5). The Lord rebuked the disciples, and the wind of the sea, “And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm” (Matt. 8:26). On one occasion Peter even rebuked the Lord, “Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be done unto thee” (Matt. 16:22). To the church in Laodicea, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Rev. 3:19).

“Bear” One Another’s Burden

If we live long in this life we will have burdens to bear. Some are light, some are heavy, some are short in duration, and some continue for a long time. Some we can bear alone; others we cannot bear without assistance. We want to look at the three kinds of burdens:

- “For every man shall bear his own burden” (Gal. 6:5). Christianity is a religion of the individual. Each individual must bear his own burden (Acts 2:38; I Cor. 16:1, 2; 2 Tim. 2:19; Phil. 2:12; Rom. 14:12). Many people refuse to accept the responsibilities of life. When we accept our responsibilities we grow.

- “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:5). We need to both share our blessings and our burdens.

- “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved” (Psm. 55:22). There are burdens that we can bear; there are other burdens which we cannot bear; these we need to cast upon the Lord. We are taught: “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Peter 5:7). Jesus invites

us to cast our burdens upon Him (Matt. 11:28.) We must love one another. Our Lord said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35). Discipline is an act of God's love if it is practiced as set out by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17. When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth to withdraw from the man who had married his father's wife (1 Cor. 5:1-13), good results followed. After the church withdrew from him he repented and was restored (2 Cor. 2:4-12).

Matthew 18:15-17 – One Another

Being human as we are, even though we are Christians, there are times when Satan will create problems. He even tempted Jesus (Matt. 4:11). Our Lord resisted him and after the third temptation Satan left for a season (Matt. 4:11).

When personal differences arise, one brother sins against another; the one sinned against must go to his brother and "tell him his fault between thee and him alone" (Matt. 18:15). If he does not hear and correct matters at this point, the second step is to take one or two others (Matt. 18:16).

The third step is if he refuses to listen to them, then "tell it to the church" (Matt. 18:17). In other words the unrepentant must be disfellowshipped (2 Thes. 3:6; 1 Cor. 5:1, 13).

"Love" One Another

We are commanded by Christ, "That ye love one another." It is commanded: "Owe no man anything save to love one another, for he that loveth his neighbor hath

fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8). The great theme is dealt with in detail in 1 Corinthians 13. Among other things we read, “Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things; believeth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things. Love never faileth” (1 Cor. 13:4-8).

“Edify” One Another

The word edify means to “build up.” Paul says: Let us therefore follow after things which make for peace, and things whereby we may edify another” (Rom. 14:19). In Romans 15:2 we read, “Let each one of us please his neighbor for that which is good, unto edifying.” “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not” (1 Cor. 10:23). Paul wrote “Let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Cor. 14:26). Paul wrote to the Thessalonians “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do” (1 Thes. 5:11).

“Admonish” One Another

From the beginning of time it seems that it has been human nature to want to change God’s will. On many occasions God admonished His people not to change His will but to stick to the truth (Gal. 1:8, 9).

“Better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished (Eccl. 4:13). The children of Israel often complained (1 Cor. 10:10). As a result God killed many of them and they fell in one day three and twenty thousand (1 Cor. 10:8). To the church at

Rome, Paul wrote: “And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another” (Rom. 15:14). To the church at Colosse he wrote: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16).

Elders are to admonish the congregation, “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, are over you in the Lord, and admonish you” (1 Thes. 5:12). If a brother errs from the truth, and it becomes necessary to withdraw fellowship from him we are to “yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2 Thes. 3:15).

“Receive” One Another

Christians are to receive one another. After Agabus had predicted that when Paul arrived in Jerusalem he would be delivered into the hands of his enemies; Acts 21:10-12; The brethren cried and besought him not to go to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, “What do ye, weeping and breaking my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:14). The next verse states “And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done” (Acts 21:14). The following verse states, “And after these days we took up our baggage and went up to Jerusalem” (Acts 21:15). Then we read, “And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly” (Acts 21:17). In matters of opinions and matters of judgment Paul wrote “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputation” (Rom. 14:1).

“Evil Actions” and One Another

“But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another” (Gal. 5:15). When one does wrong to another he can expect the like treatment from others. Paul wrote, “For he that doeth wrong shall receive again for the wrong that he hath done: and there is no respect of persons” (Col. 3:25). “And the Lord’s servant must not strive, but be gentle towards all, apt to teach, forbearing” (2 Tim. 2:24).

“Prefer” One Another

Many of us grew up being taught that we should love God first, others second, and ourselves third. However, I would word that differently; we should love God first, others “as we love ourselves” (Mark 12:28-31).

It would be wonderful if everyone could play “second fiddle” as well as Jonathan. He said to David, “And he said unto him, Fear not for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth” (1 Sam. 23:17).

Paul wrote to the church at Rome and among other things said, “...in honor preferring one another” (Rom. 12:10). The word prefer means: “To set or hold before or above other persons or things in estimation.” The word honor means: “High respect.” Basically, we are to practice the “golden rule” which says, “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12). Paul wrote, “Not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others” (Phil. 2:4).

Husbands should honor their wives. Paul wrote, “Even so ought husbands also to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his own wife loveth himself” (Eph. 5:28). Peter wrote, “Ye husbands in like manner, dwell with your wives according to knowledge, giving honor unto the woman, as unto the weaker vessel, as being also joint-heirs of the grace of life; to the end that your prayers be not hindered” (1 Peter 3:7). Wives are to be in subjection to their husbands, as unto the Lord” (Eph. 5:22). And we also read: “Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband” (Eph. 5:33).

Parents should honor and train their children. “And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). The Bible also teaches, “Behold every one that useth proverbs shall use this proverb against thee, saying, As is the mother, so is her daughter” (Ezek. 16:44).

Children know what we consider to be most important in our homes. God, Christ, and the church must be placed first. Christ said, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33).

Christians should honor faithful elders: “Obey them that have the rule over you and submit to them; for they watch in behalf of your souls, as they that shall give account; that they may do this with joy, and not with grief; for this were unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17).

Paul made an amazing statement regarding preferring others when he said, “For I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren’s sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:3).

“Striving/Working” with One Another

The word “strive” has two meanings; “And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years” (Gen. 6:3). The entire world was wicked (Gen. 6:5) with the exception of Noah and his family (2 Peter 2:5). In other words His patience would, and did come to an end. He set limits for His people. God caused Solomon to write, “Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm” (Prov. 3:30). In other words, do not pick a fight. Be sure that you do not cause trouble.

The second way the word “strive” is used is in a good sense. Paul wrote to the Philippians and said, “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ: that, whether I come and see you or be absent, I may hear of your state, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one soul, striving for the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27). In other words, Paul urged them to “strive” or work together in unity in doing the Lord’s work. Paul in this same first chapter of Philippians pointed out two different kinds of children of God: He said, “Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one do it of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel; but the other proclaim Christ of faction not sincerely, thinking to raise up affliction for me in my bonds” (Phil. 1:15-17). Peter sums up the kind of striving that is good: “Finally, be ye all likeminded, compassionate, loving as brethren, tenderhearted, humbleminded” (1 Peter 3:8).

“Provoke” One Another

“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works” (Heb. 10:24). The Christian life is a life of work (Matt. 9:37f; 1 Cor. 3:9). The work of the

Lord involves the greatest privileges, responsibilities and rewards.

We need to provoke unto love and good works to all members of the church to work in the church. It requires not the elders only, though they must set the example. Peter wrote, “neither as lording over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves ensamples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3). We must provoke deacons “unto love and good works.”

All preachers should be provoked “unto love and good works.” We should “provoke unto love and good works” every Christian to have conviction, i.e., to practice steadfastness and immovability. We need to “provoke unto love and good works” “one another” to abound in the work of the Lord for that would result in happiness here and heaven hereafter.

“Forbearance” one another

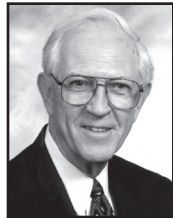
Paul wrote, “Forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgive you, so also do ye” (Col. 3:13). Forbearance means: “A refraining; patient endurance; abstaining from the enforcement of a right.” Joseph is an example of forbearance. After Jacob’s death and burial his sons who had sold Joseph into bondage came to Joseph. “And when Joseph’s brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him” (Gen. 50:15). And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, “Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him” (Gen.

50:14-17). Joseph showed great forbearance: “But as for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Gen. 50:20).

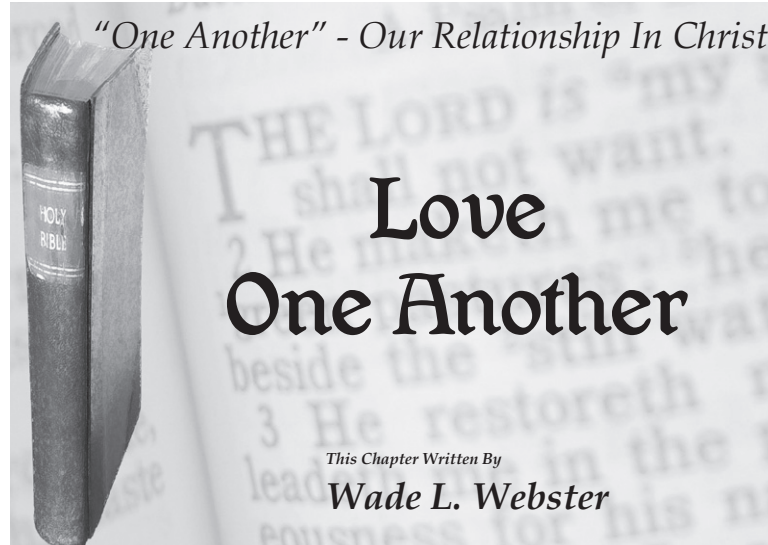
Conclusion

“Love” One Another. We owe our brethren love, “Owe no man anything, save to love one another” (Rom. 13:8). If need be “we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16). “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11).

Garland Elkins



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Of all of the “one another” commands, the “love one another” command is probably the most well-known. Although we are commanded to love one another many times, it is found in this specific form thirteen times in the New Testament.

It seems to me that the “love one another” command encompasses all the other “one another” commands. To love one another is to restore one another (Gal. 6:1), to bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2), to comfort one another (1 Thes. 4:18), to encourage one another (Rom. 14:19), and to pray one for another (James 5:16). The other one another commands simply tell us what is involved in loving one another. Realizing that other speakers will cover the other one another commands, I will focus specifically on the “love one another” command.

The thirteenth chapter of John opens with the love that Jesus had for His disciples (13:1) and closes with the love that they were to have for one another (13:34-35).

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

On His final night, Jesus talked to His disciples about the need for loving one another. He declared,

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another (John 13:34-35).

Of all the things that Jesus could have talked to His disciples about on the night of His arrest, and there were many things that they didn't yet fully understand, He talked to them about love. I am reminded of an illustration that I heard about an older doctor and a younger doctor. As the story goes, the older doctor was preparing to retire and he was prepping the younger doctor to take his place. The older doctor told the younger doctor many things, but one particular thing stuck in the mind of the younger doctor. The older doctor explained that in all of his years of practicing medicine he had found that the best medicine was love. Upon hearing this, the younger doctor asked, "What if this doesn't work?" The older doctor answered, "Then, double the dose."

It is important to note that the passage that we are considering in this lesson (John 13:34-35) was penned by the Apostle John. If you are familiar with the books that John penned by inspiration, then you know that he wrote a lot about love. Love was one of his favorite words. In fact, just in his biography of Jesus alone, love is mentioned fifty-six times. Curiously, most of the references to love in the book of John occur in the last nine chapters. Love is mentioned only twelve times in the first twelve chapters, but forty-four times in the last nine chapters. Why the increase beginning with the thirteenth chapter? The answer

seems to be that from the thirteenth chapter forward, Jesus is climbing the hill to the cross. The closer that John gets to the cross, the more that he uses the word love.

It should also be noted that John was not always known for his love. Along with his brother James, he was nicknamed Boanerges for his fiery temperament (Mark 3:17; Luke 9:54). Slowly, but surely, under the Master's tutelage, John was transformed. He went from being a son of thunder to being an apostle of love. He went from calling down fire from heaven upon unbelievers to pulling men out of the fire. Perhaps, some of us need to undergo the same transformation.

As we examine the words that Jesus spoke in the upper room with His disciples on the eve of His death (John 13:34-35), we want to see three things:

- The Mandate – “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another...”
- The Model – “...as I have loved you, that ye also love one another...”
- The Mark – “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love...”

Hopefully, by the time that we consider these three points, we will have a better understanding of what it means to “love one another.”

The Mandate

Please note that the instruction to “love one another” is a “commandment” (John 13:34). It is not a take it or leave it suggestion. It is an authoritative order or command. It is a mandate from the Master. It is a law from the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It is an order from the One who spoke with such authority that it was said of Him, “Never

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

man spake like this man” (John 7:46). It is a decree from the One who possesses “all authority” (Matt. 28:18) and before whom we must all one day appear (2 Cor. 5:10).

Repeatedly in the New Testament, the instruction to “love one another” is referred to as a commandment or a law. Please consider some of these passages with me:

- “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

- “These things I command you, that ye love one another” (John 15:17).

- “And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment” (1 John 3:23).

- “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (1 John 4:20-21).

- “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart... this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31).

- “Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law... Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom. 13:8, 10).

- “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Gal. 5:14).

- “Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned” (1 Tim. 1:5).

Clearly, loving one another is a requirement of God.

If we want to be pleasing to Him, we must practice this precept (John 15:14; cf. 14:21; 1 John 5:3).

Perhaps, the instructions to “love one another” are so often referred to as a commandment because God knew that it would not always be easy to love one another. Someone has written the following humorous lines:

To dwell above with the saints we love,
That will be grace and glory.
To dwell below with the saints we know,
Well, that’s another story.

Likely, if we didn’t have to, there would be times when we wouldn’t love one another. After all, some of us aren’t all that loveable. However, because God commanded it, we do it. We forbear one another and forgive one another because our Father commands us to do so.

Before we leave our discussion of the mandate, please notice that Jesus also referred to the instructions to love one another as a “new” commandment. As you know, from the beginning, God’s children have been commanded to love one another. Cain was supposed to love his brother Abel. In fact, John would use him as an example of what not to do. We read,

For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life

abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:11-16).

As you can see, brothers were expected from the beginning to love one another. What was “new” about the commandment was the manner in which it was to be performed. Under the Old Law, men were commanded to love their brother as they loved themselves (Mark 12:31). Under the New Law, men were commanded to love their brother as Jesus loved them (John 15:12). It was the manner that was new about the commandment. Jesus raised love to a new level. He made the commandment to love one another “new” by raising it to a level where it had never been before (Rev. 21:5). We will have more to say about the manner under the next point in this study.

The Model

Not only did Jesus give a mandate for His disciples to obey, He gave a model for them to follow. Of course, He was the model that they were to imitate. They were to love one another “as” He had loved them (John 13:34). Please notice the little word “as” in the passage under consideration. As serves as an adverb in the sentence and means to the same degree.

In the fifteenth chapter, Jesus declared, “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love” (John 15:9-10; 17:23; cf. Matt. 26:39). Please note that Jesus loved His disciples as His Father loved Him. Now, He commanded them to take the next

step and to love one another as He loved them.

Earlier in the context under consideration (John 13), Jesus spoke of giving them “an example” that they should do as He had done unto them (John 13:15). If you are familiar with the context, then you know that He had just served them by washing their feet. The word translated as “example” in this passage (John 13:15) is a very interesting word. Consider what some have said about it:

- James Strong says that it refers to “an underwriting” or a “copy for imitation.”
- Joseph Henry Thayer says that it refers to “a writing copy, including all the letters of the alphabet, given to beginners as an aid in learning to draw them.”

Jesus gave Himself and the way that He loved them as a model of how they were to love one another. Later, Peter would declare that Jesus had left “an example” that they “should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21). In like manner, John would declare that those who want to abide in Christ must “walk, even as He walked” (1 John 2:6). Of course, walking as Jesus walked means walking in love. Paul declared,

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;
And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us,
and hath given himself for us an offering and a
sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour (Eph.
5:2-3; cf. Acts 10:38).

To walk in love is to live in love. Jesus lived love. In the thirteenth chapter of John, on the eve of His own death, Jesus took a towel and a basin of water and washed the dirty feet of His disciples. He taught His disciples that love wasn't about being served, but rather, about serving. Paul later sought to convey this same message to the saints at Galatia. He wrote, “For, brethren, ye have been called

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unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13). In the context of John 13, we find that true love serves no matter what, no matter when, and no matter whom. Love serves even if the job is washing dirty feet. It serves even if it is the last night of freedom that one has on earth. Furthermore, it serves even if those who are being served are going to forsake and to betray you.

To better understand the way that we are to love one another, consider the love that Jesus displayed in the thirteenth chapter of John’s record:

- Jesus displayed a steadfast love. John wrote, “Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end” (John 13:1). Please notice that Jesus “loved them unto the end.” Although their love for Jesus waned at times, His love for them never did. He loved them with “an everlasting love” (Jer. 31:3). As Christians, we never have to flip-flop between He loves me and He loves me not. We can be assured that His love for us is steadfast. Of course, to be saved, we must abide in His love (John 15). Just as Jesus’ love for the disciples was steadfast, our love for one another must be. We are to “let brotherly love continue” (Heb. 13:1; cf. Col. 3:13).

- Jesus displayed a self-less love. As noted just a little earlier in this study, Jesus humbly and lovingly washed the feet of the disciples. He denied Himself and took upon Himself the form of a servant (Phil. 2:5-8). Of course, the most self-less act in human history was the giving of Himself on the cross for our sins (John 15:13). In like manner, our love for one another is to be self-less. True love does not seek its own (1 Cor. 13:5). In fact, we are

even to lay down our lives for the brethren if needed (1 John 3:16).

As you can see, we have our work cut out for us. Loving like Jesus loved is an extremely high standard of measurement.

The Mark

Jesus identified the love of the disciples for one another as the mark or distinctive characteristic by which His disciples would be known (John 13:35). History bears out the truthfulness of this declaration:

- Guy N. Woods, in his commentary on John, quotes Tertullian, one of the early church fathers (A.D. 155-220), who declared, “The heathen are wont to exclaim with wonder, ‘See how these Christians love one another!’ for they (the heathen) hate one another; ‘and how they are ready to die for one another!’ for they (the heathen) are more ready to kill one another.”

- R. C. H. Lenski, in his commentary on John, quotes Marcus Minucius Felix, an early Latin apologist (A.D. 150-270), who declared, “They love each other even without being acquainted with each other.”

- Lenski also quotes the apostate ruler Julian (331-363 A.D.) who declared, “Their master has implanted the belief in them that they are all brethren.”

Love is a clear trait by which God’s children can be identified. In the first epistle that bears his name, John wrote, “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother” (1 John 3:10).

Years ago, in old London town, the finest jewelry was

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produced in Goldsmith's Hall. To identify their work, the jewelers began to stamp their work with a small golden crown. The small golden crown became the mark of the hall. Today, as you know, the Hallmark Card Company uses a golden crown to identify their cards. Their motto is, "When you care enough to send the very best." In their commercials they often show people looking on the back of the card for the gold crown. In like manner, love is the mark of our Master. It is what shows that we have been with Him (Acts 4:13) and that He is living in us (Gal. 2:20). Do those in the world see the mark of the Master on us?

If we hope to win the world for Christ, our lives must be marked by love. Someone has written,

How can you lead to Christ your boy
Unless Christ's method you employ?
There's just one thing that you can do –
It's let that boy see Christ in you.

Have you a husband fond and true?
A wife who's blind to all but you?
If each would win the other one,
That life must speak of God's dear Son.

There is but one successful plan
By which to win a fellow man;
Have you a neighbor old or new?
Just let that man see Christ in you.

The Church that hopes to win the lost
Must pay the one unchanging cost;
She must compel the world to see
In her the Christ of Calvary.

WADE L. WEBSTER

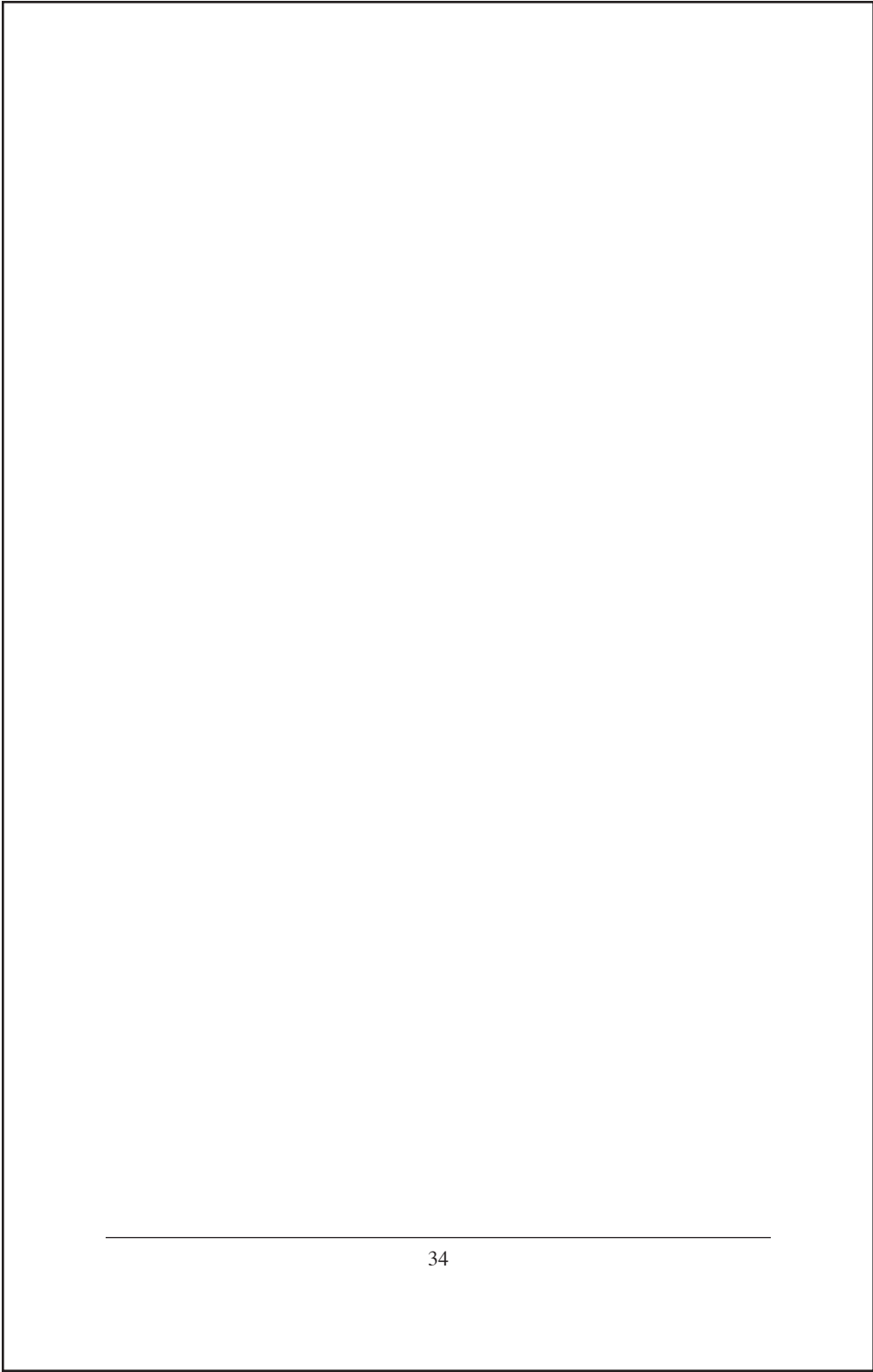
Can the world see Christ and His love in you? Are you stamped with the image of your Maker and Master?

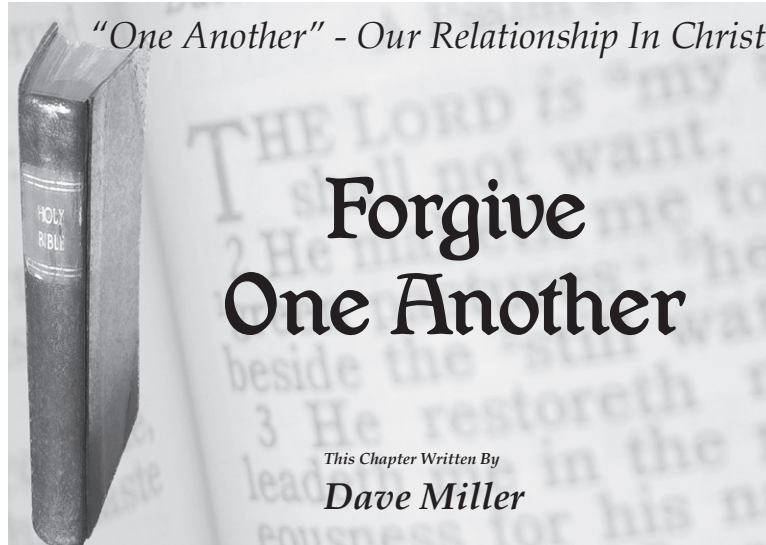
For sure, we have but touched the hem of the garment when it comes to loving one another. Hopefully, I have at least introduced the subject to you. I encourage you to read each of the chapters in this volume and the other speakers will fill in the gaps that I have left. After all, as I noted in the introduction to this lesson, the “love one another” command is fulfilled in the carrying out of the other “one another” commands.

Wade L. Webster



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One of the most encouraging, sustaining doctrines of the Bible is the doctrine of forgiveness. I need not recount to you the incredible forgiveness of God in making it possible for any and everyone to be forgiven of sin in order to live eternally in heaven. Nor do I need to restate to this group the prerequisites to our being forgiven: obedience to the Gospel to contact the blood of Jesus initially, and then perpetual repentance and confession to continue to receive the marvelous, ongoing cleansing of Jesus' blood.

Ability To Let It Go

Where the "rub comes" is in our own ability to forgive each other, and to display a forgiving spirit toward those who mistreat us. Let us contemplate several passages of Scripture that provide us with tremendous encouragement and insight into how to relate to others in the matter of forgiveness. Some of these instances pertain to the

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display of forgiveness by a Bible character toward others. Sometimes, we learn a great deal about how we are to forgive by observing God's behavior.

Joseph is certainly a prime example. You are familiar with how horribly his brothers treated him—stripping him of his prized coat, throwing him into a pit, and then callously selling him into slavery, which resulted in a series of unpleasant events that brought great suffering into his life. You remember, however, how magnificently Joseph reacted when he entertained a delegation of his brothers on the death of Jacob:

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him." So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, "Before your father died he commanded, saying, 'Thus you shall say to Joseph: "I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you." 'Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.'" And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we are your servants." Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them (Gen. 50:15-21).

Joseph was able eventually to look beyond the here and now—the hardships of this life and the hurts

that others inflict on us—and view life from a broader perspective. He was able to focus on the fact of God’s providence, and be reassured that whatever immediate or even prolonged agonies we might be called upon to endure, we can know for certain that God is behind the scenes caring for us. We can know that somehow, someday, sooner or later, He will bring us out of the tunnel of darkness into the warm light of spiritual reality. In the meantime, we must not allow bitterness, retaliation, or hatred to infect our souls. We must trust God.

Caring Deeply For Others

Then there was the time when Moses was attempting to receive the Law from God at Sinai, while also coping with the incessant resistance of the population. Upon his return, seeing the golden calf and the licentious behavior of the people, he ordered an execution detail to commence punishment proceedings, resulting in the deaths of about 3,000 people. Yet, even then, Moses possessed a spirit of forgiveness that was so strong that he sought even to take responsibility for the people:

Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, “You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.” And the LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. Now therefore, go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when

I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin. So the LORD plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made” (Exod. 32:30-35).

Of course, neither Moses nor anyone else can choose to be lost in behalf of another. But that spirit of forgiveness and concern for others is surely an indication of heartfelt love for others and an attitude we ought to emulate (cf. Rom. 9:3). On the other hand, however, we must not think that Moses was more forgiving than God. Though his spirit of forgiveness was commendable, observe that punishment was the godly response to the situation. Punishment for sin in this life is not necessarily antithetical to forgiveness.

Accepting Sin’s Consequences

Consider a similar situation when the nation was poised at the Promised Land. When the reconnaissance team returned to give their report of land conditions, and 10 of them presented a bad report, and the people decided to return to Egypt, you remember that God threatened to strike them with pestilence and disinherit them. Moses reacted by suggesting to God that the Egyptians and Palestinians would hear of it and surmise that God was unable to get them to their objective, but instead had killed them. He then concluded:

And now, I pray, let the power of my LORD be great, just as You have spoken, saying, ‘The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation.’ Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your

mercy, just as You have forgiven this people,
from Egypt even until now (Num. 14:17-19).

Incredibly, God pardoned them! However, such forgiveness did not exclude consequences for sin:

Then the LORD said: “I have pardoned, according to your word; but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD—because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it (Num. 14:20-24).

So, yes, God’s forgiveness is inexpressible and undeserved; but forgiveness does not eliminate consequences. Between Christians, while forgiveness should be complete and unreserved, there may well be circumstances connected with the sin involved that require those who forgive to exercise discretion in future interactions.

Forgiveness Withheld?

Compare these incidents at Mt. Sinai and Paran with remarks made on the occasion of the farewell address delivered by Joshua near the end of his life and leadership. After issuing a forceful challenge to the people, urging them to refrain from idolatry and to devote themselves completely to the one true God (Josh. 24:14-15), the people responded:

Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up

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out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed. And the LORD drove out from before us all the people, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God (vs. 16-18).

Apparently this firm declaration of commitment was suspect. He countered:

You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good (vs. 19-20).

Observe that merely paying lip service to following God is unacceptable. Failure to remain loyal and faithful will mean that God will not forgive us. The same principle applies between Christians (Luke 17:3).

Many in our day expect, even demand, unconditional forgiveness from God. They insist that they can continue living their self-chosen course and that God's grace and forgiveness is such that He will accept them. Yet, consider two passages that provide perspective. First, referring to the impact of murder on society, God declared to the Israelites:

So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it (Num. 35:33).

Second, referring to King Manasseh's wicked reign, which brought on the people military subjugation and the suffering caused by multiple bands of enemy raiding parties:

Surely at the commandment of the LORD this came upon Judah, to remove them from His sight because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, and also because of the innocent blood that he had shed; for he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which the LORD would not pardon (2 Kings 24:3-4).

These two passages teach that we can so conduct ourselves that we forfeit God's pardon. Specifically, notice the emphasis on "innocent blood" (cf. Prov. 6:17). If ever there was innocent blood, it would surely be the millions of unborn babies that have been butchered in this country since 1973 when abortion was declared legal. If we had the ability to look down from heaven with the eyes of God on the spiritual landscape of America, we would surely see our land flowing with rivers of the blood of innocent children. Has the Lord reached the point where He will not pardon this country for this atrocity? It ought to send a shiver down the spine of every American when we consider God's haunting warning: "blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it."

Forgiveness And The Construction Of The Temple

After seven years of construction, the day came to inaugurate the Temple that Solomon built to replace the

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Tabernacle by transferring the ark to the new structure. It was a great day, which included a powerful prayer by Solomon. In that prayer, Solomon alluded to the critical importance of God's forgiveness:

And may You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear in heaven Your dwelling place; and when You hear, forgive.... When Your people Israel are defeated before an enemy because they have sinned against You, and when they turn back to You and confess Your name, and pray and make supplication to You in this temple, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You gave to their fathers. When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against You, when they pray toward this place and confess Your name, and turn from their sin because You afflict them, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your servants, Your people Israel, that You may teach them the good way in which they should walk; and send rain on Your land which You have given to Your people as an inheritance. When there is famine in the land, pestilence or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers; when their enemy besieges them in the land of their cities; whatever plague or whatever sickness there is; whatever prayer, whatever supplication is made by anyone, or by all Your people Israel, when each one knows the plague of his own heart, and spreads out his hands toward this temple: then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and give to everyone according

to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men), that they may fear You all the days that they live in the land which You gave to our fathers (1 Kings 8:30-40).

How critically important it is to have God's forgiveness! Observe that, on a national level, being defeated by enemies, inadequate rain, famine, pestilence, plague, and sickness can very well be manifestations of God's displeasure with the way citizens are living. The only hope for forgiveness is for people to repent, turn to God, and change their ways. America desperately needs to hear this admonition and seek forgiveness from God.

Isaiah's depiction of the nation in his day certainly sounds like America:

O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of the LORD. For You have forsaken Your people, the house of Jacob, because they are filled with eastern ways; They are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they are pleased with the children of foreigners. Their land is also full of silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures; Their land is also full of horses, and there is no end to their chariots. Their land is also full of idols; They worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made. People bow down, and each man humbles himself; Therefore do not forgive them (Isa. 2:5-9).

America, too, is extremely prosperous and influenced by foreign cultures and; cars are abundant and military capability is second to none; many have diverted their attention away from true religion and devote themselves

to false religion or no religion at all. Observe: Isaiah righteously requests that God refrain from forgiving such people.

Within The Church

If there is anywhere on Earth where forgiveness ought to prevail, it ought to be among God's people. It is incredible and unfortunate that the people who are most capable of grasping the principle of forgiveness, many times seem unable to practice it themselves. Brethren frequently are at odds with one another, on the congregational level as well as across the brotherhood. We need to be constantly reminded of God's directives on this matter: "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). Or as Paul wrote to the Colossian Christians:

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do (Col. 3:12-14).

In Paul's discussion of the disfellowshipped fornicator, the punishment "which was inflicted by the majority" had apparently done its intended job, causing the brother to repent. There seems to have been a reluctance among some members to forgive and accept the brother. Paul admonished:

[O]n the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore

I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices (2 Cor. 2:7-11).

Christians can be cruel. They can be outright mean. I am reminded of the recent news account of a girl that was bullied and verbally abused by her classmates to the point that she hanged herself. How many members of the church have gone back into the world (committing spiritual suicide) because of the harsh, uncaring, insensitive treatment they received at the hands of unforgiving, judgmental members? Forgiving, accepting, and comforting each other are absolutely necessary for the efficient functioning of the church. As Jesus warned: “Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven” (Luke 6:37). He also insisted: “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses” (Mark 11:25-26).

Yes, it is true that a wayward brother must repent, as Luke 17:3-4 clearly states: “Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him” (Luke 17:3-4). However, we must not allow that prerequisite to dispel in

our hearts the central point that Jesus stressed so forcefully on the essentiality of a forgiving spirit permeating our being. The incident initiated by Peter along this line is paramount:

Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' "Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' "So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' "And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also

have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' "And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses (Matt. 18:21-35).

Conclusion

May the forgiveness that we show toward others be a reflection of the forgiveness that God shows toward us: "For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You" (Psm. 86:5). May we constantly urge and encourage each other to be faithful in living the Christian life. When tensions surface, may we dispel them quickly and make certain that our hearts are pure and our actions are blameless. When we err, may we unhesitatingly own up to our mistakes and seek forgiveness. And may we never fail to "forgive one another."

Dave Miller



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Christians know a greater and more-fulfilling life than any other people on the face of the earth. With Jehovah as our Father, Christ as our elder Brother and saints around the globe as our brothers and sisters, the words of Jesus have been proven true—“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). [All Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.]

When those first three thousand on the Day of Pentecost “gladly received His word [and] were baptized” (Acts 2:41), Scripture teaches that “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (2:47). Every New Testament Christian has been added to the Lord’s church by God Himself. The New Testament uses various metaphors to depict and explain the nature of the church of Christ. It is a kingdom, with Christ as the King and Christians as the citizens. It is a flock or sheepfold,

with Christ as the Chief Shepherd and Christians as the sheep. It is an army, with Christ as the Commander and Christians as the soldiers. It is a vineyard, with Christ as the Owner and Christians as the workers. It is a family, with God as the Father and Christians as His children. It is a body, with Christ as the Head and Christians as the members.

It is this last figure of the body that gives special meaning to this series of lectures on “One Another: Our Relationship in Christ.” For it is in the body of Christ where we were “joined and knit together” (Eph. 4:16), when “we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13). In the body of Christ, we share a unique relationship to Christ, as our Head (cf. Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23). Likewise, we share a unique relationship with one another.

The first time in our New Testament that we read about the church as a body is in Romans 12. Notice how Paul describes the relationship of the members of the body to each other: “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (12:4-5, emp. added). There are many different members, but we make up just one body. There are many different functions, but we make up just one body. When we are added to that one body, we become “members of one another.” The expression gives us a glimpse of the unique relationship we have with one another in the body of Christ. Each member is needed to make the body complete. Each member is of great consequence to the body. Each member is mutually dependent on each other and cannot exist independently from the body. Like a body, we each share a close and interdependent relationship. Brethren, we need

each other! We are members of one another! Or, as one version reads, “each member belongs to all the others.”

There are 81 verses in the New Testament in which the reciprocal pronoun “one another” can be found. Reciprocal pronouns are used to show that the action indicated by a verb is a two-way action engaged in mutually, in which both parties are carrying out the action and benefitting from the action at the same time. Both parties are required to fulfill their responsibilities individually for the good of the whole. I have two daughters. There would be an obvious difference in the resulting action and the benefits thereof if I was trying to decide which instruction to give—“Katie, go hug your sister” or “Girls, hug one another.” One action is a one-way action, with the greatest benefits being one-sided. The other action is a two-way action, in which both engage and both profit. Such is the nature of the “one another” commands that God gives to each member of the body of Christ. When “every part does its share” in the body of Christ, it “causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16). The welfare of the whole is dependent upon and promoted by the effective working of each and every member.

Members of the body of Christ are given the mutual responsibility to “comfort one another.” Let us consider how we might each fulfill our responsibility in this matter and enhance our relationship in Christ.

Defining The Concept Of “Comfort”

As a verb, the English word “comfort” is translated from at least three Greek words, with *parakaleo* being the most frequent. The verb *parakaleo* is found more

than 100 times in the New Testament and is translated variously, depending on the context. This compound word is formed from *para* (meaning “beside”) and *kaleo* (“to call”), so it literally means “to call to one’s side.” In the gospel accounts, it is often translated as “beg,” “plead,” “call” or even “pray.” However, in the letters written to Christians, it is usually translated “comfort,” “encourage” or “exhort.” Depending on the context, *parakaleo* can mean “to ask to come and be present, to call to one’s side; to urge strongly, appeal to, urge, exhort, encourage; to instill someone with courage or cheer, comfort, encourage” (BDAG 764-765).

From this same root word comes *sum-parakaleo*, which is found only in Romans 1:12. There it is in the passive voice to mean “receive encouragement or comfort together with you” (BDAG 958).

A third Greek verb that is translated “comfort” is *paramutheomai*. The same prefix *para* (meaning “beside”) is joined to *mutheomai* (“to speak”); so it literally means “to speak beside or to speak closely.” According to Vine, this carries “a greater degree of tenderness” than *parakaleo* and means “to soothe, console, encourage, comfort” (111). This verb is only found four times in the Greek New Testament.

For the verb form of comfort, **Webster’s English Dictionary** provides the following definition: “to soothe in distress or sorrow; ease the misery or grief of; bring consolation or hope to; to give a sense of ease or relief to; to reassure or bring cheer to; to aid, support or encourage.”

Brethren, as we examine this much-needed subject for the body of Christ today, let us see if we can begin to grasp the full force of our responsibility toward one

another. The context of the following passages will be discussed in the next section, but we need to pull the command to Christians found in 1 Thessalonians 4:18 and 5:11—“Comfort one another...Comfort each other.” Both verbs are from *parakaleo*, meaning “to comfort, encourage.” Both verbs are imperatives (i.e., commands) from God. Both verbs are in the second person plural (i.e., to “you all everybody”). Both verbs are in the present tense, indicating the necessity for continued and constant action in this regard. Both commands are reciprocal (i.e., all brethren must do this to all other brethren, who do this to all brethren in return). Brother or sister in Christ, are you obeying the command of God to continually call along side, comfort, encourage, soothe, console, ease, relieve, reassure, cheer, aid and support your brethren?

Identifying Specific Brethren In Need Of “Comfort”

There is no doubt that we are all in need of comfort and encouragement to faithfully navigate the narrow pathway to heaven. Thus, Paul used three different verbs in 1 Thessalonians 2:11 to explain how he was trying to treat them “as a father does his own children.” He told these brethren, “You know how we exhorted (*parakaleo*), and comforted (*paramutheomai*), and charged every one of you...” Two of the verbs defined in the previous section are used in this verse together. Paul was working hard to encourage, comfort, console and reassure his brethren of this vital goal in their lives—“that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (2:12, emp. added). The Christian life presents its challenges. As members of one another, we need each other. We need to comfort and encourage one another to

walk worthy of God! The reality is that there are certain ones who need greater comfort and encouragement than others.

Those brethren who are suffering persecution need our comfort! In the first chapter of 2 Corinthians is one of the most comprehensive discussions on comfort (*parakaleo*) anywhere in the New Testament (the entire book of 2 Corinthians is a tremendous treatise on the subject). This passage will be noticed again in the next section of this manuscript, but read through these verses now:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation (2 Cor. 1:3-7, emp. added).

Paul speaks of the “trouble,” the “sufferings” and being “afflicted,” which comes upon those who “would walk worthy of God.” The easy thing to do, in order to reduce and even rid oneself completely of these sufferings, would be to denounce Christ and cease living a holy Christian life. That’s why Paul told the Thessalonian brethren

that he had exhorted, comforted and charged them—so that they would not cease living a holy Christian life. As members of one another, we need each other. We need to comfort and encourage one another to endure the hardships associated with Christianity and continue walking worthy of God!

Those brethren who are penitent of sinful living need our comfort! When a wayward brother returns, we must not have the attitude of the elder brother in Luke 15:25-32! Instead, let us follow the divine instruction in 2 Corinthians 2. Paul had written in 1 Corinthians 5 to “deliver” a sinful brother “to Satan...that his spirit may be saved” (5:4-5). The brethren were told “not to keep company” with him, but to “put away from yourselves the evil person” (5:11-13). Obviously, if 2 Corinthians 2 is speaking of the same man, God’s instructions for church discipline worked! Now that the brother had returned, his brethren needed to respond in such a way that he would feel welcomed back into the family. The inspired pen conveyed to the brethren, “This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man.” Then, to make sure that the brother was properly received, the church was directed to discontinue their withdraw efforts and they “ought rather to forgive and comfort (*parakaleo*) him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him” (2:6-8, emp. added). This man’s brothers and sisters in Christ had put him away from themselves and were not keeping company with him. The result was exactly what God envisioned for the brethren—“that he may be ashamed” (2 Thess. 3:14) and “that his spirit may be saved.” This brother needed to be immediately called to the side of his spiritual family, comforted, encouraged,

supported and reassured that they completely forgave him and accepted him back among the flock. As members of one another, we need each other. We need to comfort and encourage one another to overcome sin and continue walking worthy of God!

Those brethren who have suffered the loss of a loved one need our comfort! We see an example of friends doing this when Lazarus died in John 11. Two verses in the chapter show Jewish friends of Mary and Martha comforting these two sisters as they grieved for their brother (John 11:19, 31). The Greek word used in both verses is *paramutheomai*, “to speak beside, to speak closely, to soothe, console and comfort with tenderness.” This is precisely what Christians are able to do for one another upon the passing of a loved one. Paul wrote to the body in Thessalonica, “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13). It is not wrong to sorrow when a brother or sister in Christ has died; that’s not what Paul is saying at all. However, Paul does not want the level of sorrow experienced by Christians to reach the level reached by those “who have no hope.” Christians have hope! Those who are dead in Christ will rise and meet the Lord even before those who are alive. When Christ returns, the righteous of all time will be united together with the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord! Paul concludes this section with these words, “Therefore comfort (*parakaleo*) one another with these words” (4:18, emp. added). A similar exhortation is found in the next paragraph of Paul’s letter as he discusses the return of Christ and affirms, “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus

Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort (*parakaleo*) each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing” (5:9-11). Coping with the death of a loved one is one of the most difficult, stressful, lonely times in a Christian’s life. During that time, perhaps more than any other, your grieving brother or sister in Christ needs to be called alongside, comforted, encouraged, supported and reassured of your love, God’s love and the hope that awaits us. As members of one another, we need each other. We need to comfort and encourage one another with the promises and assurances of God, in order that we all might continue walking worthy of God!

Those brethren who are fainthearted and downcast need our comfort! Two different passages using two different Greek words help Christians to identify two additional groups of brethren who need our attention and encouragement. The trials and tribulations we experience in life can take a toll on us emotionally. Knowing this, the Lord charges Christians to follow His example—as one “who comforts (*parakaleo*) the downcast” (2 Cor. 7:6, emp. added)—and to “comfort (*paramutheomai*) the fainthearted” (1 Thess. 5:14, emp. added). In 2 Corinthians 7, Paul says that he and his companions “had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears” (7:5). They were downcast, low, depressed. So God, through the efforts of one of His faithful, called Paul along side, encouraged him and reassured him. Our Lord then turns to us and points us to those who are “fainthearted” (1 Thess. 5:14). The Greek here (*oligopsuchos*) is a compound word, literally denoting one who is “small-souled” (Vine 222), one who is “discouraged” (BDAG 703). In this passage, God uses

the word that Vine suggested carries “a greater degree of tenderness” than *parakaleo* and means “to speak beside or closely; to soothe, console, encourage, comfort.” For Christians, sometimes there are hands that begin to hang down, knees that get feeble and hearts that become troubled (cf. Heb. 12:12; 2 Cor. 7:5; John 14:1), which are yearning for one to call alongside, to speak closely, to comfort, console, reassure and bring a sense of ease (cf. Eph. 6:22; Col. 2:2; 4:8; 2 Thess. 2:17). As members of one another, we need each other. We need to comfort and encourage one another when we grow discouraged, in order that we all might continue walking worthy of God!

Imparting God’s Gift Of “Comfort”

How can Christians successfully, effectively and compassionately convey comfort and encouragement to one another? Sometimes it is obvious what we need to do; sometimes it is not. Some “methods” of comfort may be intuitive for some; others may need some guidance or direction. This study has already shown the responsibility we share to comfort one another, the definition of comfort as it is used in Scripture, the brethren in our midst who are in special need of our comfort. Now, let us consider how we can impart God’s gift of comfort to each other.

Christians are God’s hands, God’s arms, God’s feet and God’s mouthpiece in taking comfort to His children! Reflect again carefully on this passage from the first chapter of 2 Corinthians:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation,

that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation (2 Cor. 1:3-7, emp. added).

Scripture teaches that God is “the God of all comfort.” There can be and will never be any comfort apart from God. All comfort resides in Him and is dispensed from Him. So how does God our Father bestow His incomparable, unsurpassed comfort upon His children? One sure way that He ensures it is received is through His other children. Even in the Old Testament, God told His people, “Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” (Isa. 40:1). As members of the body of Christ, we are “able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” The comfort of God is passed from Christian to Christian to Christian. On this earth, it has been suggested, God has no hands but our hands. Oh, God can find a way to bring comfort to His children, but the means He has put in place is for Christians to do for hurting Christians what other Christians did on their behalf when they were hurting. As members of the body of Christ and members of one another, may we share the comfort we have received from the God of all comfort with our brethren who are in desperate need of it.

The Word of God is our greatest source of comfort! How often have preachers sat next to a hospital bed without saying much, other than to read from God's Word? How often have Christians tossed and turned at night, fretting over life's circumstances or a decision to be made, only to find peace by sitting up, switching on a lamp and reading from God's Word? Why do so many elderly Christians keep a Bible on their nightstand? Why is it that the twenty-third Psalm is so well-known, even outside of the church and religious circles? Why is it that religious greeting cards usually have verses printed in them? The Word of God is our greatest source of comfort!

So often, when it comes to trying to comfort one another, we feel so inept. We stumble over what to say and how to say it. We're not sure what to do and what not to do. We want to have the greatest impact on our brother or sister who is hurting, but we do not want to "under-do" it or "over-do" it. Brethren, that's why the Word of God is our greatest source of comfort!

Romans 15:4 is a well-known passage in the Lord's church; at least, the first part of Romans 15:4 is well-known. "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning..." We know that part of the verse quite well! How well do we know the rest of the verse? "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort (*paraklesis*, noun form of *parakaleo*) of the Scriptures might have hope" (emp. added). The Scripture brings us comfort, which brings us hope. Remember the words of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4? "I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren...lest you sorrow as others who have no hope...For this we say to you by the word of the Lord..." (emp. added). Paul wanted them not to

sorrow but to have hope. To convey hope to them, he spoke the Word of the Lord to them. Then, he gave this instruction to the brethren, “Therefore comfort one another with these words” (emp. added). Use the words of God to impart comfort to one another!

Brethren, there are times when we don’t know what to say. There are times when we don’t know what to do. We can never go wrong by simply speaking or writing to our brethren straight from the Word of God! A simple note can mean so much and offer untold comfort, even just to say, “I have been thinking about you and praying for you. I’m not sure what to say, but this verse has always meant so much to me. ‘Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand’ (Isa. 41:10).”

May we never think that offering a few comfort-filled Scriptures from God’s Word is “too little” or “not enough” or “not good enough.” Brethren, there is no greater source of comfort! The verse immediately following the one that says, “that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures...,” turns right around and points to “the God of patience and comfort (*paraklesis*)” (Rom. 15:5, emp. added). God is the source of comfort. His Word is His means of providing that comfort. The reality is that there is nothing better that we can offer to someone in need of comfort than “the comfort of the Scriptures.” To convey anything less is to convey too little.

Words about heaven are a great source of comfort! As illustrated above, sharing passages of Scriptures to those in need of comfort is unparalleled in its power to encourage—verses about the loving and merciful nature of God, verses about the active care of God in our lives,

verses about the assurance that God gives to us in times of trouble, verses about faithful followers of the Lord experiencing trials and then triumphing over them, etc. The list of categories of comforting Scriptures is as long as the categories of life's circumstances that discourage us and upset us. However, there are Scriptures on a particular subject that have a unique power to comfort. When Jesus was in the upper room with His apostles and had foretold of Judas' betrayal, Peter's denial and His own impending death, His disciples were apparently troubled at these revelations. To comfort and soothe them, Jesus spoke these words to them:

Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also (John 14:1-3, emp. added).

To comfort and soothe His disciples, Jesus spoke of heaven. Paul did the same thing in 1 Thessalonians. When the brethren in Thessalonica were sorrowful about the passing of loved ones, Paul wrote to them of the second coming of Christ, which culminated in this exceedingly marvelous thought—"...to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17, emp. added).

To help us long for heaven, the Bible describes it by using words like "joy" (Matt. 25:23), "rest" (Rev. 14:13), "paradise" (Rev. 2:7), "prepared for you" (Matt. 25:34), "a better country" (Heb. 11:16), "with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8), "victory" (Rev. 15:2), "gain" (Phil. 1:21), "far better"

(Phil. 1:23), “no more death” (Rev. 21:4), “nor sorrow” (Rev. 21:4), “nor crying” (Rev. 21:4), “no more pain” (Rev. 21:4), “see His face” (Rev. 22:4), etc., etc. There is no place that offers greater comfort than the “home” that has been made for us (2 Cor. 5:1-8). If Jesus and the inspired writer, Paul, used words about heaven to bring comfort to others, may we find the same assurance in them today.

“Just being there” is a tremendous source of comfort! When our brethren are facing times of trials, tribulations and troubles, faithful Christians seek some “perfect” way to “make things all better.” Let us understand that as feeble and flawed human beings, our meager efforts alone will never be “perfect.” The only tangible thing in our possession that is “perfect” is the “perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25; cf. Psm. 18:30; 19:7). Thus, our “perfect” response must entail God’s Word (as discussed above). However, as loving, caring, concerned brothers and sisters in Christ, we want to do more. We try to find ways to show our love and concern. We try to find the right words to express our love and concern. Yet, it just never seems enough. We feel like we need to do more—take more food, bake more cakes, send more flowers, etc. In all this, there is something fundamental that we are overlooking—“just being there” is a tremendous source of comfort! Think about the root meaning of the Greek word *parakaleo*. It literally means “to call alongside of.” The very word itself indicates presence, being together. As Paul began to close his letter to the church at Colosse, he sent greetings to the brethren from his “fellow workers” who were with him (visiting him while in prison). Paul mentioned Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Justus, Epaphras, Luke and Demas (Col. 4:7-15). Now, notice

what Paul says about these brethren in verse 11. They are his “fellow workers,” and “they have proved to be a comfort to me.” Why? What had they done? Was there something extra special about these men that was unique only to them and no one else? Paul was in prison. Do you suppose that he needed comfort and encouragement? What would you have done or said to console and soothe the apostle Paul in prison? In all likelihood, it was simply the fact that these brethren were “just there with him” that proved to be a comfort to Paul. The word “comfort” in this verse is unique (it’s not found anywhere else in the New Testament). This noun comes from the Greek word *paregoria*, which means “a soothing, solace” (Vine 111), “a source of encouragement, comfort” (BDAG 777). From this word is derived our English word “paregoric,” a medicine that soothes or lessens pain. These brethren that came to Paul, while he was in prison, proved to be a medicine, which soothed and lessened the pain, discomfort and discouragement that must have been experienced by this Roman prisoner. Not necessarily because of anything that they specifically did or said, but most likely because they were “just there” for Paul.

Brethren, let us not underestimate the soothing and comforting power of the presence of Christian brothers and sisters. You do not need to know “exactly what to say” and you do not need to know “exactly what to do.” Just sit there in the hospital room. Sit there on the couch in their living room. Put your arm around them at church services. Just be there with them. This is more than saying, “I am here for you.” It is, in actuality and reality, being there! Read through your Bible and see how many times God said, “I am with you,” or “I will not leave you,” or “I will be with you.” God told Joshua, “The Lord your

God is with you wherever you go” (Josh. 1:9). God’s presence brings comfort. The presence of God’s children brings comfort.

Being sympathetic (and when possible, empathetic) with our brethren is a source of comfort! Both sympathy and empathy entail an emotional response. Brethren, it is permissible (in fact, it is advisable and beneficial) to show emotion to our brethren. It is nearly impossible to genuinely comfort one another without conveying our emotions. At the very least, we ought to express sympathy to our brethren when they are struggling. Sympathy is a feeling of understanding and recognition of the situation or issues that another is experiencing, with a desire to help and comfort the person in need. Empathy involves a deeper sense of emotion than sympathy, as it reflects the ability one has to share in another person’s situation, feelings, emotions and sufferings. Sometimes empathy has been described as the ability one has to “put oneself in the shoes of another.” This may be too simplistic a contrast of the two responses, but empathy is a response of one who has “been there” (has experienced what the other person is experiencing), and sympathy is a response when one has not “been there” but feels a desire to comfort and help the one in need.

As recommended in the previous paragraphs, the sympathetic or empathetic expression of comfort can start with simply being present. When Jesus arrived in Bethany following the death of Lazarus, His mere presence in the city was of immediate encouragement to Martha and Mary when they heard the news. Still, the Son of Man was able to do more than “just be there” (although that would have been enough). We are able to see the emotion of Jesus in John 11. Jesus’ very good friends

were hurting—Lazarus was dead and his sisters, Mary and Martha, were grieving. “Therefore, when Jesus saw [Mary] weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled” (John 11:33). The New American Standard says, “He was deeply moved in spirit.” Jesus’ emotions overflowed and He wept (11:35). “Then the Jews said, ‘See how He loved him!’” (11:36). Oh, how Jesus loved Lazarus, Martha and Mary. It was not difficult for Him to respond emotionally and offer comfort to His friends. Verse 38 continues, “Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb” (“again being deeply moved within,” NASB, emp. added to all). Brethren, it is ok to cry. The sisters in Christ know that, so maybe this should be worded, “Brothers, it is ok to cry!” “Just being there” offers comfort. Expressing emotion offers comfort. While we may not always take this passage literally, Romans 12:15 does teach us, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.”

Most often, in this context, we think especially (and maybe exclusively) about offering our sympathy and empathy to those who are grieving the death of a loved one. (Although, as discussed in the “Identifying Specific Brethren in Need of Comfort” section, there are others who need our comfort, as well.) Wendell Winkler suggested these six actions during times of bereavement to comfort one another: “(1) providing food and other necessities; (2) attending the memorial service; (3) sending floral or other remembrances; (4) sending message of consolation; (5) expressing words of sympathy; and, (6) visiting. By so doing we are weeping with those who weep” (64).

The joy, growth and goodness of our brethren should be a source of comfort! Reading through Paul’s epistles, he often used the word “comfort” to speak of the satisfaction

and relief that he experienced upon hearing reports about the spiritual condition of his brethren, and the satisfaction and relief the brethren would experience through hearing of Paul's condition. "Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord...whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that you may know our affairs, and that he may comfort (*parakaleo*) your hearts" (Eph. 6:21-22). "Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort (*parakaleo*) your hearts" (Col. 4:7-8). "We...sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage (*parakaleo*) you concerning your faith" (1 Thess. 3:1-2). "But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love...therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted (*parakaleo*) concerning you by your faith" (1 Thess. 3:6-7). Note from 2 Corinthians how Paul received comfort himself from the comfort experienced by his brethren: "Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort (*paraklesis*). I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation...God, who comforts (*parakaleo*) the downcast, comforted (*parakaleo*) us by the coming of Titus...by the consolation (*paraklesis*) with which he was comforted (*parakaleo*) in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more...Therefore we have been comforted (*parakaleo*) in your comfort (*paraklesis*)" (2 Cor. 7:4-13).

What does all of this have to do with us? First of all, this ought to remind us of the very sequence that God

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designed for comfort to travel—“The Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Cor. 1:3-4). God passed His comfort to His children by means of other children who had been comforted. What an incredible process! Second, it should bring us joy, comfort, satisfaction and relief to hear of brethren we know and brethren around the world prospering and growing in their efforts for the cause of Christ. To comfort one another in order to walk worthy of God, what if we shared stories and reports of the spread of the gospel, the conversion of souls, the spiritual growth of individual Christians, the activities of the local congregation, etc.? Third, comfort can be contagious. The comfort experienced by some brethren can extend comfort to others in the body of Christ. As we are members of one another, “the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor. 12:25-26).

Conclusion

When Job was suffering and in desperate need of comfort, his friends who came to him were anything but comforting. They may have gotten it right at the beginning. “Now when Job’s three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, each one came from his own place—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. For they had made an appointment together to come and mourn with him, and to comfort him. And when they raised their eyes

from afar, and did not recognize him, they lifted their voices and wept; and each one tore his robe and sprinkled dust on his head toward heaven. So they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great” (Job 2:11-13). They came with the intent of comforting him. And, as has been noted, even sitting in silence with him could have been comforting, just to have them there with him. However, Job’s friends were of little help and encouragement to him. In fact, in Job 16:2, he answered his friends and said, “I have heard many such things; Miserable comforters are you all!” With their many words that they heaped up against him (cf. 16:3-5), they had done nothing to relieve his grief. Brethren, may we not resemble in any way the miserable comforters of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. Instead, when a brother meets sorrow, let us model Job’s brothers and sisters, who came to him in Job 42:11—“Then all his brothers, all his sisters, and all those who had been his acquaintances before, came to him and ate food with him in his house; and they consoled him and comforted him...”

The church of Christ is a kingdom; it is a flock; it is an army; it is a vineyard. But, best of all, it is a family and a body. As a body, composed of many different members, every member needs the other members – to live, to function, to grow, to prosper, to help one another reach our heavenly home. As “one another” is a reciprocal pronoun, God calls upon each and every one of us to be actively engaged in the task of comforting one another. This is not a task that is merely assigned to a group of deacons, and no one else is responsible. This is not a responsibility that is shouldered only by

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the elders/shepherds (cf. Psa. 23:4), and no one else is responsible. Every Christian is charged to “comfort one another.” We share a unique relationship with one another. We are “members of one another.” Each member of the body is mutually dependent on the other. We need each other! The welfare of the whole is dependent upon and promoted by the effective working of each and every member.

There is no greater joy, greater comfort or more-fulfilling life than being a Christian and having brothers and sisters in Christ!

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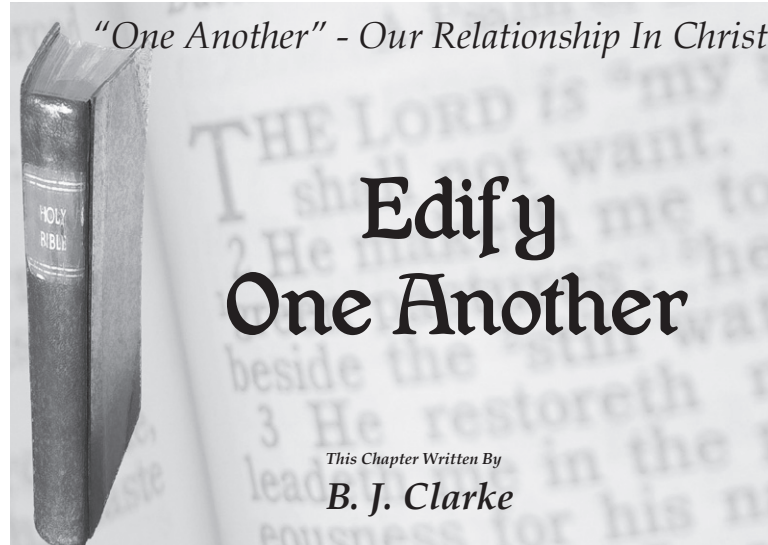
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Near the close of his first epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul wrote, “Wherefore, comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do” (1 Thess. 5:11). The first phrase in this text, “comfort yourselves together,” is very similar to what Paul had already written in 1 Thessalonians 4:18, “Wherefore, comfort one another with these words.” Interestingly, the word translated “comfort” in both of these passages is from the Greek word *parakaleo*, which is most often translated with forms of the English word “exhort.”

The second phrase in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, “and edify one another,” is similar to Paul’s instructions to the Romans, “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Rom. 14:19). It is this concept of edifying one another that will occupy our attention in this chapter. We will investigate both the meaning, and the means, of edifying one another.

The Meaning

What does it mean to edify one another? Marvin Vincent informs us that “In old English the word edify was used in its original sense of build. Thus Wycliffe renders Gen. 2:22, ‘The Lord God edified the rib which he took of Adam, into a woman.’” In the New Testament, the word translated “edify” is from the Greek word *oikodomeo*, which most literally means, “to build up.” The word is a construction term and refers to the act of building a building (Luke 6:48; 11:47-48; 12:18; 17:28). However, the Scriptures often use the word metaphorically. Charles Wanamaker observes that the metaphorical use of this word “can be traced back to the LXX, especially to Jeremiah, where the prophet promises that God will ‘build up’ Israel (Jer. 24:6; 31:4; 33:7; 42:10) and even Israel’s neighbors if they call upon God (Jer. 12:16).”

Jesus used the word *oikodomeo* when He said, “I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). Even after the church “was built” (Acts 2), the Bible writers often referred to the need for the members of the church to build up one another, such as Paul’s admonitions to the brethren in Rome and Thessalonica to “edify one another.” Gene Green comments on Paul’s use of the word in 1 Thessalonians 5:11:

This call to mutual comfort is tied in with the further exhortation to build each other up, a verb that appears for the first time here in the Pauline letters. It derives from the world of construction (Matt. 21:33; 23:29; Mark 14:58; Luke 12:18; Acts 7:47), but the apostle uses it metaphorically. It describes the way the apostle and other believers help each other grow and progress in the faith. Each individual in the community is responsible for the development

of others and of the whole through this mutual building process. This term therefore becomes fundamental to Paul's understanding of the life of the church.

F. F. Bruce notes that the metaphorical sense of building up the church "is particularly common in 1 Corinthians; it is preeminently by love that Christians, and the church as a whole, are built up (1 Cor. 8:1)...Every church member has a duty to help in 'building up' the community, so that it may attain spiritual maturity." Bruce's point is further evidenced by Paul's declaration to the Corinthians, "Ye are God's building" (1 Cor. 3:9). As living stones (cf. 1 Peter 2:5) in God's building, the Corinthians were expected to build up one another. Wanamaker elaborates on this point:

In 2 Cor. 10:8; 12:19; and 13:10, Paul describes his own apostolic role as one of building up the Corinthians rather than tearing them down. The connection with the call of Jeremiah seems unmistakable (cf. Jer. 1:10). But the apostle also speaks of the need for members of the community to build one another up (1 Cor. 8:1; 14:4, 17).

Paul expected the Thessalonians to do likewise. His command to them to "edify one another" is a present active imperative. He commends them for what they had been doing in this department, and commands them to keep up the good work.

The Means

It is insufficient to know what edification is, if we do not follow through and learn the means whereby we

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may edify one another. The Scriptures not only define edification—they demonstrate the way to carry it out. A survey of the Scriptures reveals that we may edify one another...

1. By Worship. When we attend worship services, we build one another up in the faith (Heb. 10:24-25). It is encouraging to see the pews nearly filled, and it can be rather discouraging to see empty pews that used to be filled. My attendance at worship services builds up my brother because it sends him a message that he is not alone in living the Christian life.

Having said this, we must remember that a large number in attendance at services may be encouraging, but numbers alone do not guarantee an edifying worship service. There is no doubt that God intended for worship assemblies to be sources of edification, for Paul reprimanded the church at Corinth for conducting assemblies where brethren were not being edified. Some brethren were speaking in tongues without an interpreter. Thus Paul wrote,

Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying (1 Cor. 14:1-5).

Paul drove this point home again just a few verses later: “Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church” (14:12). There was confusion and chaos in the church at Corinth, especially in their assemblies. Paul asked them what good it would do for someone to utter a beautiful prayer in a tongue/language that no one could understand! He asked, “how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified” (1 Cor. 14:16-17). Paul concluded by saying that he would rather speak five words in the assembly that could be understood than ten thousand words no one could understand (14:19). The principle that ought to govern worship assemblies is stated succinctly by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:26: “Let all things be done unto edifying.”

Since we do not possess miraculous gifts today, what, if anything, may we learn from Paul’s admonitions to the Corinthians to edify one another in worship? The absence of miraculous gifts from our assemblies does not cancel out the need for our services to be edifying. For instance, if a man speaks English, but mumbles his way through a Scripture reading/prayer to the point of being unintelligible, then what edification did the congregation receive from the reading/prayer? On the other hand, when a brother speaks up and loudly, and clearly reads, or prays to our God, we are built up in the process. Likewise, when my brother and I both sing out in the assembly, and think about the words of the psalm, hymn or spiritual song that we are singing, we teach and admonish one another, and edify one another in the process (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19).

2. By Words. One of the definitions given by Arndt and Gingrich of the word “edify” is “to help improve the ability to function in living responsibly and effectively, strengthen, build up, make more able.” How can I strengthen my brother and make him more able to reach a heavenly inheritance? Never underestimate the power of words to build up your brother! However, we are not talking about any and all words. According to Paul, not all words have the power to provide “godly edifying” (1 Tim. 1:4). Whose words do possess the power to edify?

(1) God’s Words are able to build up my brother.

Paul made a statement to the Ephesian elders, which shows the edifying power of God’s Word. He said, “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). God’s Word has edifying power! Thus, when the child of God investigates the Scriptures on a daily basis, he is energized to live for God. Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). Just as physical food sustains and nourishes the physical body, the Word of God nourishes the soul and energizes the Christian.

A daily study of God’s Word provides the reader with energy and strength, which can be found nowhere else. “A man of knowledge increaseth strength” (Prov. 24:5). Paul told the Colossians,

For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good

work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; (Col. 1:9-11).

Paul knew that in order for the Colossians to walk worthy before the Lord, they would first have to be filled with the knowledge of His will. He knew that as their knowledge of God increased, their strength to live the Christian life would also grow proportionately. In other words, the more the Colossians investigated the will of God the more built up they would be in determining to live out that will in their lives.

According to Peter, we find the strength to escape the pollutions of the world through knowledge (2 Peter 2:20). The Psalmist said, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psm. 119:9-11). A mother wrote a message inside the front cover of her son’s Bible. It read: “Only this little book will keep you from sin, and only sin will keep you from this book.” We need to learn the book, and then talk the book to our fellow brethren. This will strengthen us, and those who hear us (1 Tim. 4:13-16).

(2) **My words are able to edify my brother.** This is not because my words are as potent as God’s Word. It is because God’s Word reveals that there is edifying power in a “word that is spoken in due season”(Prov. 15:23) and in “a word fitly spoken” (Prov. 25:11). We read a beautiful passage from the pen of Isaiah:

The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak

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a word in season to him that is weary...(Isa. 50:4).

Although we are not inspired and directly taught by God what to say, we can nevertheless read the Word of God and speak a word to the weary in order to build them up and strengthen their faith. Death and life are in the power of our tongues (Prov. 18:21). We will either be justified by our mouths or condemned by them (Matt. 12:36-37). Therefore, we must heed Paul's admonition, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers (Eph. 4:29).

3. By Works. I can edify my brother by my worship, by God's Words, by my words, and by my works. Of course, we are not suggesting that we can do enough works to merit our salvation. We are simply saying that there are works of kindness that I can do to build up my weary brother. Paul made it clear that the body will be built up with growth, strength, and maturity when every member of the body does his/her part (Eph. 4:15-16). This would include the part of our responsibility to edify one another.

We need to get away from the idea that we must do something extraordinary in order to make a significant impact upon people's lives. The story is told of a passenger on an Atlantic steamer who lay in his bunk during a raging storm with a severe case of seasickness. Suddenly he heard the cry, "Man overboard!" "May God help that poor fellow," he prayed, "but there's nothing I can do." Then he thought, "I can at least put my lantern in my small window," and, with an effort, he did so. The man was finally rescued. In recounting the story the next day, he said, "I was going down in the darkness for the last

time when someone put a light in a porthole. It shone on my hand, and a sailor in the lifeboat grabbed it and pulled me in.” We can edify our brethren by doing the simple things.

In fact, often the small things make the biggest difference. General Eisenhower once rebuked one of his Generals for referring to a soldier as “just a Private.” He reminded him that the Army could function better without its Generals than it could without its foot soldiers. “If this war is won,” he said, “it will be won by Privates.” In the same way, the common, ordinary, one-talent Christians are the very backbone of the church. We have our great evangelists, our strong congregations led by godly elders, and our wealthy brethren who are able to finance great works. But, if the work of the Lord is to be done, if the gospel is to be taken to the lost, it will be the “ordinary” Christians who will do it.

Don’t ever underestimate the difference your deeds can make in building up those around you. One early morning, an elderly man walking with a cane, went down to the beach. Another gentleman on the beach watched as the elderly man seemed to be surveying the part of the beach left exposed by the receding tide. Every now and then, the elderly man would bend down, pick up something, and toss it into the ocean. The other gentleman finally realized that the man was looking for starfish. Every time he saw one lying helpless in the sand, unable to get back to the ocean on his own, he would lovingly pick it up and toss it gently back into the sea.

The younger man approached. As he arrived, the elderly man explained, “The starfish are left behind after the tide goes out. If they don’t get back into the ocean they will dry up and die beneath the hot summer sun.”

The younger man replied, “But there are endless miles of beach and there must be millions of starfish. Surely, you don’t think you can save them all. What difference can your efforts possibly make?” Slowly the old man bent over and picked up another starfish. As he tossed it into the ocean, he looked at the young man and said, “It makes a difference to that one.”

It is so easy to become discouraged when we see the sheer magnitude of the task that Christ has given to us in the church. We must not forget to focus on the value of a word fitly spoken, and a deed kindly performed on behalf of even one soul. We are called to be faithful in scanning “the beaches” and in making a difference to “that one” and “that one” and “that one” in the name of Christ. Moreover, as we busy ourselves with this task, we will be strengthened and encouraged to remain faithful as Christians.

Conclusion

The key to it all is L-O-V-E. Paul reminded us that, in dealing with our brethren, it is knowledge that puffs up, and love that builds up (1 Cor. 8:1)! Because I love my brother, I will selflessly seek what is in his best interest. Even if an action is lawful for me, I will not pursue it if it does not edify my brother (1 Cor. 8:1ff; 10:23). In dealing with my brethren, I must remember, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification (Rom. 15:1-2). As we prepare for the time when the Lord shall come, we should in the meantime “exhort one another by teaching, encouragement, and example, and we should build each other up with the

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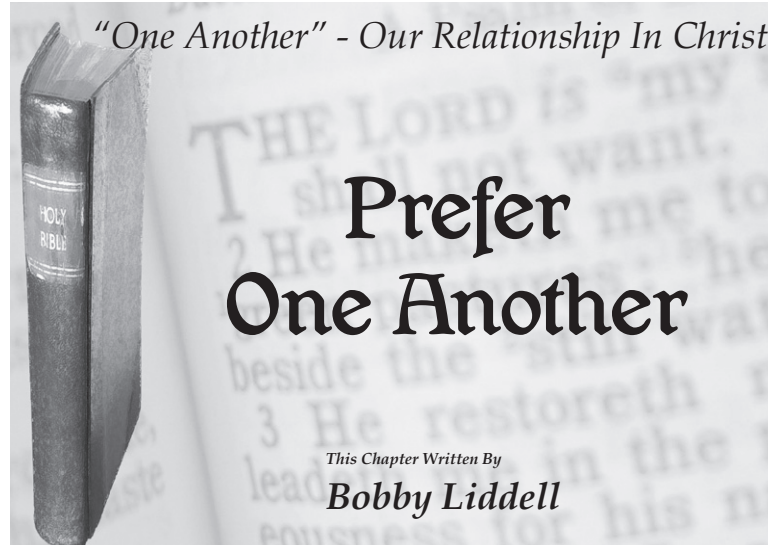
word of God and with loving care. Because we will live together with Him then, we should live together with one another cooperatively now.”

B. J. Clarke



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After Paul's inspired doctrinal discussion (Rom. 1-11), emphasizing the theme of the Roman epistle, "the just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17), the apostle turned to instructing his brethren in the practical application of the revelation. Beginning with the call to present our bodies "a living sacrifice," not conforming to this world, but being "transformed by the renewing of [our] mind" (Rom. 12:1-2), he described how as saints we must meet our responsibility; that is, how we are to put into practice our Christian duty by our living by faith. Of special interest to our study, in this second part of the book of Romans, is how Christians carry out the divinely given responsibility to prefer one another.

Paul wrote: "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Rom. 12:10 KJV). The word "prefer" means to go before, to lead the way, or to show the way. Other translations may help us to understand better the meaning of the word.

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The RSV has “outdo one another in showing honor.” The YLT has “in the honour going before one another.” BBE has “putting others before yourselves in honor.” At least one translation uses the word “prevent” (in the sense of going before) to translate the original word, “with honour preventing one another” (DRV). Note that 1 Timothy 5:21 condemns “preferring one before another,” adding, “doing nothing by partiality,” but the word translated “preferring,” in this verse, is a different word from that used in Romans 12:10, and means a prejudiced opinion formed without one’s knowing all the facts. So, there is no contradiction between Romans 12:10 and 1 Timothy 5:21, and brethren are, in the sense of Romans 12:10, to prefer one another.

Before we can put into practice the doctrinal truths we have learned from Romans, including the Christian characteristic of preferring one another, we must learn how to think as those who live by faith (Prov. 23:7; Matt. 12:34). First, we must realize how we should think about ourselves (Rom. 12:1-8). Then, we must learn how to think correctly about our brethren (Rom. 12:9-13). Finally, we must think correctly about our enemies (Rom. 12:14-21). Then, we will be ready to think correctly, and act appropriately, in preferring one another.

Thinking Correctly About Ourselves (Romans 12:1-8)

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith (Rom. 12:3).

Bowing before God, who created the universe, blessed us with life, loved us enough to give His Son for us, and presented us with the wonderful opportunity to know spiritual life, being justified by faith in Christ, surely we should realize we owe everything to Him. We were saved by “the mercies of God,” and our “reasonable service” is to offer ourselves to Him as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1-2). Thinking soberly, we will know we have no reason to think more highly of ourselves than is proper, but every reason to exalt God in our thinking, and our brethren before ourselves. Let us keep ever before us, in our thinking, that all Christians are members of the same body, and none is more important than the other (1 Cor. 12:12ff). Although members differ in their “office,” even the ones considered the “feeble” and “less honourable” members have their place in the body, and are as necessary to the proper functioning of it as any other member.

Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness (1 Cor. 12:22-23).

So, Paul wrote:

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another (Rom. 12:4-5).

Thus, thinking correctly about ourselves, we will not grieve that others may be more “comely” members, but will rejoice that they are. We will not covet the “gifts”

others have, nor will we seek to rob them of their honor for having them, but we will use our abilities (keep in mind there are no miraculous abilities today), whatever they may be, with the right attitude of heart, to the glory of God, and to the benefit and promotion of our beloved brethren. Envy and jealousy will not confuse our hearts, or cloud our thinking. We will rejoice, genuinely and without guile, when others have greater abilities, or greater opportunities, or greater acclaim. Following the example of Christ (Phil. 2:5ff; Heb. 2:9; 5:8-9), we will gladly submit ourselves in humble service and sacrificial obedience (Eph. 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5). If we think more highly of ourselves than we ought, we will never be the followers of Christ we ought to be, but when we think correctly about ourselves, we will follow Him, and we will also think correctly about our brethren.

Thinking Correctly About Our Brethren (Romans 12:9-13)

Do we really want what is best for each other? Maturing in love means we learn the greater satisfaction of denying ourselves, or even sacrificing ourselves, for the good of others. We will happily stand in the shadows while others have the spotlight, and we will join in applause for them. After all, they are our brothers, and we love them. In humility, we will not let Satan tempt us to seek the preeminence, but will, as Paul penned: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Phil. 2:3). Brotherly love is without dissimulation; that is, it is sincere, not fake (Rom. 12:9), and love for brethren is an identifying mark of the Lord's people, but how different do those outside Christ treat each other!

Worldly men love themselves (2 Tim. 3:2), the preeminence (3 John 9), the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:42-43), pleasure more than God (2 Tim. 3:4), the uttermost seats and proper greetings (Luke 11:43), vanity (Psm. 4:2), error (Jer. 5:32), evil (Micah 3:2), money (1 Tim. 6:10), and flagons of wine (Hos. 3:1), because they love the world and the things of the world (1 John 2:15-17), and because they love not the truth (2 Thes. 2:10). Such men will never understand the love Christians share, as brethren, in the body of Christ. They will scoff at the idea of putting others before themselves, and will ridicule those who do.

On the contrary, brothers and sisters in Christ are “kindly affectioned one to another” (Rom. 12:10). Using a unique word, combining delight and tender familial affection, Paul references the reciprocal love family members have for one another; that is, the tender, affectionate, natural love shared by parents and children, by brothers and sisters, or by husband and wife, as they delight in and cherish one another. Think of the love of a mother for her child, and apply that love to the brotherhood. That will help us to know better the meaning of Romans 12:10. This usage is certainly fitting, since Christians are children of God (2 Cor. 6:18), and are all members of the same household, “the house of God, which is the church of the living God” (from a word, translated “house,” meaning a dwelling place, used metaphorically to mean the ones who dwell within the house; thus, the family [1 Tim. 3:15]).

Paul continued: “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love.” (Rom. 12:10). Romans 12:9-13 lists the various aspects of our relationships in Christ, and our positive responses to them because of our love for God,

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and for one another. Brotherly love describes the tender affection that exists among saints, and that Jesus said (as it has been called the “badge of discipleship”) would let the world know who were those who followed Him.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another (John 13:34-35).

Notice what the New Testament records about God’s will for us, and what attitude He would have us to have, in our relationship as brethren.

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you (John 15:12).

These things I command you, that ye love one another (John 15:17).

But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another (1 Thes. 4:9).

Let brotherly love continue (Heb. 13:1).

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently (1 Peter 1:22).

Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king (1 Peter 2:17).

Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous (1 Peter 3:8).

And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity (2 Peter 1:7).

Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth (1 John 2:7-8).

For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another (1 John 3:11).

And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment (1 John 3:23).

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also (1 John 4:20-21).

From the numerous passages commanding brotherly love, we should be impressed with the emphasis God places upon our loving one another in Christ. When we think correctly about ourselves, we will think correctly about our brethren. How should we think about our enemies?

Thinking Correctly About Our Enemies
(Romans 12:14-21)

The Lord's people think correctly, even about those

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who would do them harm. Christians bless (speak well), instead of cursing their enemies. Righteous men and women live honestly and seek to live peaceably. Godly men and women leave vengeance to the Lord, treat their enemies with kindness, and overcome evil with good (cf. Matt. 5:44-45).

Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:14-21).

Even in the case of our enemies, as Christians, we are to seek their good before our own. Having briefly considered our thinking concerning ourselves, our brethren, and our enemies, let us make the application in “preferring one another.”

Thinking Correctly About Preferring One To Another

Christians show honor to each other, as they prefer one another, setting a proper example for others in going

before, or leading. The meaning is that saints are to lead the way in giving honor to others, seeking to be first, not in demanding respect, but in showing respect, not in gaining honor, but in giving honor. The truth is that no man respects himself, as he should, until he respects others, as he should; that is, until he seeks their honor more than his own. Likewise, no man will receive respect, as he should, who does not show respect for others, as he should. He may bully others into submitting to him, but he will not gain their respect.

The plural pronoun translated one another indicates the mutual, reciprocal relationship we have in Christ, as we exercise kind, courteous regard for each other. We are expected to give honor, but we also receive honor as our brethren mutually reciprocate. However, we are not to wait upon our brethren to show us honor, before we show honor to them (Matt. 7:12). When we hold each other in honor, as God's Word directs us to do, we will not be guilty of evil surmising, suspicion, doubt, hearsay, gossip, slander, or any other malicious act toward one another. Not only will we not indulge in jealous whispers behind our brother's back, we will neither listen to others who do, nor allow them to do so unchallenged.

John, the apostle of love, wrote to "the wellbeloved Gaius," desiring his prosperity, and rejoicing that he walked in truth. John commended Gaius for his charity toward the brethren and strangers, encouraging him, and all of us, to receive those who labor for the Lord, "that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth." John condemned the haughty Diotrephes, "who loveth to have the preeminence."

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will

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remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church (3 John 9-10).

Who more accurately depicts the very opposite of the divine requirements of preferring one another than Diotrephes? He wanted to be first, and he desired the preeminence so much that he rejected the apostle John and faithful brethren. Diotrephes so aspired for the honor of first place that he made empty, idle, false accusations against his own brethren, with troubling, annoying words that caused, for the righteous, hardship and pain. Not content to stop there, in his blind zeal to be the greatest, he would not receive the brethren, and prevented others from doing so, even to the point of driving them away from the church. If all would heed the call to prefer one another, there would not be another Diotrephes in the Lord's church.

How unlike wicked Diotrephes was righteous Abraham (Abram), who sought resolution to the strife between his and Lot's herdsmen by offering Lot the first choice as to the land he would take. Abraham could have demanded first choice by his age and station, but he did not do so. He exemplified leading the way in putting others first (Gen. 13:1-18).

And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the

right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then
I will go to the left (Gen. 13:8-9).

God's people do not seek honor for themselves, but are ready and willing to give honor to their brothers and sisters in Christ. Surrendering oneself to Christ changes everything—for the better. Christians "honour all men," affixing the proper value to their fellow men (1 Peter 2:17), and give honor to whom honor is due (Rom. 13:7). Saints are good citizens, showing honor to the king (that is, those in leadership roles of civil government [1 Peter 2:17]) In Christ, servants honor their masters (1 Tim. 6:1). God's people honor father and mother (Mat. 15:4; Eph. 6:2), and widows who are widows indeed (1 Tim. 5:3). Husbands honor their wives (1 Peter 3:7). Brethren honor elders that rule well (1 Tim. 5:17). Above all, God's people "honor the Son, even as they honor the Father" (John 5:23).

Worldly people clamor to receive honor, selfishly desiring all the honor they can garner for themselves. Following the motto, "Every man for himself," carnal people try to accumulate all the honor they can have others to give them, by whatever means available to them. Christians have a completely different attitude, as shown by the following passages.

Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved (1 Cor. 10:33).

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10).

Let no man seek his own, but each his neighbor's good (1 Cor. 10:24 ASV).

PREFER ONE ANOTHER

Dare we allow the world to convince us to consider ourselves overlooked, neglected, even mistreated because another brother receives honor? If so, we need to learn the meaning of being members of the same body. When one member of the body is strengthened, the whole body benefits, but when one member is weakened, the whole body suffers (1 Cor. 12:26-27). Do we know who is our brother in the body of Christ? Every accountable person who has heard the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), believed in Jesus as the Christ (John 8:24), repented of all past sins (Acts 2:38), confessed his faith in Christ (Rom. 10:9-10), and has been baptized (immersed in water) into Christ (Rom. 6:3-4), in order to have his sins remitted (Acts 2:38), is one who, by obeying the Lord's commands, has been saved (Mark 16:16), has been added, by the Lord, to His church (Acts 2:47), and is our brother in the family of God. He may be a member of the local congregation where we attend, or he may be a member of another congregation across town, or on the other side of the world, but he is still a brother in Christ. Nothing such as color, nationality, language, social standing, educational attainment, or wealth should ever come between brothers in the same family; that is, in the spiritual family of God. Therefore, our love for each other, as brothers in Christ, should be mutual, reciprocal, and unfeigned, motivating our lovingly and willingly promoting each other, and "preferring one another."

In the great chapter on love, Paul wrote that charity (love), "Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil" (1 Cor. 13:5). Love looks first to bring honor and glory to God, and in so doing to further the Cause of Christ, while seeking the benefit of brethren before one's own interests.

The paradox is that we will, by preferring others, find ourselves lifted above the plane of worldly men, to heights we could never attain by the most strenuous efforts of self-serving.

Conclusion

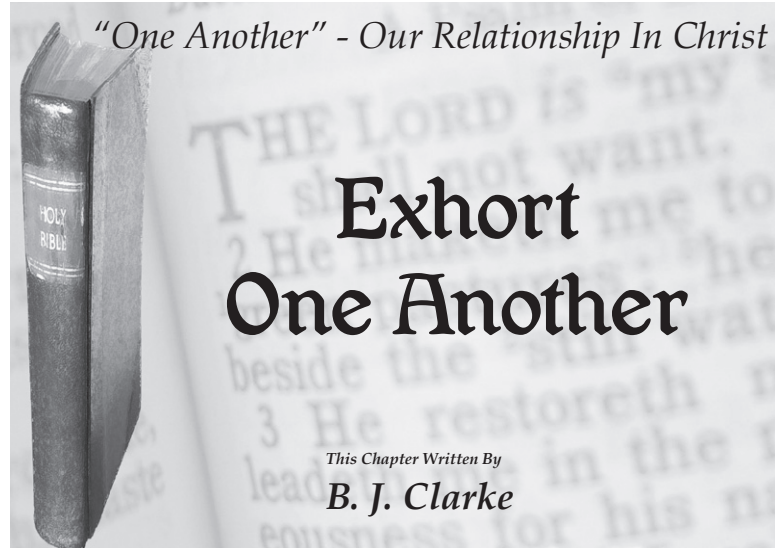
“In honor preferring one another,” we will work steadfastly for the benefit of each other, sincerely seeking the best for each other, and honestly desiring to bring happiness and promotion to all. Before we can do that, we must learn to think correctly about ourselves, our brethren, and even our enemies. Then, we will know how to think correctly and act appropriately in preferring one another. When we make that transforming change in our lives, we will find the blessings of peace and hope God promised to His children.

Bobby Liddell



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PREFER ONE ANOTHER



God never intended for His called out people to have to go it alone. He gave us one another. This lectureship is so valuable because it reminds us of our numerous “one another” responsibilities. In this particular chapter we will focus upon the inspired admonition that we “exhort one another.” Our opening text is Hebrews 3:12-14, wherein we read:

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;

The passage above clearly commands us to exhort one another as brethren, but what is involved in exhorting

one another? Obviously, we cannot obey the requirement to exhort one another unless we know the definition of exhortation.

What Is Exhortation?

The definition of the English word “exhort” is to “strongly encourage or urge (someone) to do something.” This is a good definition, but we should remember that the New Testament was originally written in Greek. Therefore, it is enlightening to study the original language as it relates to the word translated “exhort” (and other forms of this word) in the King James Version. The Greek word most commonly translated “exhort” is *parakaleo*. It is actually a compound Greek word, “*para*,” meaning “beside,” and “*kaleo*,” meaning “to call.” Thus, the most literal meaning of *parakaleo* is “to call beside.” Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich attest to this meaning with their definition of *parakaleo*, “to ask to come and be present where the speaker is, call to one’s side.” Vine’s Dictionary of New Testament Words concurs, and adds that it means “to call to one’s aid.” Spiros Zodhiates notes that the word also conveys the idea of “calling upon someone to do something, to exhort, admonish.” The word can even be translated to communicate the concept of comforting or consoling someone.

Now that we have defined the meaning of the word “exhort” we are in a position to enhance our understanding of it by asking and answering a series of questions.

Who Needs Exhortation?

1. **Elders need it.** The apostle Peter wrote, “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also

a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.” (1 Peter 5:1). We often think of the need for elders to exhort others, but this passage shows that sometimes the elders need exhortation as well.

2. Preachers need it. Paul instructed the young preacher Timothy, “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:13). Paul not only exhorted Timothy to exhort the brethren, but also encouraged him to attend to himself (1 Tim. 4:16). One of the most enjoyable things about speaking on a lectureship is the opportunity not only to exhort the brethren in preaching but also to be exhorted by the preaching of others.

3. The brethren need it. Paul was very careful not only to convert the lost, but also to confirm the saved. Acts 14:22 reveals that Paul went back to places where he had already preached for the purpose of “confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” He continued with this same emphasis as he went from place to place, giving them “much exhortation” (Acts 20:2). Moreover, Paul was not the only one to see the need for exhortation of the brethren. “And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them” (Acts 15:32).

In addition to the general admonition to exhort the brethren we also see more specific commands concerning those who need exhortation.

(1) Busybodies need it. In his second epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul wrote, “For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we

command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread” (2 Thes. 3:11-12).

(2) **Gainsayers need it.** Paul informed Titus that men who would become elders must be taught, and must be known for “Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Titus 1:9). The word “gainsayers” is from antilego, which means to “speak against.” In this context, the elders would need to be able to exhort those false teachers who spoke against the truth of the gospel in order to gain a following.

(3) **Young men need it.** Paul told Titus, “Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded” (Titus 2:6). Young people are a precious resource to the church and we cannot afford to lose any more young people than we already are losing. We must not let the only voices they hear be the ones of the world. Spiritual people need to reach out and encourage our young people to be serious minded about what the bottom line of life is all about. Paul did not think that young people are too young to think seriously.

(4) **Employees need it.** Paul told Titus to “Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again;” (Titus 2:9). Although we do not use the terms of “servants” and “masters” in our culture to describe the employee-employer relationship, the basic principle of respecting the authority of the boss is needed still in our society.

(5) **The unruly need it.** Paul wrote, “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly...(1 Thes. 5:14). The word “unruly” is from the same word that is translated “disorderly” in other passages. Although it

is not pleasant to confront the disorderly, they need our exhortation to get back in line.

(6) **The feeble-minded need it.** “Now we exhort you, brethren, ...comfort the feeble-minded (1 Thes. 5:14). The word “feeble-minded” is synonymous with being discouraged or faint-hearted. It is a joy to speak a word of encouragement to the discouraged.

(7) **The weak need it.** “Now we exhort you, brethren, ...support the weak,” (1 Thes. 5:14). The Greek word for “weak” in this passage appears 25 times in the New Testament. Most of the time it is translated with the word “weak” but it is also equivalent to the word “sick” (Matt. 25:43-44; Luke 10:9; Acts 5:15-16) and even refers to those who are crippled or lame (Acts 4:9). Those who are sick need our encouragement. This is so important to God that it is depicted as a salvation issue (Matt. 25:43-46)!

Why Should We Exhort One Another?

The Scriptures are quite clear concerning the purpose of exhorting our brethren. We should exhort one another...

1. **To cleave to the Lord.** When Barnabas came to Antioch, “when he came, and had seen the grace of God, [he] was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:23). Likewise, we must encourage our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to cleave and not to leave the Lord.

2. **To continue in the faith.** Paul exhorted the brethren in Acts 14 “to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). We must continue in the words of Christ in order to be His disciples indeed (John 8:31-

32). Regrettably, there are still brethren like Demas who do not continue in the faith (2 Tim. 4:10). We must encourage our brethren to know the perfect law of liberty and to continue therein (James 1:25) so that they may be blessed.

3. To confirm the faith of those already converted.

This is precisely what we read of in Acts 14:22 and Acts 15:32. It is no less important today. The Lord knew that it is not enough to teach and to baptize. Rather, we must teach, baptize, and then teach the baptized to observe all things commanded by the Lord (Matt. 28:19-20). Sadly, the second part of the great commission is all too often jettisoned. We cannot afford to bring the lost to the baptistery only to “dip ‘em and drop ‘em!”

4. To cheer the fearful. In Acts 27:22, Paul told his fellow shipmates, who were frightened because of severe storms, “And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship.” Although Paul’s words were spoken primarily to non-Christians, it is nevertheless true that we need to imitate his example among our brethren. As our fellow brethren face the storms of life we need to offer words of good cheer.

5. To encourage brethren to place their confidence in a faithful brother. Apollos was a very talented man, but he was preaching the baptism of John long after it had ceased to be a valid baptism (Acts 18:25). Aquila and Priscilla did not assume that he knew better and just did not care about the truth. They did not hasten to write him up in a brotherhood paper and brand him as a false teacher. Their first approach was to take Apollos aside and explained the way of God more perfectly unto him (Acts 18:26).

Apparently, Apollos humbly accepted their correction and changed his message. Make no mistake about it—if Apollos had not accepted their correction, and had insisted on preaching still the baptism of John—they would have had no choice but to mark him as a false teacher (Rom. 16:17). However, Apollos had changed. Thus, they did not write him off and put him on probation to punish him for his former error. Instead, “when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace:” (Acts 18:27).

6. To comfort one another. We noted earlier that the word *parakaleo*, which is most often translated with a form of the word “exhort” is sometimes translated “comfort.” This is exactly what we find in the following words from Paul to the Thessalonians: “Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thes. 4:18), and “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do” (1 Thes. 5:11).

When Should We Exhort One Another?

The Hebrews writer leaves no doubt about the urgency of exhorting our brethren. He wrote, “But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” No doubt the daily interaction of the early church did much to encourage one another (Acts 2:42ff). Moreover, when a brother is suddenly wavering in his attendance, or is “overtaken in a fault” (Gal. 6:1ff), or is becoming entangled again in the ways of the world (2 Peter 2:20ff), there is no time to lose! He needs our exhortation “Today!” It is no wonder that

later in the same book the author of Hebrews penned these words:

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (10:24-25).

How Should We Exhort One Another?

Methods do matter when it comes to exhortation. We must be careful to imitate the spirit of exhortation modeled by the apostle Paul.

1. **Sincerely.** He told the Thessalonians, “For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile.” (1 Thes. 2:3).

2. **Fatherly.** There must be a mixture of fatherly tenderness and firmness as we exhort one another. This is the formula Paul used toward the Thessalonians, “As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children” (1 Thes. 2:11).

3. **Authoritatively.** Paul wanted the Thessalonians to know that his exhortation toward them did not originate with him. “Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more” (1 Thes. 4:1). Paul emphasized that his exhortation was “by the Lord Jesus.” We are not inspired as was Paul, but we do possess the words of Jesus which will judge men in the last day (John 12:48). Therefore we must follow the command Paul gave to Titus: “These things speak, and exhort, and

rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee” (Titus 2:15).

4. **Patiently.** The point above does not mean that we exhort our brethren in an unloving and impatient way. Paul did tell Timothy to “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke” but he also told him in the same verse to “exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). Earlier in this epistle he told Timothy,

And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

5. **Doctrinally.** This point is closely aligned with point number 3 above. It is important that our exhortation be grounded in the doctrine of Christ. Paul told Timothy to exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). We have no authority to exhort our brethren to follow our manmade rules but we have an obligation to exhort them to follow God’s rules.

6. **Prayerfully.** The apostle Paul exhorted Timothy with the following words, “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men” (1 Tim. 2:1). Praying for all men would certainly include those who are not members of the church. We are also to do good unto all men, but especially unto those who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). Likewise, while we are to pray for all men, it is consistent with Scripture to suggest that we ought

EXHORT ONE ANOTHER

to pray especially for those of the household of faith, especially if they are away from the household!

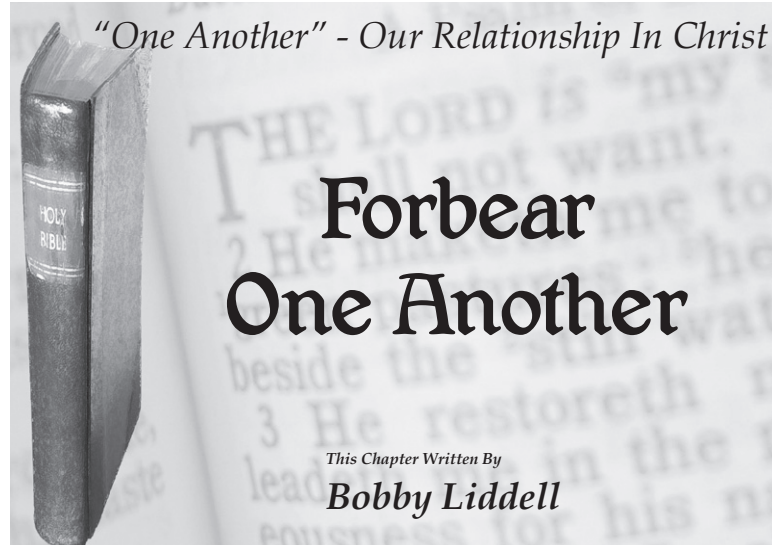
Conclusion

The Scriptures are full of admonitions and exhortations (Heb. 12:5; 13:22; 1 Peter 5:12, Jude 3). It is important that we accept these exhortations (2 Cor. 8:17; 9:5ff). It is equally important for us to perpetuate these exhortations by exhorting one another to do what is right, and encouraging one another when things are not going right. To do so, we must be beside one another, ready at a moments notice to offer a word of caution, a word of counsel, and a word of comfort! Let us exhort one another daily, and so fulfill the law of Christ!

B. J. Clarke



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Christians share a special, spiritual, and eternal relationship with “one another.” The connection we have in Christ, unlike any other association we may have, transcends the differences of “all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues” (Rev. 7:9), and lasts forever (1 Thes. 4:13-18). The New Testament of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:15) reveals the mutual interaction Christians are to have with one another; that is, how we are to behave, or conduct ourselves, one toward another (1 Tim. 3:15). Among other things, those in the family of God are to love one another (John 13:34), prefer one another (Rom. 12:10), not judge one another (Rom. 14:13), but receive one another (Rom. 15:7), admonish one another (Rom. 15:14), serve one another (Gal. 3:13), bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2), forgive one another (Eph. 4:32), comfort one another (1 Thes. 4:18), edify one another (1 Thes. 5:11), exhort one another (Heb. 3:13), and consider one another (Heb. 10:24).

FORBEAR ONE ANOTHER

Our blessed relationships and faith-building responsibilities, in Christ, are reciprocal and reflexive (as shown by the pronouns that describe them, as those pronouns have been revealed to men, through inspired men [John 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:9ff], by the Holy Spirit [see Eph. 4:2; 5:18-21]). Thus, what we do properly in the church of Christ, as obedient believers, is from one to another, and of one by another. For example, all who are in Christ have the mutual, reciprocal responsibility to love each other, but also have the mutual, reciprocal expectation to be loved by each other (1 John 4:7). Emphasizing the idea of Christian unity, and of adherence to the one, true standard of authority, the Word of Christ (John 12:48), as all the saved are members of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12, 20, 27; Acts 2:47), so all are to join in the approved actions that God has declared to be characteristic of our joint bond with one another, and of our shared attitude toward one another, in the one body, of which Christ is the singular Head (Eph. 4:4; Col. 1:18).

Among the many mutual responsibilities we share in the body of Christ is the responsibility to “forbear one another” (Eph. 4:2).

Paul wrote the Christians in Ephesus:

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:1-6).

A Manner Of Life

Paul, the “prisoner of the Lord,” appealed to his brethren to walk worthy of the primary pursuit of their lives; i.e., Christian living. In the Ephesian epistle, the word “walk” occurs seven times in six passages (Eph. 2:10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15), and indicates a continuous conduct, or manner of living (Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 5:7; 1 Thes. 2:12; 1 John 1:6-10; 3 John 4). To “walk” means to live a life of discretion, walking appropriately and becomingly; thus, in purity and obedience. To “walk” means to live a life of direction, guided all along the way by the gospel by which we are called (2 Thes. 2:14). To “walk” also means to live a life of devotion to God, following the same path taken by the apostle Paul, as he exemplified such devotion in his Christian living (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 1:21; Acts 21:13).

Paul’s inspired instruction and loving encouragement to his brethren in the church in Ephesus, was that those in Christ must walk together in unity—the unity that was on Jesus’ heart as he approached the cross (John 17:20-21), and that can be found only in Christ (Eph. 2:15). Paul’s interest (and the Lord’s) was that the Ephesian brethren would grow spiritually, as they should, for God has never approved one’s continuing in weakness or immaturity (2 Peter 3:18). Neither the church at Ephesus, nor any other congregation, could grow, as it should, until each member grew in spiritual maturity, as he should. Thus, Paul wrote to his beloved brethren about a godly manner of life, and a growing mind of love—both of which were necessary for their heeding the inspired command of forbearing one another (Eph. 4:1-2).

A Mind Of Love

We are to forbear one another “in love” (Eph. 4:2).

FORBEAR ONE ANOTHER

Love for one another identifies us as His (John 13:34-35), but also motivates the submission necessary for us to have peace, joy, hope, and unity in Christ. Love is patiently enduring, whether in addressing conflicts, dissolving disputes, or restoring broken unity (1 Cor. 13). Christian love insures that opinion will never become a wedge that separates brethren. Provocations, slights, and sharp words hurt our feelings, so we should know that they hurt others as well (cf. Matt. 7:12). Surely, we all understand the necessity of avoiding heated words and hasty deeds. We ought to be well aware of the need for cooler heads to prevail. The ability to express love by being able to bear with one another, to listen, to think, to pray, instead of too quickly reacting, is an attribute that requires nurturing into maturity. To extend to others the patient endurance we all need and want, to offer a helping hand, and to lend a listening ear, because of lovingly, genuinely seeking the good of the other, and of the body of Christ, will, when properly received, result in the healing of the body that we seek, instead of additional injury.

Lowliness, one of the close companions of forbearing, means humility (Phil. 2:3-9; Matt. 11:28-30; James 4:6), and accurately depicts the truth that the forbearing that we exercise with one another is free of envy and jealousy. God's Word declares envy to be a work of the flesh, and that those who so sin "shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that

they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law (Gal. 5:19-23).

Additionally, Paul penned: “Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another” (Gal. 5:26). While there are many requirements of what we are to do, and to be, to one another, there are also many warnings of what we are not to do, and not to be, to one another. God, through Paul, warned: “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another” (Gal. 5:15). Loving forbearance would eliminate such devilish conduct that consumes brethren, and condemns the souls of the attackers, for we would seek the best for each other, and be willing even to suffer in order to do so.

The evil opposites of Christ-like lowliness, envy, pride and haughty arrogance, preclude forbearing, for the proud person cares only for himself, his position, his power, and his pleasure. Humble brethren, who bow their hearts to listen to the God of Heaven, and who are true Christians, stoop down to lift up the lowly; listen to, and learn from, the least; and think more highly of others than they do of themselves. Paul wrote, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Phil. 2:3). Proud men stubbornly stand in opposition to God, but the lowly bow at His feet, and heed His Word.

Love for one another encourages the strength necessary for unity in Christ. Meekness is strength under control (Num. 12:3; 1 Peter 3:4; Gal. 5:22-23), and is an essential element in our mutual relationship in Christ.

FORBEAR ONE ANOTHER

We must be strong if we would, “Bear...one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). Likewise, weakness will never result in our heeding the command to: “Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32). To be forbearing, we must be meek and lowly, as was Christ (Matt. 11:29)

Love for one another makes possible the suffering necessary for unity in Christ. Longsuffering (to suffer long) involves dedication and patience (Rev. 2:10; 2 Peter 3:9; Gal. 5:22) in bearing with one another. Gill pictured longsuffering, and its close kinship with forbearance, as:

...a patient bearing and enduring of present evils with joyfulness...being slow to anger, ready to forgive injuries, put up with affronts, and bear with, and forbear one another: and which is usually accompanied with gentleness, humanity, affability, courteousness, shown both in words, gestures, and actions; in imitation of the gentleness of Christ, and agreeably to that wisdom, that heavenly doctrine of the Gospel, which, among other things, is said to be gentle, and easy to be entreated.

Therefore, longsuffering includes patient forbearance with the shortcomings and slights of others, as well as the insults and injuries caused by them, and the ability to do so without seeking retaliation or revenge, but with a readiness, not only to endure such affronts, but also a willingness to forgive the offender. The attitude of longsuffering forbearance is not reluctantly agreeing to some grievous, despised requirement, or to some burdensome, hated imposition. It is not cowardice, or inability to act, but a joyful submission to the Christian

way of life, trusting God that His way is always the best way. The Lord's followers do not boast of their goodness in forbearing, or seek sympathy for their suffering, or complain about what they must endure as they joyfully engage in "forbearing one another."

What Does Forbear Mean?

From the original language, lexicons give the meaning of *anechomai* (from *ana*, that means among or between, and *echo*, that means to have, in the sense of holding; thus, to hold up, sustain, bear, or endure; therefore, to bear with the faults and shortcomings of others), and its various forms, generally translated in the King James Version as *forbear*, as: to put up with, bear with, tolerate, or endure. Berry, in his interlinear (in agreement with others), has "bearing with" as the translation (506). Some correctly include, and emphasize, the idea of willingly suffering for the benefit of others in forbearing.

Mounce wrote:

Anechomai means "to bear with, endure, tolerate, put up with" something or someone. The KJV translates it as "forbear" or "suffer." When the object of *anechomai* is personal, it means to put up with or tolerate an individual. In the gospels, Jesus exclaims in frustration, "O unbelieving generation...how long shall I put up with you?" (Mt. 17:17; Mk. 9:19; Lk. 9:41). The proconsul Gallio refused to tolerate the Jews and their accusations against Paul (Acts 18:14). Twice Paul exhorts believers to "bear with" one another in the sense of being patient with one another, overlooking differences through love and forgiveness. This mutual forbearance is essential in the church in order

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to promote peace and unity within the church body (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13). Several times in 2 Cor. 11, Paul makes a sarcastic play on this word, asking the Corinthians to “put up with a little” foolishness from him as he defends himself and his apostleship (2 Cor. 11:1-4). While they will “tolerate” fools who enslave, exploit and abuse them (vv. 19-20), ironically, they will not bear with Paul, who has never wronged them (213).

Thus, the meaning of “forbear,” as used in Ephesians 4:2, is to put up with, or tolerate, other Christians, and to do so “in love.” Some, in obvious disregard of their God-given, mutual, Christian responsibility, foolishly and falsely define longsuffering and patience as sinful toleration and compromise. We must never let anyone pressure coerce, condemn, or sanction us into believing that we sin when we correctly follow the Lord’s command to be forbearing. Perhaps, if we were to study our Bibles more, and sincerely seek to put into practice what we learn from God’s Word, we would know that all Christians are to be longsuffering, patient, and tolerant (forbearing) with one another.

As we contemplate what that means, we would then rejoice in God’s goodness, demonstrated by His forbearance extended to us. Paul asked: “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance (toleration, BL) and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance” (Rom. 2:4)? Then, we would humbly submit to Him, gladly serve one another in Christ, love and care for each other as we should, and praise our God for sending His Son Jesus, who is indeed the Christ, of whom Paul wrote: “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to

declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Rom. 3:25). Thank God for His forbearance with us, and for His teaching us to be forbearing.

Forbearing; that is, bearing with, putting up with, or tolerating one another in Christ is a godly characteristic. God’s great example, “the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering,” should inspire us to endure patiently, to forbear lovingly, and to forego revenge, even upon those who have grievously wronged us, because of our love for them, and for the Lord’s body, and in order that we might offer forgiveness to them. Brethren, we can never secure a right response, or enjoy a right relationship with one another, by angry retaliation, or by hateful accusation. Do we really think our brother will know how much we love him, how we are sincerely seeking his good, and how we want for him salvation, when we refuse to follow the divine, plain command to forbear with him?

Forbearing does not mean, does not include, and does not even hint at the idea of tolerating continuing sin (1 John 3:4, 8-9; 5:16-17). God’s being forbearing does not mean that He overlooks sin, in “sinful toleration and compromise,” but that He was willing to prepare for, and provide for, man’s salvation, in spite of all man has done against Him. The reason is that He desires sinners to be saved from their sins. Jesus said:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:16-17).

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Do we want our brethren to be saved? Are we willing to go the extra mile in order to help them (and ourselves) to be saved? Can we put aside pettiness and pride, and inculcate within ourselves lowliness, meekness, and forbearance, in order that we might help men to be productive in the Lord's church, and to be with Him eternally? If so, then, and only then, will we have the proper disposition to confront sin, faithfully, gently, but firmly rebuke sin, and correctly call upon the one involved in sin to repent.

How much do we love the Lord's church? Enough to forego demanding praise for ourselves (even if the praise should rightly be ours) that a brother received? Do we love the Lord's church enough to put aside personalities, in order to maintain peace? Do we love the Lord's church so much that we would be willing to take a lowly position, in order to help promote a good work, or to make possible the greater work of another? Do we love the Lord's church enough to put up with the shortcomings of others, realizing we all are "works in progress"? Do we love the Lord's church enough to hold our tongues rather than let jealous, hateful words hurt the Cause of Christ? Do we love the Lord's church enough to suffer wrong rather than to commit wrong?

Not only does forbearance forego envy, more than that, forbearance means we rejoice in the victories of the faithful. We should thank God for our brethren who have great talent and ability, and who serve God faithfully. Christians are not jealous because another has more acclaim, receives promotion, has a good reputation, is widely known, or has more opportunities. We thank God for opportunities that are theirs, and we pray for their success. Why should any brother or sister not want another in Christ to succeed?

In the battle with Satan, let us hold up the hands of the valiant soldiers who wear well the Christian armor, whose swords are sharp, and who wield them with precision and power (Eph. 6:10-18). Instead of trying to weaken them, let us seek to strengthen them, and to work to be like them. Let us also reach down to the “little ones” who seem insignificant, lacking in knowledge, deficient in ability, behind in maturity, and seek to raise them up to where they should be, to where they can be. Let us make it our practice to befriend the friendless, to listen to those whose voices are not heard, to bring to the chief seat the ones whom others think unworthy of their association.

Toleration (forbearance) is not toleration of sin, but let us remember that God, not man, is the one who determines what sin is, and who is guilty of sin (1 John 3:4; Rom. 7:13). One does not sin just because he differs from another in a matter that is optional, that is a matter of judgment, or that one holds as a scruple (cf. Rom. 14). One is not guilty of sin just because another brother dislikes him, or is jealous of his position. It is not necessarily the case that those who have success are compromising in order to do so. Additionally, one is not free from the guilt of sin simply because some overlook it under the guise of forbearance. Likewise, one is not necessarily guilty of sin just because someone accuses him. Let us never adopt the Devil’s tactics of accusing brethren, or aid those who do so (Rev. 12:10).

Where Does Forbearing Fit?

Paul wrote about those whose lives were “hid with Christ in God,” instructing them in, “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a

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quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Notice what the Holy Spirit inspired him to write to the Colossian brethren.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye

are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him (Col. 3:1-17).

Where does forbearing fit? From Colossians 3:1-17, note the following. Forbearance is a Christian characteristic of those who:

1. Are risen with Christ.
2. Seek those things that are above.
3. Set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth.
4. Are dead, but alive in Christ.
5. Expect to appear with Him in glory.
6. Have put to death their members upon the earth.
7. Have put off the evil attributes of the old man with his deeds.
8. Have put on the new man.
9. Have put on the characteristics of Christians—including forbearing.
10. Have put on, above all, love, which is the bond of perfectness.
11. Let the peace of God rule in their hearts.
12. Let the word of Christ dwell in them richly.
13. Do all, in word or deed, in the name of the Lord.
14. And, give thanks unto the Father by Him.

Conclusion

Forbearing one another in love is a Christian characteristic that we must all work to acquire, to practice, and to perfect within us. Forbearance requires patience with one another, demands slowness to anger, and also stresses readiness to forgive. Offering aid, sympathy, and encouragement, forbearance endures the trials, overcomes weakness, and claims the victory--and does so with lowliness and meekness. Forbearing one another in love should not seem to us to be unusual or unknown. Rather, we should be faithful practitioners of bearing with, putting up with, and tolerating one another, ready to forgive, and gentle in our dealing with others. If we love one another, as we should, we will know the blessings of forbearing, even if we must suffer in order to do so.

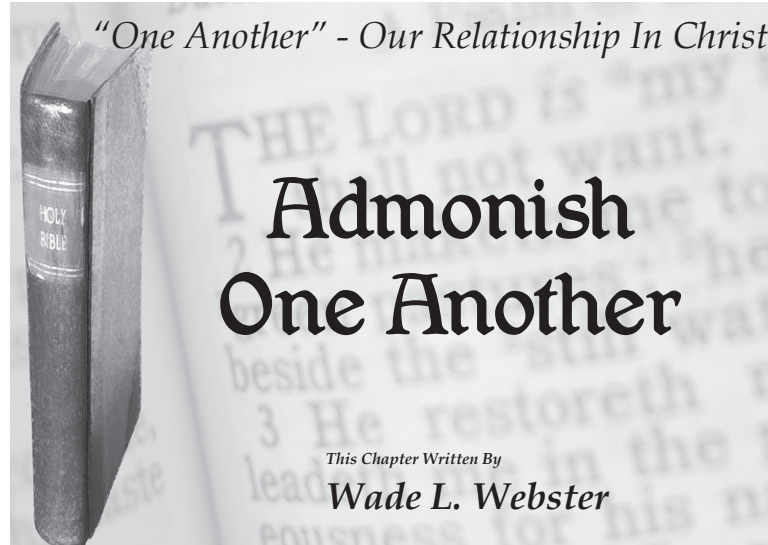
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Bobby Liddell



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Much of the New Testament is made up of epistles written to congregations. A large part of these letters are lessons on how brethren are to treat one another. Often, these inspired instructions appear in a “one another” form. In this chapter, I have been asked to focus on the command to “admonish one another.”

To admonish is “to put in mind, i.e. (by impl.) to caution or reprove gently: admonish, warn.” Joseph Henry Thayer adds the word “exhort” to the definition.

No doubt, in the words of Edgar A. Guest, most of us would rather see a sermon than to hear one any day. In like manner, we would rather see a trait displayed, than to have it defined. In His wisdom, God knows this about us and has given many examples to teach us. When it comes to admonishment, one man comes to mind. In fact, he was nicknamed the admonisher by the apostles. I realize that “the admonisher” sounds a little like a wrestler. I assure you that the man that I have

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in mind was not a wrestler. However, he would have been a great tag-team partner for anyone wrestling with discouragement. Of course, I have in mind, Joses, who was surnamed Barnabas. Of him, Luke records:

And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:36-37).

Please note that Barnabas was the son of consolation or exhortation. He was an admonisher. When Saul was being shunned by the saints out of fear, it was Barnabas that stepped forward to help him (Acts 9:26-27). Later on, when John Mark wanted to try mission work a second time, after having turned back the first time, it was Barnabas who was willing to partner with him (Acts 15:36-39). Barnabas was a great admonisher. A little later in this lesson, we will have more to say about him.

Repeatedly, in the New Testament, saints are instructed to admonish (warn, remind, reprove, exhort) one another. Consider just a sampling of the passages:

- “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16).

- “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2 Thes. 3:14-15).

- “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:25).

• “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men” (1 Thes. 5:14).

• “But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13).

Although any of these passages would make an excellent foundation for this study, I have selected another.

To discuss the command to “admonish one another,” I want to use Paul’s words to the redeemed at Rome. Paul wrote,

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost. And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another (Rom. 15:13-14).

Please note that Paul was persuaded or convinced that the Christians at Rome were “able” “to admonish one another” (Rom. 15:14). He had found the reports of others concerning the saints at Rome to be right. They passed the Pauline test. Paul reveals two things within this context that convinced him that they could carry out this command:

• The power of the Spirit (Rom. 15:13).

• The perfection (maturity) of the saints (Rom. 15:14). Overall, they were mature. Whatever was lacking, the Spirit could and would supply.

I believe that Paul laid out five things that must fill us as Christians if we are to be able to admonish one another. Four words stand out in these two passages:

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“fill” (15:13), “abound” (15:13), “full” (15:14), and “filled” (15:14). These words suggest the idea of being filled to overflowing. To be able admonishers, we must be full of joy (15:13), peace (15:13), hope (15:13), goodness (15:14), and knowledge (15:14). If we are deficient in any of these things, then we will be deficient in our ability to admonish. These things must fill us if we are going to excel in exhortation or admonishment.

Let’s quickly go back and take another look at Barnabas, the great admonisher. I want you to consider a statement that was made about him. Luke records,

Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord (Acts 11:22-24).

Please note that Barnabas is described as “a good man” who was “full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.” Clearly, being a good man, he was full of goodness. Furthermore, being full of faith, he was full of knowledge. After all, “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Barnabas’ being full of the Holy Ghost would likely cover the remaining characteristics. After all, joy, peace, and goodness are identified as the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). The only characteristic outstanding is hope. Was Barnabas full of hope? To answer this question, just consider what he did on the first time that he is mentioned in the Scriptures. He sold land and

laid the price at the apostle's feet. Clearly, his treasure was laid up in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21). He was living in hope of eternal life.

Having defined and displayed admonishment, let's develop it. Let's consider the five things that must fill us in order for us to be able to admonish.

Joy

First, to be able to admonish, we must be full of joy. Please note that Paul's prayer was for God to fill them with joy (Rom. 15:13). Repeatedly, Jesus spoke of His desire for His disciples to be full of joy. On one occasion, He declared, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). In like manner, on another occasion, He declared, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24). Later, the apostles of Christ would emphasize the same desire to the disciples that they knew (1 John 1:14; Phil. 4:4; 1 Thes. 5:16).

As we read of the record of the early church, we find that they were "filled with joy" (Acts 13:52). Although persecuted and poor, they had an abundance of joy (2 Cor. 8:2). What a rebuke this is of so many today. In spite of peace and prosperity, many today are lacking in joy.

Many Christians today remind me of Eeyore, the gloomy grey donkey, from A. A. Milne's Winnie the Pooh series. Although Eeyore had much to make him happy, like good friends, he seemed to always dwell underneath a cloud. In one of the stories, he stood by the side of a stream, and looked at himself in the water. "Pathetic," he said. "That's what it is. Pathetic." He then turned and

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walked slowly down the stream for about twenty yards, splashed across it, and then looked into the water again. “As I thought,” he said. “No better from this side.” Does that not describe some people on the pew? They seem to have been nursed on a persimmon and weaned on a pickle. On another occasion, Eeyore declared, “When stuck in the river, it is best to dive and swim to the bank yourself before someone drops a large stone on your chest in an attempt to hoosh you there.”

Someone has described joy as the flag that flies above the castle to let people know that the King is in residence. Sadly, individuals like the ones that I described above always have their flag flying at half-mast. Sorrow rather than joy characterizes their lives. They have a slow leak in their Christianity somewhere. Being deficient in joy, they are not able to admonish. It should be noted that if a person like the one that I just described tried to admonish another, the admonishment would probably not be received. After all, it would be easy to dismiss warning from one who tended to be alarmed by everything and to reject reproof from one who tended to find wrong everywhere.

Peace

Second, to be able to admonish, we must be full of peace. Paul’s prayer in the context was for God to fill them with peace (Rom. 15:13). Repeatedly, as He prepared to return to His Father, Jesus expressed His desire for the disciples to be filled with peace. He declared, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27; cf. 16:33; Col. 3:15). In addition to being at peace with God, and

at peace with men in general, Jesus wanted them to be at peace with one another. He declared, “Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another” (Mark 9:50; cf. 1 Thes. 5:13; 2 Cor. 13:11). Please notice how that Jesus connected influence and peace together. To have influence, we must be at peace. A church that is feuding and fighting has lost its influence. Imagine the following scene:

We are all gathered for a wedding. The wedding march begins to play and everyone stands. Eyes are focused on the back of the auditorium, awaiting the entrance of the bride. Finally, the bride appears. However, something is terribly wrong. The bride is limping and her dress is torn. Her hair is a mess, her eye is black, and her lip is busted. The audience gasps at the sight of her and someone exclaims, “The bride has been fighting again.”

Sadly, this is the way that the church, the bride of Christ, appears to the world when brothers and sisters don't get along. It is crucial that we be at peace with one another.

Consider the instructions that the early Christians were given relative to peace:

- **They were to follow peace.** Paul wrote, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14; cf. Rom. 14:19; 2 Tim. 2:22). We are to let peace lead us. Sadly, peace often doesn't move fast enough for us and we run ahead of it (James 1:19-20). We need to follow the example that Jesus left us and walk in His steps (1 Peter 2:21-23).

- **They were to seek peace.** Peter wrote, “Let him

eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it” (1 Peter 3:11). Peace must be sought. It is not going to just show up on our doorsteps. Neighbors who want to be at peace with one another must seek peace. The word translated as seek suggests the idea of wearing a path. No doubt, we have all seen a path in a pasture that cattle have worn to and from the barn. In like manner, we must wear a path by daily seeking peace.

• **They were to make peace.** James wrote, “And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace” (James 3:18; cf. Matt. 5:9). Please note that we are to sow peace and to make peace. If we want peace, we must plant it. As you know, planting requires much work. The ground must be prepared, the plant must be watered, and the weeds must be removed, if we hope to “make” a garden. Sadly, many are sowing discord rather than peace (Prov. 6:16-19).

Obviously, the inspired instructions listed above relative to peace show that it is not easily obtained or maintained. Peace requires work. However, it is work that we must put in if we hope to admonish one another. People who are not at peace with one another cannot admonish one another. In fact, almost anything that they do is likely to be taken the wrong way. Let me use a story from the life of Naaman to illustrate this point. Do you recall how that the King of Syria sent a letter to the King of Israel? The King of Syria was attempting to obtain help for Naaman, but the King of Israel interpreted the letter as an attempt to start a quarrel (2 Kings 5:1-7). Why did the King of Israel interpret the King of Syria’s request in this way? The simple answer is that they were not at peace with one another. Because they were not at peace with one another, the King of Israel naturally

assumed that the King of Syria was trying to start a fight. In like manner, unless peace exists between brethren, any admonition is likely to be taken the wrong way. If admonition is needed, then it may be received better from someone other than a brother or sister with whom there has been a problem, either real or imagined.

Hope

Second, to be able to admonish, we must be full of hope. Paul's prayer was that "the God of hope" might help them to "abound" or to overflow "in hope" (Rom. 15:13). Hopeful people make great admonishers. As you know, admonition is so much easier to take from a person who is optimistic and hopeful. A person who tends to always be filled with doubt is easy to dismiss.

Paul was a person who was filled with hope. In addition to being filled with the hope of eternal life (Titus 1:2), he was filled with hope toward his brothers and sisters in Christ. After dealing with multiple problems in the Corinthian congregation, Paul declared in his second letter to them that his hope of them was "steadfast" (2 Cor. 1:7). He had not lost faith in them. He maintained hope that when their faith was increased, they would respond properly toward him.

As Christians, we are instructed to "plow in hope" (1 Cor. 9:10). Not only must we plow in hope of eternal life for us as individuals, we must plow in hope of eternal life for others. We must believe the best concerning our brethren. Like a farmer, we must see a barren field and believe that it can be fruitful. We must see a field of weeds and believe that it can be a field of grain. Sadly, I'm convinced that some admonish with little hope in their hearts. They make the visit, but they don't really believe

that it will do any good. They don't hold out hope that their brother or sister will listen or change. They plow in doubt rather than hope.

Goodness

Having prayed that they might be filled with joy, peace, and hope, Paul now expressed his confidence that they were already full of goodness (Rom. 15:14). Zodhiates says that the word translated as goodness refers to an "active goodness." Thayer says that it refers to an "uprightness of heart and life." Most include benevolence and kindness as a part of their definition.

Paul instructed the saints at Ephesus to be "kind one to another" and "tenderhearted" (Eph. 4:32; cf. Col. 3:12; Rom. 12:10; 16:4). Clearly, these traits go hand in hand with goodness. Furthermore, Paul listed goodness among the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). He knew that it was a quality that must be produced in the life of the Christian. Jesus declared, "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things" (Matt. 12:35). A good man, with a good heart, will bear good fruit.

A good man can provoke a response that bad man cannot. To the saints at Rome, Paul declared, "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die" (Rom. 5:7). Please note that some would "dare to die" for "a good man." I believe that you will agree that this is quite a response. If we are full of goodness, we can move men to do things that they otherwise might not do. In other words, we can effectively admonish them.

Knowledge

In addition to goodness, Paul was convinced that the saints at Rome were filled with knowledge (Rom. 15:14). Like the Colossian Christians, they were able to teach and admonish because the word of God dwelled within them richly (Col. 3:16).

It is interesting that Paul listed knowledge after goodness in the passage under consideration (Rom. 15:14). As you likely know, this is the very same order that Peter listed them in giving the Christian graces. Peter wrote, "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge" (2 Peter 1:5). Please note that knowledge is to be added to virtue or goodness. Sadly, some people are good people, but are ignorant. Others have knowledge, but lack kindness. The old expression holds true, "People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care." Both graces are sorely needed.

To the saints at Macedonia, Paul wrote, "Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also" (2 Cor. 8:7; cf. 2 Tim. 2:15). Although Paul was primarily concerned with the grace of giving in the context, he mentioned abounding in knowledge also (cf. Col. 1:9).

To be an able admonisher, we must possess wisdom and knowledge. James wrote, "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom" (James 3:13; 2 Tim. 2:24-25). Please note that it is the wise man, endued with knowledge, who is to show the meekness of wisdom. It is the spiritual man (Gal. 6:1), who possesses spiritual understanding (Col. 1:9), who is

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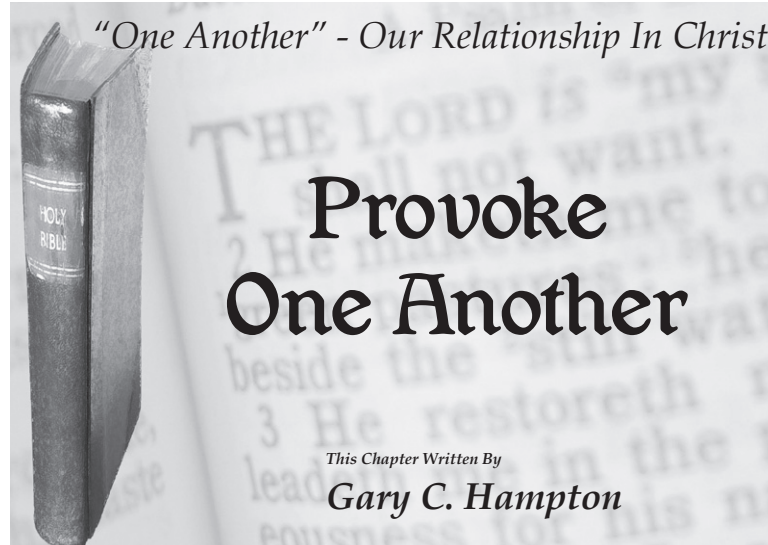
able to admonish a brother who has been overtaken in a fault. Someone noted that “you cannot preach what you do not know any more than you can come from where you have not been.” Let’s make sure that we are filled with knowledge so that we will be able to admonish one another.

For sure, some men possess more ability in the area of admonition or exhortation than others (Rom. 12:6-8). Some have been given five talents, some two, and some one in this department (Matt. 25:15). Whether a lot or a little ability, everyone has been given some. There are no zero talent men or women. It is simply a matter of our using the ability that God has given us. Let’s fill ourselves with joy, peace, hope, goodness, and knowledge, that God may use us as a vessel in His house (2 Tim. 2:20-21).

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The book of Hebrews is written to Christians who, under intense persecution, were considering returning to worshiping God under the Law of Moses. The writer encouraged his readers toward faith in the One who promised a home in heaven, which is the sincere hope of every Christian. He urged them to hold fast to Christ and His teachings since He is the object of the Christian's confession of faith.

Boldness To Enter

The inspired penman clearly demonstrated that Jesus "is a greater Spokesman than the prophets;" "a greater Law-Giver than Moses;" "a greater Rest-Provider than Joshua;" and "a greater High Priest than Aaron" (Holland 65).

He then wrote,

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new

and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:19-22). [All quotations are taken from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

“The ‘therefore’ of this paragraph is an exhortation based on the preceding argument about Christ” (Holland 65). The writer has already noted that the tabernacle had to be made according to the pattern God gave on the mount (Heb. 8:1-5). This was because it was a shadow of the true type that would come under Christ’s new covenant, with the Holy Place representing the church and the Most Holy Place representing heaven. Christ’s followers are able to confidently, or “boldly,” approach heaven, “the Holiest.” This boldness, from *parresia*, is not a subjective feeling, but is based upon the blood sacrifice of Jesus (Heb. 9:11-14).

Significantly, Jesus Christ entered heaven, rather than the earthly sanctuary in which the Levitical priests served, to offer His own blood for sins (Heb. 9:23-28). “Christ, having been exalted to the heavenly sanctuary, has made entry possible for those who follow Him (9:8). His blood, not the ‘blood of bulls and goats’ (10:3; 9:12 and notes there), made this access available (cf. 4:16)” (Thompson 136).

The “boldness” which believers in Christ have to enter the heavenly sanctuary through Him is set in contrast with the restrictions which hedged about the privilege of symbolic entry into the presence of God in

Israel's earthly sanctuary. In it not all the people could exercise this privilege, but the high priest only, as their representative; and even he could not exercise the privilege any time he chose, but at fixed times and under fixed conditions. But those who have been cleansed within, consecrated and made perfect by the sacrifice of Christ, have received a free right of access into the holy presence; and our author urges his readers to avail themselves fully of this free right (Bruce 244).

Citizens under Christ's covenant can approach God's actual throne in prayer if they have a "true heart." It "is a heart which, while renouncing all self-righteous and every other 'refuge of lies,' receives Christ and trusts in him as the way, the truth, the resurrection, and the life" (Milligan 281). They also must approach "in full assurance of faith," that is "a faith which enables us to 'take God at his word,' and do just what he commands, feeling perfectly sure that all things work together for good to them that love and serve him" (Ibid). Additionally, coming before God requires that the petitioner have his heart "sprinkled from an evil conscience." "That the sprinkling of the heart denotes an inward and spiritual cleansing is obvious; it is equally obvious that our author has in mind the counterpart under the new order of the old ritual cleansing with the 'water for impurity', the water prepared with the ashes of the red heifer" (Bruce 250). Finally, the one who would have confidence approaching God's throne in prayer must have his body "washed with pure water," which "represents the physical act of baptism in water, the divinely-ordained manner by which faith reaches out to take hold of sovereign grace" (Fudge 111).

Hold Fast

With the above being true, the writer pleads, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (Heb. 10:23). The word for “hold fast,” *katechō*, means “to hold fast, keep secure, keep firm possession of” (Thayer 339). Use of it here “indicates the danger that the readers might renounce their commitment” (Thompson 138). “The idea is, that we are still but pilgrims here as all our fathers were. We have not yet reached the goal of our destiny. Eternal life is still with us an object of hope. And hence the necessity of clinging to this hope as the anchor of our souls” (Milligan 283). The word translated “without wavering,” *aklinēs*, “is made up of *kline* ‘to incline, bow,’ thus ‘to lean towards,’ and *Alpha* privative, which when prefixed to a word makes it mean the opposite to what it meant originally. The writer urges the recipients not to lean back towards the First Testament” (Wuest 181). After all, rather than waiting for the promised Messiah as those under the Law of Moses did, the Christian hope stands strong in the fact that heaven, or eternal life, is possessed as a promise from God, the One who unfailingly keeps his word (1 John 2:25).

Exhorting One Another

The next exhortation arises from the inspired penman’s desire for both his readers and himself to tightly hold their hope without wavering. “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:24-

25). The word “consider,” kata-noeō, “speaks of attentive, continuous care. The exhortation is to take careful note of each other’s spiritual welfare” (Wuest 182). “Christians consider...one another mainly by taking into account the circumstances and weaknesses of others, in order to lend them support” (Lightfoot 191).

Each Christian’s caring for the welfare of his brothers and sisters in God’s family will result in provoking them. The word “provoke,” paroxusmos, describes “an inciting, incitement, a stimulation” (Wuest 182). Usually the word “provoke” is thought of in a sense meaning to incite to something bad. For instance, when Barnabas wanted to take John Mark on a second journey with Paul, Luke reports, “And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus” (Acts 15:39 ESV). The word translated “sharp disagreement” is the same one translated “provoke.” However, the writer of Hebrews is urging Christian brothers and sisters to think about one another with the goal of finding ways to encourage each other to love and good works.

Edification And Public Worship

Public worship is, in part, designed to edify (1 Cor. 14:26), and would certainly be one means of encouraging each other. “Love for others cannot be shown in separation. In none of their affairs, and especially in spiritual matters, can Christians regard themselves as isolated digits. Thus they must not fail to meet together for worship and mutual encouragement” (Lightfoot 191). The word translated “not forsaking,” eg-kata-leipō, means to, “to let down, to abandon” (Wuest 182). It is clear that, “Some of the recipients of this letter were, under stress of persecution,

absenting themselves from the Christian assemblies” (Ibid).

The Approaching Day

It was particularly important to continue meeting and encouraging one another in light of the time approaching when the Lord would come. While it appears the “Day approaching” likely refers to the destruction of Jerusalem which the writer thought was imminent, all of Christ’s disciples need to be constantly aware of the approaching day of judgment. While it is impossible to know it is imminent, God’s people can be sure all will face One who knows their every action (Matt. 25:13; Heb. 9:27; Rom. 2:16). It is vital for each to encourage his brother to be prepared for the Lord’s return.

The Lord’s Day

Jesus was raised from the dead on the first day of the week (Luke 24:1, 7, 13, 21). A careful examination of a number of passages will make it plain that the early church met on the first day of the week.

Evidently, Christ himself initiated the weekly meetings of the disciples on the first day of the week, actually attending them Himself on successive Lord’s days after He was risen from the dead. Thus He was present on a certain Lord’s day, Thomas being absent, and again on the following first day of the week, Thomas being present (John 20:19-28). The establishment and beginning of the church on Pentecost occurred on just such a first day of the week when the disciples were gathered together (Coffman 234).

Support for Coffman’s last statement comes from the fact that Pentecost was always on the first day of the

week (Lev. 23:16; Acts 2:1). Justin Martyr, early in the 2nd Century, wrote, "But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead" (67.7). Further support for the first day of the week being the day the early church assembled for worship will be found in our discussion of the Lord's supper.

Luke's report of the events of the day of Pentecost include the following: "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). J. W. McGarvey briefly described this by saying, "He closes this section of the history with a brief notice of the order established in the new Church, first describing their order of worship" (47).

The theme in verse 42 is worship. When people were baptized, they "were continually devoting themselves" to worshiping God. Note also that this was corporate worship. Brothers and sisters in Christ worshiped together. Nothing is more important to growing closer to one another and to God than worshiping together (Roper 95).

In their worship, there were at least four things to which the early Christians gave "constant attention," which Thayer says is the meaning of the word *pros-kartereō*, here translated "continued steadfastly" (547).

"The Apostles' Doctrine"

First in Luke's list is "the apostles' doctrine," or teaching. "God initially provided the apostles to teach

members of the church personally what to believe and what to do....Jesus had charged the apostles that after they baptized people, they should then teach them to observe all He had commanded (Matt. 28:19, 20)” (Roper 93). The church at Troas got to hear the apostle Paul when he, Luke and the others with them assembled with the church at Troas as they came together to break bread. “Because he was scheduled to depart the next day, Paul ‘discoursed’ with them, talking right up to midnight” (Jackson 252). On one occasion, the apostle to the Gentiles described himself as “ministering the gospel of God,” like a priest offering a sacrifice (Rom. 15:15-16). Significantly, such is accomplished in the assemblies of the saints who, as the church, comprise the temple, the very dwelling place of God (1 Cor. 3:16).

“Fellowship in Giving and Singing”

“Fellowship,” *koinōnia*, meaning “fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse...used of the intimate bond of fellowship which unites Christians” (Thayer 352), is the next thing on Luke’s list of things the early church did when they worshiped. Jackson says it “may include several facets of common sharing or ‘joint participation,’ including the regular giving of their income for the support of the Lord’s work (cf. Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 9:13 where *koinonia* is rendered ‘contribution’ in the ASV)” (Jackson 252). In Acts 2:44, the word *koinos*, or “common,” is used to describe the open sharing of goods found among Christ’s early followers. Of course, Christians also “have fellowship with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit (1 Jn. 1:3; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 13:14)—and with other Christians (1 John 1:7)” (Roper 94).

There is at least one other area of sharing that took place in First Century worship. Paul wrote, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16). “If ‘the word of Christ’ is dwelling richly in the body of believers, they will be able to instruct and guide one another in every kind of wisdom which concerns Christian belief and conduct.” While this might be accomplished in different ways, “Paul specifies the occasions of social worship and the particular instrument of sacred song” (Erdman 99).

The apostle gave similar instructions to the saints at Ephesus, when he wrote, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (5:18-19). Concerning “speaking to one another” Stott says,

The Greek use of the reflexive here can equally be translated ‘each other’ (as in 4:32). Nor does it mean that, if we are filled with the Spirit, we stop speaking to one another and start singing instead. No, the reference is to Christian fellowship, and the mention of ‘psalms, hymns and spiritual songs’...indicates that the context is public worship. Whenever Christians assemble, they love to sing both to God and to each other (205-206).

In fact, the instructions to Colosse and Ephesus describe a reflexive action in which one Christian taught, admonished and spoke to another, meaning that each plays a great role in their partnership. Significantly, teaching, admonishing

and speaking cannot be done by mechanical instruments of music.

The Bread And The Fruit Of The Vine

The three thousand who were added on Pentecost also “continued steadfastly in...the breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42). “The ‘breaking of the bread’ (do not overlook the article) is not a mere common meal, but the observance of the Lord’s Supper” (Jackson 31) and is here mentioned by Luke as one of the elements of the worship of the newly formed church. “‘breaking the bread,’ by a figure known as synecdoche (a part put for the whole), represents both components of the Lord’s Supper, bread and fruit of the vine” (Ibid). Both of these are taken in fulfillment of the Lord’s instructions on his betrayal night. “And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you’” (Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25). Paul went on to say, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Cor. 11:26), which plainly tells us it was to be taken often.

The timing of this can be plainly seen in a further study of this context. Five times in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 Paul used the expression “come together” (17, 18, 20, 33, 34). It is from the Greek word *sun-erchomai*, “a t.t. [technical term] for the gathering/assembling of the congregation” (Balz 304). There were two problems in reference to the assemblies of the saints in Corinth. “First, the Lord’s Supper had been turned into a common meal and was seemingly joined with potluck food (verses 23-26,

29b). Second, the local assembly (congregation) was so divided Christians could not share their food with fellow saints” (Price 432).

Sadly, the Corinthian saints were coming together to eat the Lord’s Supper as a common meal. This created such a dangerous problem that Paul said, “I praise you not’ (i.e. ‘I censure you severely’) at the beginning of verse 17” (Ibid). The apostle thought the very act of Christians coming together should encourage unity and spiritual development. He said the Corinthians were failing in that and reprimanded them. Reports of their conduct in the assemblies of the saints had already come to Paul before he wrote. Some of the reports may have been exaggerated, but Paul believed it when it was said they were dividing into factions when the congregation came together (1 Cor. 11:17-18).

Divisions caused by carnal thinking tend to separate those who are “approved,” *dokimos*, meaning “accepted, particularly of coins and metals” (Thayer 155), from those who are not. In other words, some were like metal or coins that had passed the test and proved to be genuine. The divisions in the Corinthian church and misuse of the supper made it no longer proper to call it the Lord’s. The Lord would have no part in their division (1 Cor. 11:19-20). If they were to truly make the supper be the Lord’s, Paul emphasized the need for the proper attitude (1 Cor. 11:27-29). Irreverence while partaking would have shown a light concern for the Lord’s sacrifice, which they were supposed to be remembering. Each participant needed to ask himself whether or not he was eating and drinking in thankful memory of Christ’s dying sacrifice on Calvary. This was especially true because an improper attitude in partaking would lead to condemnation.

Their spiritual father was concerned that many in Corinth were suffering spiritually because of a wrong attitude in receiving the supper (1 Cor. 11:30-32). In truth, he said many were “weak,” *asthenēs*, which means “of the body, feeble, sick” (Thayer 80), “sick,” *arrōstos*, or “without strength, weak; sick” (Thayer 75), “and many sleep,” from *koimaō*, “to cause to sleep, put to sleep...metaph. and euphemistically i. q. to die” (Thayer 351). Paul tried to encourage the brethren by assuring them that condemnation would not come upon those who kept a close watch on their attitude. The Lord only disciplined those in the wrong so they might not be lost eternally. In order to correct the problem of division at Corinth, Paul told them to wait to have fellowship with one another in eating the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:33-34). Those who were hungry were to eat at home so that the Lord’s Supper did not turn into a common meal.

The First Day Of The Week

The timing of their assemblies, or coming together, is made plain in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, where Paul wrote,

Now concerning the collection for the saints:
as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you
also are to do. On the first day of every week,
each of you is to put something aside and store
it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be
no collecting when I come (ESV).

It is evident they assembled on the first day of every week. This is consistent with actions Paul took in the city of Troas.

But we sailed away from Philippi after the
Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days

joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days. Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight (Acts 20:6-7).

Prayers, Intercessions And Thanksgiving

The last thing Luke mentioned to which the church gave constant attention is “prayer” (Acts 2:42). “The church began in an atmosphere of prayer and continue in an atmosphere of prayer. Early Christians could meet the challenges life brought each day because every day they met the Lord in prayer” (Roper 95). Based on their understanding of God’s promises, the early church was incited to prayer. It is likely the apostles repeated the promise the Lord gave them, when He said, “And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (John 14:13). Peter reassured the scattered saints when he quoted from Psalm 34. “For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12).

There can be no denying that prayer played a vital role in the life and teaching of our Lord (Luke 5:16; 6:12-13; 9:18, 28-29; 11:1; 18:1; 22:41; 23:34, 46). The early church followed the Master’s example on numerous occasions (Acts 1:24; 4:23-31; 7:59; 10:9; 12:12; 13:3; 16:25; 27:35). Paul gave Timothy, his son in the faith, instructions relating to prayer.

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and

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peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

The apostle directed that four different types of prayer be offered up for all men, even the wicked Roman government of his day. While it may be difficult to receive, this suggests that God's children need to approach their Father with a thankful attitude about their enemies and those who may persecute them. A supplication is an entreaty to God to provide for a particular need. Prayers include petitions, expressions of thanks and adoration. Intercessions are an opportunity for the Christian to have an intimate talk with the King. Thanksgiving, literally "good grace," is an expression of gratitude for God's graciousness. These various types of prayer were to be offered with the ultimate goal of seeing God's desire of the salvation of all men come to fruition.

Conclusion

Christian worship is a powerful means used by God to have each member of the body of Christ incite every other member to love Him more, which will, in turn, motivate to good works. Preaching, giving, singing, partaking of the Lord's Supper and prayer all provoke Christ's followers to positive action. It is no wonder that the inspired writer of Hebrews did not want his readers to willfully forsake the assemblies of the saints.

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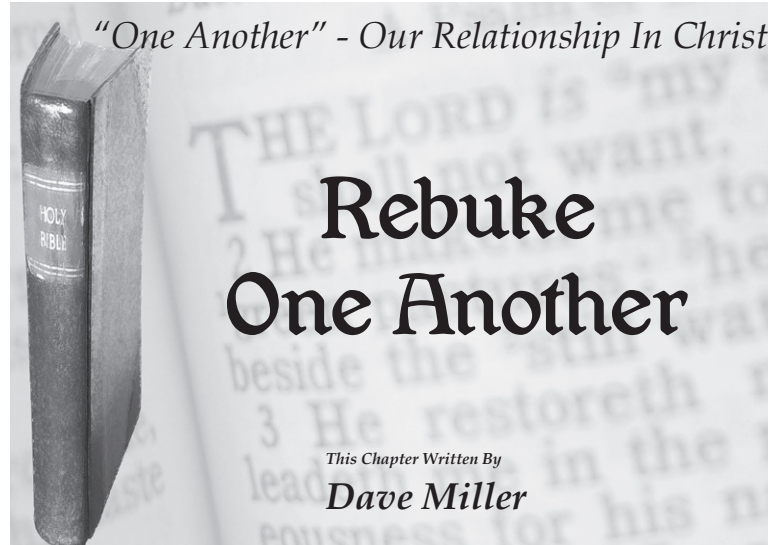
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When you were a child, you well remember instances where you were rebuked or disciplined by a parent. Those occasions were no doubt unpleasant, depending on what you had done and what method of discipline your parent chose to enact. Has receiving rebuke gotten any easier for you?

The fact is that being corrected can be distasteful and unsettling. However, I challenge us to examine our hearts very carefully. When we are rebuked—whether by a mate or other relative, a fellow church member, or an employer or fellow employee—how we handle it will be a reflection of the condition of our own heart. If our heart is infiltrated by pride, we will resent, resist, and reject rebuke. We will become defensive and scoff at correction. But when we possess humility and a submissive spirit (Eph. 5:21), rebuke will be received with sober, receptive reflection. After all, if rebuke is deserved and needed, we should desire its assistance. If the rebuke is undeserved

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and incorrect, we have no reason to bristle—since the allegation is untrue.

Consider some of the pithy, insightful, soul-enriching wisdom given along this line by the Holy Spirit via Solomon, beginning with the central theme of Proverbs (1:7; 9:7):

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For by me your days will be multiplied, and years of life will be added to you. If you are wise, you are wise for yourself, and if you scoff, you will bear it alone (Prov. 9:10-12).

The person who is so full of himself that he scoffs when presented with correction will have to endure the outcome of his refusal to receive the correction. “A wise son heeds his father’s instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke” (Prov. 13:1). Such admonitions highlight the fact that we must be willing to receive rebuke. We must be willing to listen to input. Living life from the sole perspective of one’s own arrogant self-assurance will inevitably lead a person to an unhappy end. Receiving a variety of input—including rebuke and correction—will broaden perspective and enable a person to avoid many pitfalls that bring unhappiness and dissatisfaction.

Proverbs gives additional insight into the foolishness of rejecting rebuke as contrasted with the person who is willing to listen and learn:

The ear that hears the rebukes of life will abide among the wise. He who disdains instruction despises his own soul, but he who heeds rebuke gets understanding (Prov. 15:31-32).

Rebuke is more effective for a wise man than a hundred blows on a fool (Prov. 17:10).

Strike a scoffer, and the simple will become wary; Rebuke one who has understanding, and he will discern knowledge (Prov. 19:25).

Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear (Prov. 25:12).

He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes a wicked man only harms himself. Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning (Prov. 9:7-9).

Observe: the person who rejects rebuke “despises his own soul,” i.e., he lacks sufficient concern for the development of his spirituality. He thus lacks genuine interest in securing his eternal abode. He actually lacks respect for himself. He is a “fool,” i.e., a person who is morally deficient, lacking proper concern for the spiritual realities of life.

The person who is able to give and receive appropriate rebuke is a loving individual—a person who genuinely cares for others. It is true that some people just enjoy criticizing others, and have no real concern for their victims. Their criticisms are more of a reflection of the condition of their own critical heart. However, doling out the kind of rebuke the Bible endorses, and being able to gracefully receive the same, is a manifestation of a compassionate, loving, caring heart.

God most certainly allows us to be chastised out of love for us and a desire that we be saved eternally: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor

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detest His correction; For whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights” (Prov. 3:11-12). John quoted this verse in Revelation 3:19 in a context of church discipline—“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.” Complete humility would enable us not only to welcome constructive rebuke, it would cause us to desire and seek it. Listen to the psalmist: “Let the righteous strike me; it shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; it shall be as excellent oil; Let my head not refuse it” (Psm. 141:5). Indeed, we do not truly love another, and others do not truly love us, if we or they refrain from expressing necessary words of rebuke. We may convince ourselves, “Well, I don’t want to hurt his feelings,” or “She may stop being my friend,” or as is probably more often the case, “I’m too fearful to confront him!” But listen carefully to Solomon: “Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Prov. 27:5-6). Like a doctor’s piercing scalpel that cuts away disease from the body, so the painful words of truth are faithful, healing wounds that enable us to get our souls right in God’s sight. We would rather not engage in such sticky, uncomfortable confrontation; but if a soul is in jeopardy and we love that soul, we must speak.

Remember that the Hebrews writer stated: “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful” (Heb. 12:11). Rebuke is unpleasant for both the parent and the child. There’s nothing enjoyable for the parent that spans the child. Indeed, the natural inclination is to avoid it and fail to be consistent and punctual. But love demands that the parent put forth the necessary effort, trouble, and heartache required to administer corporal

punishment every time the child displays a defiant spirit. For those parents who persist in the arduous process: “afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (vs. 11). Or as Solomon explained, “Correct your son, and he will give you rest; Yes, he will give delight to your soul” (Prov. 29:17). So it is with adults who submit themselves to needed discipline and rebuke. The soul is strengthened, further enriched, and made fit for the kingdom. The soul is made calm, peaceful, and contented.

Notice that even if we are rebuked by someone that hates us and only desires to discourage us, if what they say has any merit, they are doing us a favor and we should not bristle with pride toward them. Likewise, we should be so concerned about others that we want them to be saved, and we want to do our part to aid them lest we be counted unfaithful. As Moses admonished the Israelites: “You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him” (Lev. 19:17).

In The Church

Christians are given special admonitions regarding rebuking in the church. For example, Paul told Timothy, no doubt due to his youthfulness, not to rebuke an older man in the congregation. Rather, as an evangelist, he should “exhort him as a father” (1 Tim. 5:1). However, if even an elder of the congregation engages in sin, he was to issue a public rebuke: “Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear” (1 Tim. 5:20). Indeed, the very nature of preaching involves rebuke. You remember Paul’s stirring directive to preachers: “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out

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of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2).

Titus received similar admonitions from Paul to implement in his evangelistic efforts on the island of Crete. Concerning those who were insubordinate, Paul instructed: “Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (Titus 1:13). And in regard to the teaching of godly Christian living, Titus was told to, “Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you” (Titus 2:15).

The Goal

We as Christians no doubt recognize that rebuking one another is permissible and appropriate. However, the undergirding point to it all should be kept ever before us. This valuable spiritual tool is never to be wielded out of self-interest, or revenge, or condescending pride. The purpose is clear and simple: we are trying to assist each other in getting to heaven. That’s all we want! We should never seek to demean or put each other down. We certainly should have no desire to hurt a fellow Christian. We want to treat others precisely the way we want to be treated. Our sole concern ought to be to motivate each other to be right with God so that we might live with Him forever (cf. Heb. 10:23-24).

Inspired Instances

Do you remember the occasion recounted in Galatians when Peter was rebuked by Paul for the hypocrisy Peter displayed by eating with Gentiles, but refraining from doing so when the Jews showed up? Even Barnabas went along with the tactic. Paul said: “But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I

said to Peter before them all, ‘If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?’” (Gal. 2:14-15). Observe that this startling rebuke by one apostle to another was logical and centered on the spiritual point in question. Scriptural rebukes should pertain to matters of salvation in which a person’s soul is in jeopardy due to sinful behavior. Far too many of our rebukes have to do with frivolous, mundane things like whether the kitchen and other parts of the church building are being organized or cleaned the way someone thinks they should. Our rebukes often pertain to irritations over personal preferences—the very areas where we ought to be flexible, tolerant, and open to differing ideas.

Another inspired account is given on the occasion when Jesus announced to the apostles that He must go to Jerusalem to suffer and die:

Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (Matt. 16:22-23).

These are rather harsh-sounding words! Jesus compared Peter to Satan, told him to get out of His way, labeled him a detriment, and declared him to be unmindful of spiritual things! We must conclude that rebukes can be rather piercing and still be appropriate. Though Peter had just confessed Jesus as the Christ, yet he was in need of a stern rebuke.

Another example is seen when Jesus received rather cold receptions at the cities where He taught and preached,

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backing up His preaching with miraculous confirmation (cf. Mark 16:20):

Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you” (Matt. 11:20-24).

Again, these are rather stern words, yet in complete harmony with the divine nature. There’s no question that Jesus merely wanted those people to be right with God. Such should be our attitude as well. A similar example is seen in Jesus’ almost mournful outpouring of rebuke toward the Jewish nation in the person of the capitol city of Jerusalem:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate (Matt. 23:37-38).

No one can question Jesus’ love and deep concern for the Jews. Yet He rebuked them for their rejection of Him and foretold their destruction.

Conclusion

May God help us to cultivate an attitude and a spirit of calm reception when we find ourselves on the receiving end of rebuke. May we have such humility that we are concerned first and foremost with whether our soul needs adjustment. May we project a humble, gentle reaction to the one rebuking us. May we display gratitude toward that person, and manifest a sincere desire to be right with God more than anything else in the world.

Dave Miller



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The study of our relationship with one another through Jesus Christ is of greater value with each passing day. Each individual Christian and every congregation of the Lord's church would benefit from the diligent study and application of the "one another" passages found throughout the New Testament.

My assigned topic for this hour is "Receive One Another." As we begin, it is paramount to our subject to define the word "receive" as it has been employed by the Holy Spirit through the New Testament writers and note its usages in pertinent passages.

New Testament Usage Of "Receive"

There are nineteen different words in the Koine Greek that are translated in some form of the word "receive" in the King James Version of the New Testament, thirteen of which are the root forms *lambano* (to take, to receive) and *dechomai* (to receive by deliberate and ready

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reception of what is offered) and their variants. Another notable word translated “receive” is *choreo*, which means to “receive with the mind.” The beauty and wisdom of the Father to use a language with such detail to record the New Covenant of Christ is beyond compare.

Jesus Himself used these words constantly in His teachings. Just in the gospel of Matthew, there is a range of usages of these words. For instance, in Matthew 10:14 (NKJV), He tells His disciples, “And whoever shall not receive (*dechomai*) you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet.” Here, *dechomai* demonstrates the reaction to the action from another. When He was summing up His teachings on marriage, divorce, remarriage, and celibacy, Jesus said, “He that is able to receive (*choreo*) it, let him receive (*choreo*) it.” (Matt. 19:12b, KJV). This is a metaphorical usage of the word, which the NKJV translates “accept.” In explaining the incident with the withered fig tree, Jesus said, “And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive (*lambano*).” (Matt. 21:22, NKJV). This word *lambano* shows us that this is the receiving of something given from another.

On at least one occasion, Jesus even used different words for “receive” in the same sentence: “He who receives (*dechomai*) a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive (*lambano*) a prophet’s reward...” (Matt. 10:41a). In other words, anyone who is accepting of a prophet as the reaction to the action of another shall receive from another a prophet’s reward.

This takes us to the usage of the variants of *lambano* and *dechomai*. By compounding a preposition with the root word, the meaning becomes even more meaningful

and clear. There are eleven such variants in the New Testament, but only two are found in connection with the three “receive one another” passages – *proslambano* and *prosdechomai*.

The “Receive One Another” Passages

Romans 15:7 - “Therefore receive (*proslambano*) one another, just as Christ also received (*proslambano*) us, to the glory of God.”

Romans 16:2 – “...that you may receive (*prosdechomai*) her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.”

Philippians 2:29 – “Receive (*prosdechomai*) him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem...”

In **Romans 15:7**, Paul uses the word *proslambano*, which is always found in the middle voice, meaning to take to oneself, indicating a special interest on the part of the receiver. It suggests a welcoming or acceptance. On the other hand, he uses *prosdechomai* in **Romans 16:2** and **Philippians 2:29**, suggesting the receiving of someone favorably.

Background To The Roman Passages

Our passages in Romans find themselves toward the end of Paul’s most theological epistle. In this letter, he addresses a congregation of which he only possessed second-hand knowledge; for he had never had the opportunity to visit them (1:10), yet was making plans to visit in the not so distant future. In his epistle, he is hoping to settle some of the overriding issues facing the

body of Christ in Rome so that his visit might be more productive and mutually beneficial (1:11-15).

The primary source of conflict and disagreement among the Roman Christians is not so different from that faced by other congregations during the first century – the differences between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. The Jewish Christians felt a sense of entitlement by right of birth and often attempted to incorporate the Law of Moses into the doctrine of Christ. As such, they often made demands upon the Gentile Christians that went well beyond the demands placed upon mankind by Christ Himself.

Paul, by inspiration, speaks of the need of every person, regardless of their race, to conform themselves to the system of being “in Christ,” which had been taught by Jesus Christ and His apostles and purchased by His blood that was shed on Golgotha. All previous ways of conducting oneself before God Almighty were null and void.

By the twelfth chapter, a less theological and more practical tone establishes itself as Paul exhorts the Christians in their proper behavior towards each other and the governing authorities. In other words, he is saying, “As a result of all of these things I have previously said, this is how you should be living your lives and treating one another.” Chapter fourteen is concerned with how doubtful or disputable matters, that is, matters of opinion and preference, are handled among the brethren.

Romans 15:7

In Romans 15:7, the apostle writes, “Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.” By beginning the sentence with the inferential

conjunction “therefore,” by necessity we must look to the broad and immediate contexts to properly determine the meaning of Paul’s injunction.

The broad context concerns judgment and contempt for the brethren based upon the observance of days and the eating of foods. Once again, the differences between the Jewish and Gentile Christians are front and center. Paul instructs them to “Receive one who is weak in (the) faith,” and not to despise and judge the one whom “God has received” (14:1-3). In both verses, Paul uses *proslambano*, suggesting the acceptance of another person to oneself, the standard of such acceptance being God’s acceptance of that person.

There are those who believe that Romans 14:2-3 teaches that it does not matter what one believes or practices – that it is acceptable to receive a person regardless. This is not the teaching of Paul. These issues were those of preference, and they mattered little in the church of Christ. God had not prescribed days or food under the new covenant of Christ.

He uses words such as “destroy,” “despise,” “judge,” “contempt,” and “grieved” to describe the attitude of the brethren to one another with regards to matters of opinion and preference. The attitude he prescribes is, “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another” (14:19), since “...the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (14:17). The church (the kingdom) is about righteousness (our standing before God) and peace (our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ) and joy (our attitude regarding ourselves).

In the immediate context, the “therefore” of Romans

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15:7 looks back to the previous two verses, “Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is an inspired appeal to unity (like-minded, one mind, one mouth) in their diversity.

Much has been said and written regarding “unity in diversity” over the last few decades, usually with a mind toward changing Scriptural patterns and teaching. Such is not the concept found in the Holy Writ. We are never exhorted to be unified with differing views on salvation, New Testament worship, church government, and the like. We are, however, to be unified without regard to ethnic, cultural, socio-economic, educational, and spiritual maturity matters (Gal. 3:28, et al).

So Paul writes “therefore receive one another,” that is, take one another to yourselves, be welcoming and accepting of one another with a mind to the unity of the body of Christ. *Proslambano* is in the imperative mood, which is used when one seeks to impose their will upon another. Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is seeking to impose his will upon the Christians in Rome that they would be “...perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10). It has often been asked that if we cannot get along down here, what makes us think we will get along up there (in heaven)? Or, if we cannot get along down here, what makes us believe we will even be up there? The Lord’s church is a piece of heaven on earth and it is our “testing ground” if you will, preparing us for eternity together with our heavenly Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

How Do We Receive One Another?

The manner of our receiving one another is also detailed for us in verse seven, "...just as Christ also received us..." This begs the question, "How did Christ receive us?" Everyone who reaches the age of accountability has sinned, fallen short of God's glory, and has thus earned the wages of death (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). When we were still in that state, God demonstrated His love toward us by sending Christ to die in our stead (Rom. 5:6-8). As a result of sending Jesus, God has called and sent (by His inspired word) preachers to proclaim the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:14-15; 1:16). True faith is the by-product of hearing and believing this good news (Rom. 10:9, 17). When one has developed this true faith, he becomes aware of the need to change his thinking and actions to be in line with God's will (Rom. 12:2), and to acknowledge with his mouth the deity of Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:9-10). Once a person recognizes that his or her standing before God apart from Christ is one of death, they can be buried with Christ and raised in the likeness of His resurrection having put away the body of sin (Rom. 6:3-6). These are found in Christ Jesus our Lord, having been received (*proslambano* – to take to oneself, welcomed or accepted) by Christ, where there is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1-2).

Likewise, we must receive (welcome or accept) those whom Christ receives. As we have been welcomed or accepted into fellowship with God through Christ, so must we also to those who have obeyed the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is not only desirable, it is reasonable to accept and follow this important teaching. We should never receive (in the Scriptural sense of the word) into Christian fellowship the one whom God rejects,

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nor should we ever reject the one whom God through Christ receives, lest we stand opposed to God Himself.

This requires thoughtful and prayerful discernment on the part of every Christian, especially those who serve in leadership capacities among churches of Christ. According to the Hebrew writer, “But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (5:14). This teaching on “receiving one another” is “solid food.” It is therefore incumbent upon us to exercise our senses by reason of use that we may be able to properly discern this matter.

Phoebe And Epaphroditus

In Romans 16:1-2, Paul commends to the Christians in Rome their sister in Christ, Phoebe. They were to “...receive (*prosdechomai*) her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints.” She was to be favorably received by them for Paul’s sake and also for the Lord’s (“in the Lord”), and she was to be received properly by those who love Christ and all who belong to him, that is, with love and honor.

There have been congregations I have visited where I felt as if I had crashed someone’s party – have you ever had that feeling? There have also been congregations where I received a welcome fit for the Lord Himself. This is how we should receive one who comes into our midst – as if the Lord Jesus Himself had just entered our assembly, because, in a sense, He has (Matt. 25:31-46).

In a like manner, Paul commends Epaphroditus to the church at Philippi: “Receive (*prosdechomai*) him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem...” (2:29). These two individual Christians

were to be welcomed favorably into the fellowship of these congregations and held in high regard because of their status in Christ.

Conclusion

I know of a congregation that has had many problems. Sadly, there is division among its members regarding doctrine, and some have even denied the authority of some of Paul's writings and teachings. They have made a mockery of the Lord's Supper and worship, and women have not kept their Scriptural place in mixed assemblies.

Most of you probably know the congregation of which I speak – it is the church of Christ at Corinth in the first century. In spite of all their divisions and difficulties, he called them “the church of God” and “saints” (1 Cor. 1:2), as well as “brethren” (1:10). Oh yes, there was one who was to be “put out” of the church, but the rest he diligently sought to patiently and lovingly correct. This would never have been possible if Paul had not continued to “receive” them.

It is tempting and even easy to withdraw from a congregation or write them up at the first sign of something we see as unscriptural or problematic. I am not talking about preachers and teachers whose efforts in digression are well known and who refuse to repent, but rather the many members of congregations who are confused or caught up in something not of their own doing. If we hastily withdraw from everyone with whom there is disagreement, the opportunity to encourage them through prayerful study will be lost – and so may the one whom God through Christ has received (Rom. 14:3; 15:7).

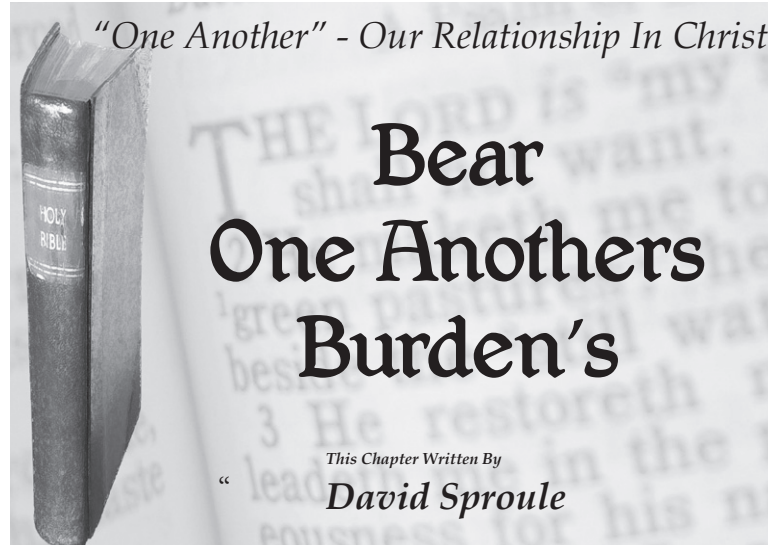
RECEIVE ONE ANOTHER

Consider the words of our Lord, when he said in Matthew 23:23, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you should have done, without leaving the others undone.” If these were “weightier” matters under the old Law, how much more are they under the better covenant (Hebrews 8:6)? Let us not be guilty of neglecting the weightier matters, but let us “receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.”

Mark Jamieson



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“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized... And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:41, 47). “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...” (1 Cor. 12:13). [All Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.] In His scheme to redeem man and provide the most conducive environment possible for faithful living, God could have done any number of things. His desire for His children is that they be “in the world” but “not of the world” (John 17:11-19), that they “come out from among them and be separate” (2 Cor. 6:17), and that they “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:11). In order to make this possible and easy for His people, the above passages could have read and taught, “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized... And the Lord tucked away into isolation daily those who were being saved.” “For by one Spirit we were all baptized

into seclusion..." But, that was not God's plan!

When a person becomes a New Testament Christian, God places him into the safest place on this earth. He surrounds him with the greatest protection and defenses available to mankind. The Lord adds to the church daily those who are being saved! We are all baptized into one body! This is not some social establishment or a club membership! It is admission into a new relationship with Jesus Christ and thereby adoption into a new family. In the family of God, one has brothers and sisters, who are vitally interested in his soul. In the body of Christ, the New Testament teaches that we share a unique relationship with each other, as "members of one another" (Rom. 12:4-5). Think about the members of a human body and how interdependent each member is on the other. Each member of a human body is of great consequence to the body, needs the other members of the body, relies on the other members, is incomplete without the other members, and every member is mutually dependent on the other. It is not accidental or coincidental that the Lord chose this metaphor to describe the relationship that we share in the body of Christ. Like a body, we each share a close and interdependent relationship. Brethren, we need each other! We are members of one another! We could not and would not make it spiritually in this life without each other!

The reciprocal pronoun "*one another*" is found in 81 verses in the New Testament to depict the interdependence that we have within the body of Christ. The pronoun indicates that, as a Christian, I am responsible for "doing these things for you" and you are responsible for "doing these things for me." When we are all fulfilling our individual responsibilities as Christians, then we are

all having our needs met by one another. It's a win-win for everyone, but only if everyone does his share (cf. Eph. 4:16).

Galatians 6:2 instructs Christians, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Let us examine this passage to better appreciate our responsibility as Christians and better minister unto one another.

Brotherly Problems: TRESPASSES AND BURDENS

What are these burdens that we are instructed to bear? Putting the verse into its context makes it much easier to answer that question.

We All Have Burdens!

Read the first five verses of Galatians 6:

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load.

Verse 2 exhorts Christians to be aware of burdens that others have. (The verse exhorts Christians to do more than be aware, but that will be discussed in more detail below.) Yet, verse 5 indicates that we ourselves also have a load (and not just others), so we need to consider ourselves also (as verse 1 teaches).

We All Have Different Burdens!

The King James Version and American Standard Version translated the last English word in verse 5 as “burden.” The more modern translations now translate it as “load.” This has given rise, especially the older translations, to a question of apparent contradiction between verse 2 and verse 5. The question has been raised, “How can verse 2 teach to ‘bear one another’s burdens,’ when verse 5 says that ‘each one shall bear his own burden’? Which is it? Am I supposed to bear my own alone, or is someone to help me?”

The “burden” in verse 2 is from the Greek word *baros*, and means “heaviness, weight” (Thayer 96), “something that is particularly oppressive” (BDAG 167), “heavy burdens—those that are more than a man should carry” (Boice 502). Paul used the verb form of this word (*bareo*) in 2 Corinthians 1:8, “...We were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life”. The verb *bareo* means “to press down as if with a weight...burdened altogether beyond our strength” (BDAG 166), “scarcely bearable and life-threatening burden” (Balz 1:198), “burdens too heavy to bear” (Earle 247). These are burdens that we need help in order to bear; these are burdens that our brethren need help to bear.

The “burden” or “load” in verse 5 is an altogether different word. From the Greek word *phortion*, the load in verse 5 “constitutes a load for transport...that which is carried” (BDAG 1064), “something carried” (Vine 83). It was a word used for the soldier’s “pack” that he was expected to carry and of “the cargo of a ship in the sense of that which the ship is designed to carry (cf. Acts 27:10)” (Boice 503).

If there is a distinction that can be made in the

Greek, the “burden” in verse 2 is like a heavy rock, which cannot be handled alone but necessitates assistance to handle, lest it crush the one below it. The “burden” or “load” of verse 5 suggests a load that is either (1) more manageable than the one in verse 2 and/or (2) not possible to be shared with another as it is a personal load to bear.

As Christians we all have different burdens. With some burdens, we need help in order to handle them (defined more specifically below). With other burdens, we are personally responsible to handle them on our own. No one else can obey for another Christian, worship for another Christian, live faithfully for another Christian, grow spiritually for another Christian, etc. These are responsibilities that we might carry out together, however we must carry them out for ourselves.

We All Have The Same Burden!

When Galatians 6:2 instructs us to “Bear one another’s burdens,” what are these burdens under consideration? These are not, as some have tried to suggest, material burdens, where we are responsible for bearing one another’s economic or personal financial burdens. (While a Christian may choose to do this, as some did in the first century, that is not under discussion in the book of Galatians.) Others have focused in on physical problems like sickness, death, affliction, ignorance, etc. This may be getting closer to the idea being conveyed, but it seems the context is dealing with something even more specific. To remove Galatians 6:2 from its immediate and remote context and apply it to any and every burden someone may endure is not a healthy hermeneutical habit. Look at verses one and two together:

BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

The burden under discussion in Galatians 6 is much more serious than financial stress or personal injury or even the loss of a loved one. (Note: This is not intended to convey that we are not needed or responsible when a brother or sister is dealing with an extra heavy load of "life," like a serious illness, death of a loved one, loss of a home or job, family strife, etc. We are needed and we are responsible, but this context is dealing with something more threatening than any of those things. See the manuscript on "Comfort One Another," in this same volume, for a study on sharing with one another when personal needs and struggles arise.) Verse 1 speaks of one being "overtaken in a trespass." Verse 2 speaks of one dealing with a "burden." Without a compelling textual reason, we should not separate the two verses from each other.

The most devastating burden that a fellow Christian can have weighing down on him is sin. Sin is a crushing burden that can enslave us (John 8:34). Sin is a crushing burden that will lead to death (Rom. 6:23). All the while, the crushing burden of sin deceives us into thinking that all is good and we are safe in the eyes of God (read carefully Galatians 6:3-4, 7-8; James 1:12-16). As Galatians 6:1 clearly shows, sin is a crushing burden that can overtake us. To "overtake" means "to ascertain something by surprise, detect, overtake, surprise" (BDAG 872). Vine offers this comment, "The meaning is not that of detecting a person in the act, but of his being

caught off his guard” (Vine 454).

Scriptures teach that Christians can so sin as to be lost eternally. Children of God can “fall away” (Heb. 6:6) “from grace” (Gal. 5:4), where “there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 10:26), and where “they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end [being] worse for them than the beginning” (2 Peter 2:20-22). This is a danger, for which we must all be on alert (for ourselves and our fellow Christians), lest sin overtake us.

Perhaps, when hearing the word “trespass,” the readers of Paul’s epistle should have been reminded of the listing of the works of the flesh just a few verses prior:

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21).

These trespasses can quickly overtake us and become burdens, if we do not guard our hearts and our minds. The effects and consequences of sin are devastating. There are some Christians who can handle temptations better than others. There are some Christians who can keep sin at bay longer than others. But, sometimes, sin has the ability and tendency to overtake a Christian. Even the best of Christians can stumble and slip. When that happens, what will his brothers and sisters in Christ (those who are “members of one another”) do?

Brotherly Responsibility: Restore And Bear

It could be stated that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), and just leave it at that, with no action necessary on the part of anyone. However, we know that is not acceptable. Our Savior told us to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). The world is entangled and lost in sin (1 John 5:19), and it is every Christian’s responsibility to reach out and try to save them. So, what if a brother or sister in Christ gets entangled in sin again (2 Peter 2:20)? Does not every Christian have that same responsibility to reach out to them and try to save them? Such is precisely what Galatians 6 teaches us.

Galatians 6:1 poses the hypothetical, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass...” What are the “brethren” to do about it? Our responsibilities are two-fold: restore and bear.

Brotherly Responsibility: Restore Such A One

The Greek word for “restore” in this passage (*katartizo*) is translated “mending nets” in Matthew 4:21 and “perfectly joined together” in 1 Corinthians 1:10. *Katartizo* means “to cause to be in a condition to function well, put in order...restore to a former condition” (BDAG 526), “put (again) into order; complete” (Balz 2:268, parentheses in original). The verb “is a medical term used in secular Greek for setting a fractured bone” (Boice 501). As a surgeon would skillfully set a broken bone, in order that it might be restored whole again, such is a brother’s responsibility when a fellow Christian has been overtaken in sin. Look at the definitions and apply them: we are to “mend” them, put them in a condition to function

well, restore them to a former condition, to make them complete.

Another significant note regarding the Greek verb *katarizo* in Galatians 6:1 is that it is a present tense imperative. Imperative makes it a divine command, not a mere suggestion. The present tense points to continuous action, continuous restoration efforts—not just trying once and giving up, but repeated attempts to bring the brother or sister back to where they once were and back to where they need to be.

The question arises, “Do we do that?” When a brother slips or is overtaken in sin, do we seek to help him be reset, restored to active Christian living? This is not about embarrassing them or taking some kind of pleasure in trying to punish them. Our responsibility, as a skilled surgeon, is to do our best in putting them back in a place and making them whole.

We must remember, above all, that a precious soul is at stake. The last two verses of the book of James address the matter so well:

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins (James 5:19-20).

What a beautiful thought! When a brother “wanders from the truth” (is overtaken in a trespass) and “someone turns him back” (restores him), that “someone” needs to know (present tense) that he has saved a soul from eternal death. Brethren, let’s be diligent to restore our wayward brothers and sisters in Christ, that we may “gain our brother” (cf. Matt. 18:15).

Brotherly Responsibility: Bear His Burdens

Sin is a serious burden that needs our constant caution and constant action to overcome (both personally and within the body of Christ). For each Christian, there seems to be those particular temptations, those pesky weights and those frustratingly besetting sins (cf. Heb. 12:1) to which some seem to be more susceptible in their struggles than perhaps others. Thus, to them, these truly represent a heavy burden, one which we should be eager to offer our aid and assistance in bearing and overcoming. The word “bear” in Galatians 6:1 comes from the Greek word *bastazo* (meaning “to pick up; carry; endure,” Stenger 1:208) and is another present tense imperative. Brethren, God is not simply wishing that we would restore our brethren and bear their burdens, He is commanding us to do it. And again, in the present tense, this is labor of continuous action—not short-term, not one-time, not some time in the future. It needs to be done now and it needs to be continued.

For those who have had a broken bone in your body, you can better (and maybe fully) appreciate the use of the word *katartizo* for restore (surgical term for resetting a bone) and now the word *bastazo* for bearing the burden. When you broke your arm, or foot, or leg, the rest of your body, no doubt, took immediate note of the injury. The other members of your body did not excommunicate the broken limb; they did not force amputation. Just the opposite. Your other limbs and joints took immediate action to pick up, carry, support and compensate for the injured member. Even if the restoration and healing process took weeks, the rest of your body was willing to “bear the burden” of the suffering member, knowing that the effort would be worth it all and the rejoicing would

be overwhelming once the restoration was complete.

This is exactly what God had in mind when He commanded, “bear one another’s burdens”! Imagine if we, in the body of Christ, were as concerned for the other members of the body, as one broken arm is for another broken arm. Do we feel the pain? Do we rush to help, pick up, support and bear the burden? Is our deepest desire, for our weak brethren, their restoration? What if the entire body reacted to have the “member” reset, repositioned and restored?

When someone is overtaken with sin, they are also experiencing the guilt, pain, sorrow, stress and overload of the sin. Our goal, in order to “bear burdens,” should be to relieve our brother of some of that guilt, pain, sorrow, stress and overload. On a practical level, what all does this include?

- Keep your eyes open to situations! “Let each of you look out...for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4).
- Go to them in private! “Go and tell him his fault between you and him alone” (Matt. 18:15).
- Use Scripture to identify and convict of sin! “All Scripture...is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16).
- Encourage them to repent! “Repent...and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you” (Acts 8:22).
- Pray with them! “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16).

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- Urge them to not give up! “Exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13); “encourage the fainthearted” (1 Thes. 5:14).
- When necessary, warn them of the consequences! “Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2 Thes. 3:15), “warning...that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Col. 1:28). See also Hebrews 10:26-31.
- Encourage them to do right! “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works” (Heb. 10:24).
- Point them back to Jesus! “...Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus” (Heb. 12:1-2), for “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).
- Refresh their appreciation for the cross of Christ! He “endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb. 12:2); “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:6-10); “For [God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21).
- Remind them of heaven! “And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thes. 4:17-18).
- Emphasize the riches of the love, mercy and grace of God! “God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)” (Eph. 2:4-5).
- Help to persuade them to avoid temptations!

“Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11); “Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thes. 5:22).

- Convince them to forgive themselves, for God has forgiven them! “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9); “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,” including me (1 Tim. 1:15)!
- Be a Barnabas: Give up whatever you have for the good of your brethren! “Barnabas...having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:36-37).
- Be a Barnabas: Stand in the gap when brethren are unreceptive to the brother! “And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles” (Acts 9:26-27).
- Be a Barnabas: Encourage brethren to remain true to the Lord! “Barnabas ... encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord” (Acts 11:23).
- Be a Barnabas: Be a steady companion and fellow (next-to-the-side) worker! “By the hands of Barnabas and Saul...Barnabas and Saul returned...Barnabas and Saul for the work...called for Barnabas and Saul...devout converts followed Paul and Barnabas... Paul and Barnabas grew bold...Barnabas and Paul heard this...listened to Barnabas and Paul...our beloved Barnabas and Paul...Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching...” (Acts 11:30; 12:25; 13:2, 7, 43, 46; 14:14; 15:12,

25, 35). Notice also that Barnabas' name did not always have to come first.

- Put their needs even above your own! "...Let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4, cf. Rom. 12:10).
- Be that friend (i.e., that brother/sister) who is always there for them, to lean on, confide in and trust, no matter what! "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up...Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Eccl. 4:9-12).

Once we have done all we can to bear our brother or sister's burden and to restore him/her to Christ and the narrow way, the ultimate decision and the ultimate burden lies on his back. He must make up his mind. He is ultimately the one responsible for his sin and the one who will give an account (Gal. 6:5; Rom. 14:10-12). But, brethren, we must do our part!

Brotherly Responsibility: Whose Is It?

Some may consider this kind of responsibility to lie squarely and solely upon the elders (i.e., the shepherds of the flock). And, for sure, the elders do carry a significant responsibility in looking out for the strong members and the weak members. Regarding the task laid upon shepherds, Hebrews 13:17 states that "they watch out for your souls,

as those who must give account.” Nevertheless, while the elders may have a specialized responsibility, there are five words in Galatians 6:1-2, which are positive proof that this is bigger than just the shepherds.

Brethren. This is the eighth time in this epistle that Paul addressed the recipients as “brethren.” Who has the responsibility to restore and bear? The brethren do!

Ye. This is easier to see in the old King James Version and American Standard Version. Both translations have the word “ye” in verse 1, which is the second person pronoun plural. This was not to one person but to a plurality of brethren. Who has the responsibility to restore and bear? Ye do!

Spiritual. This is where it gets narrowed a bit. Who has the responsibility to restore those who have been overtaken in a trespass and bear one another’s burdens? This does not fall on the wayward or the weak or the carnal, for they themselves need to be restored! Those who have a special responsibility in this regard are those whom the Holy Spirit labels as “spiritual.” Various suggestions have been made as to its meaning, but why go any further than the context in which the word is found? When Paul addresses brethren/Christians who are spiritual, who does he have in mind?

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh...But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law...But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control... If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit...Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual...he who sows

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to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. (Gal. 5:16, 17, 18, 22, 25; 6:1, 8).

When it is put into its context, determining who the “spiritual” ones are becomes rather obvious. It is those who walk in the Spirit, are against the flesh, are led by the Spirit, bear the fruit of the Spirit, live in the Spirit and sow to the Spirit. These are strong Christians, and able to help those who are weak, because their lives have been devoted to and led by God! If they were not, they would be ineffective and possibly even detrimental in efforts to restore. Who has the responsibility to restore and bear? Those who are spiritual do!

One Another. This reciprocal pronoun in “bear one another’s burdens” emphasizes the responsibility of each one to help every one—mutual responsibility met with mutual action for the mutual good of all brethren. It cannot (and will not) get any better than that! Others have a responsibility to do their part, but someone else’s failure or inactivity does not diminish or relieve us of our responsibility. Who has the responsibility to restore and bear? All who are members of the body of Christ, “members of one another” do!

Brotherly Attitudes: LOVE AND GENTLENESS

The final aspect of this study, but by no means the least important, is the attitude which a Christian carries and manifests in fulfilling this divine plan. There is a grave problem: trespasses and burdens! There is a mutual responsibility: restore and bear! However, if we are conscious of the first point and active in the second point, we fail miserably if we do not put into practice this third point.

To better appreciate the context of Galatians 6, start by either ignoring the chapter division between chapters 5 and 6, or slide the last verse of chapter 5 (verse 26) down into the beginning of chapter 6. After discussing the battle for the soul between the flesh and the Spirit, Paul turns to an attitude that had evidently infested the church. “Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another” (5:26). (Notice the “one another” pronouns, which are found earlier in the book, as well.) Some of these brethren had obviously become so conceited with themselves that they were thinking themselves “to be something,” when, in fact, they were “nothing” spiritually” (6:3). When you tie in verses 1 and 2, which discuss “weaker” Christians who would be overtaken and need help in bearing burdens, these conceited brethren seemed to be using the “weaker” brethren as their standard of measurement. Thus, when they looked at the ones who were being overtaken and needing help, they felt good about themselves, and perhaps did not even mind seeing some weaker brother fall into sin (as such would be additional evidence of the conceited brother’s superiority). Various descriptions of these brethren and this situation come to mind: sick, twisted, warped, sad, destructive and spiritually devastating for all involved.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, some of our brethren are dealing with burdens that are wearing them down and threatening their souls. These burdens (the ones in Galatians 6:2) are those which press down heavily and overtake. What will be our response? We do not need any “elder brothers” like the one in Luke 15. His arrogant, self-inflated pride would have driven that sorrow-laden younger brother away, if the elder brother was the first one he met when he arrived back at home.

Galatians 6 gives us three gauges by which to check our attitudes.

Brotherly Attitude: Gentleness

“Restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.” If you broke both bones in your lower leg, how would you want the surgeon to handle your leg? You have a vivid and definite answer to that question, don't you? Now, switch roles. If you were the surgeon, getting ready to reset, reposition and prepare for the restoration of those broken bones, how would you care for them? Again, you have a pretty good idea of how delicately the suffering body needs to be handled. As the surgeon, you would not grab the leg, shake the leg, and harshly or roughly throw the leg around out of pride or frustration. You would not immediately and joyfully jump to the “amputation” option, either. No, you would carefully, compassionately and, hopefully, sympathetically pick up the leg, gently move the leg, put it back in the right position, then surround it with protection so that it could heal. Put this in the context of restoring a brother or sister who is “broken,” overtaken in a trespass. Those in that situation need us to carefully, compassionately and, hopefully, sympathetically pick them up, gently help to move them, put them back in the right position, then surround them with protection so that they can heal.

Gentleness is not indicative of weakness. Not at all! Those who are restoring wayward brethren do not ever overlook the sin, make light of the sin, condone the sin or try to excuse the sin in any way. Nor is there ever a time to compromise the truth in order to win a brother back. Remember that James 5:19-20 speaks of turning a sinner back who “wanders from the truth.” If he has

wandered from the truth, you cannot turn him “from the error of his way” and “cover a multitude of sins” by conceding any portion of the truth. However, “gentleness” is emphasizing the attitude we must have.

Carefully consider these words of Paul to Timothy: “And a servant of the Lord” (i.e., “Brethren...ye who are spiritual...”) “must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will” (2 Tim. 2:24-26, emp. added). The devil takes even brethren captive. Bringing them to repentance requires gentleness, patience, humility and truth.

David’s son Absalom had committed so many heinous acts against his father and against God. He had murdered his half-brother, stolen the hearts of the people away from his father, led a rebellion against his father, drove his father from his home in Jerusalem, went to battle against his father, and would have taken his father’s life if given the opportunity. How would David respond to this kind of treatment? More appropriately, how did David respond? David’s armies were going out to battle against Absalom and his armies. Did David say, “Off with his head! Let him have it! I’ve had enough! I’m tired of him! He’s not worth the effort! He’s got this coming! No mercy!”? Here is the heart and attitude we must have. “Now the king had commanded Joab, Abishai, and Ittai, saying, ‘Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.’ And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains orders concerning Absalom” (2 Sam. 18:5, emp. added). He truly was a man after God’s own heart!

Brotherly Attitudes: Humility And Caution

“Considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” No Christian is above or beyond being tempted by sin and even falling away. The Christian who thinks that he is above it or thinks he is strong enough to not be affected by sin (i.e., he who “thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing”), “he deceives himself” (Gal. 6:3)! Thus, those who are spiritual and fulfill this command in seeking to restore the fallen must take heed to his own life, to his own susceptibility to temptation and to the possibility of he himself being overtaken by a trespass (cf. 1 Cor. 10:12). Brethren, “beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked” (2 Peter 3:17). We need to be cautious!

There seems to be more than just a warning about one's own temptation in this passage. The Lord seems to be saying more than just “Watch out!” or “Be careful of doing that same sin that he is doing!” The warning at the end of verse 1 seems to be here to produce the proper motive and attitude in the heart of the “restorer.” No one is above temptation, sin and falling. With that being true, treat your brother accordingly! You are just as susceptible as he is. Show humility, not hypocrisy! Be sympathetic, not insensitive! You're not there to blame him; you're there to help him! If he is not worthy to be a child of God; you are not worthy to be a child of God! Help your brother or sister to know that you do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think (cf. Rom. 12:3); in fact, let him know you are not there out of any selfish ambition at all, but in lowliness of mind, you are esteeming him and his needs better than your own (cf. Phil. 2:3).

It is deceptive “if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing.” Too often we compare ourselves to other brethren, particularly weaker brethren, and conclude that we are satisfactory in the eyes of God (and maybe even commendable). Read 2 Corinthians 10:12 carefully, “For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.” Are you wise? How do you class yourself, compare yourself, commend yourself, measure yourself? Instead of always being in the comparative mode, Paul says in Galatians 6:4, “But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.”

The bottom line is that without the Lord, we are nothing! The only measure, the only commending that matters is the Lord’s. Thus, Paul concludes 2 Corinthians 10 by saying, “For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends” (10:18). Christ is the only perfect example that we have. Let us compare ourselves with Him and measure ourselves by Him. When we look in the mirror and behold “the glory of the Lord,” if we are honest and open-face observers, we can be “transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18). May we follow our Master’s example, and with a spirit of gentleness (cf. Matt. 11:28) and humility (Phil. 2:6-8), help our brethren in need. For the day may come when we ourselves need to be restored. The day may come when we ourselves need some burdens borne on our behalf. Our Lord taught us, “Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them” (Matt. 7:12).

**Brotherly Attitude:
Devotion To Law And Love**

The final phrase to be examined in these opening verses of Galatians 6 is the end of verse 2. "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Amazing and disappointingly frustrating how some folks want to claim that under Christ we are not under a law. Such could not be further from the truth. This passage alone, speaking of "the law of Christ," is sufficient proof that under Christ there is a law—His law! The New Testament also speaks of this as "the law of faith" (Rom. 3:27); "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:2); "under the law of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21, NASB); "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25); and "the royal law" (James 2:8). There is a law that prescribes (1) to bear one another's burdens, and (2) how to do it.

How do we fulfill the law of Christ by bearing one another's burdens? Look back in chapter 5. "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13). There is another "one another" pronoun. With the liberty that Christians have in Christ, Paul says "love one another," "serve one another." That ties beautifully with bearing one another's burdens! Why do we bear the burdens? Because we love one another! Because we long to serve one another! But, Paul is not done in Galatians 5. Look at the very next verse: "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (5:14). There's the key! When we love one another as ourselves, we will serve one another and we will bear one another's burdens, without any inclination to provoke one another or think ourselves to be something in the process.

When Christians devote themselves to the law of Christ, they devote themselves to loving one another! When Christians devote themselves to loving one another, they devote themselves to doing whatever is needed to help one another get to heaven!

Conclusion

We're part of the family that's been born again;
Part of the family whose love knows no end;
For Jesus has saved us, and made us His own,
Now we're part of the family that's on its way home.
And sometimes we laugh together, sometimes we cry;
Sometimes we share together, heartaches and sighs;
Sometimes we dream together of how it will be
When we all get to Heaven, God's family.

(Lanny Wolfe, 1974)

What a glorious relationship we share with one another in the body of Christ! The Lord knew what was best when He added us to the church (the body, the family)! He knew that we needed each other! He knew that weak Christians would need strong Christians and that strong Christians would need weak Christians! What a blessed privilege we have, to consider how much our Savior bore on our behalf, and to consider that we have the opportunity to bear burdens on behalf of our brethren! Thank God for His church! Thank God for the body of Christ! Cain asked in derision, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9). May we thank God that we have a brother! May we thank God that we can be his keeper! And, may we thank God that he can be our keeper!

Consider heartily these words in closing:

We have seen, then, that when a Christian brother is overtaken in sin, he is to be restored, and that mature, spiritual believers are to exercise this delicate ministry gently and humbly. It is sad that in the contemporary church this plain command of the apostle is more honoured in the breach than the observance. Yet if we walked by the Spirit we would love one another more, and if we loved one another more we would bear one another's burdens, and if we bore one another's burdens we would not shrink from seeking to restore a brother who has fallen into sin. Further, if we obeyed this apostolic instruction as we should, much unkind gossip would be avoided, more serious backsliding prevented, the good of the church advanced, and the name of Christ glorified. (Stott 162)

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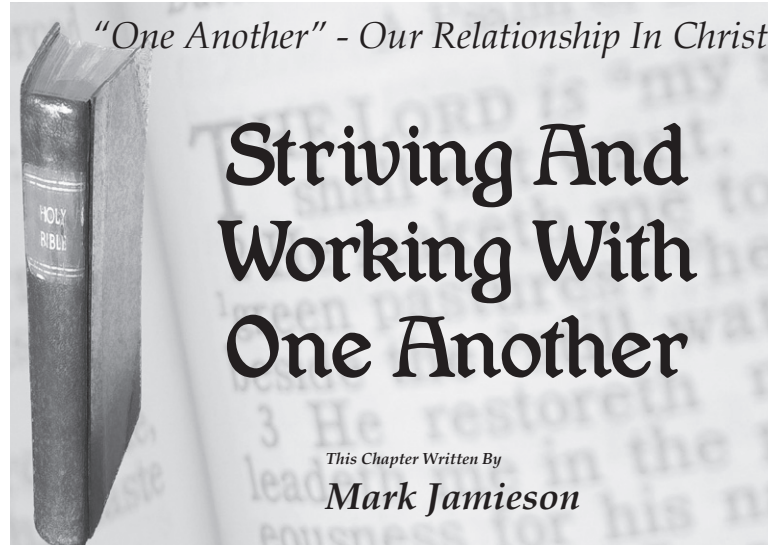
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Jesus taught His disciples that "...a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him" (John 13:16, NKJV). This was spoken in response to His having washed the disciples' feet the night He was betrayed, but the implication permeates the entirety of Jesus teachings.

From the earliest days of His life, our Lord and Savior was about His Father's business (Luke 2:49). Jesus' primary focus was on the souls of lost mankind (Luke 19:10), since it was for this purpose that He came (John 12:27). Yet, He was concerned with more than just saving souls – He sought to build them up in order to keep them saved, and to meet the important needs for those who could not meet them for themselves.

These three areas have long been recognized as the appropriate focus of the followers of Jesus Christ – evangelism, edification (encouragement), and benevolence – because the servant is not greater than his master, nor

is the one who is sent greater than the one who sent him.

Evangelism

John chapter one may present us with one of the greatest patterns in the Scriptures regarding evangelism. Beginning in verse 29, John begins pointing his disciples to Jesus, when he said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” Also, the next day while he was with two of his disciples he made the same statement (v. 36). Those disciples, of which one was Andrew, then began to follow Jesus (vs. 37-40). He first found his own brother Simon and brought him to Jesus (vs. 41-42). In a like manner, Philip who was called by Jesus, found Nathanael and sought to bring him to Jesus (vs. 43-46).

There are three important lessons we can learn from this narrative. First, being effective evangelists begins with a recognition of who Jesus is. Consider for a moment the four designations ascribed to Jesus in this passage. John first calls Him “the Lamb of God” (vs. 29, 35). This directs us to the sinless nature of Jesus, as well as His selfless sacrifice for our sins on the cross of Calvary. Next, he refers to Jesus as “the Son of God” (v. 34), always speaks of His divine nature and origin. Andrew tells Simon, “We have found the Messiah,” which is translated, “the Christ” (v. 41). He is the Anointed One, the Savior of the world. Lastly, Nathaniel says to Him, “You are the King of Israel” (v. 49). Jesus is the King of kings, and He reigns over His kingdom, the church, which is the spiritual Israel.

Second, in order to become effective evangelists we

must recognize that people are impotent to save themselves. Regardless of how “good” a person may be, their goodness can never remove the stains of sin, nor can it establish and keep them in the grace of God. This is where the digressives among us have made a fatal error. When one speaks of those who are caught up in denominational error, they (the digressives) will usually respond with a comment about “what a good person” this one or that one is, as if that makes them righteous before God. With this attitude towards those who are trapped in the snare of denominationalism, why would you need to be evangelistic? God has always been quite clear regarding our good deeds, when He said through the prophet Isaiah, “But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind have taken us away” (64:6). All of mankind’s good works are as menstrual rags before the righteousness of God; therefore, we are completely impotent to save ourselves.

Last, we must recognize that people need to be brought to Jesus. Andrew and Philip had no problem telling their friends and relatives that they needed to meet Jesus. What if our brother or friend might become the next great gospel preacher as did Simon Peter? It was the charge of the apostles and the first century Christians and it is our charge today in the twenty-first century to bring people to Jesus (Matt. 29:19-20).

Edification / Encouragement

Everyone, both Christian and non-Christian, needs to be encouraged, enriched, and built up. There was a lady in Shelby, North Carolina, named Mabel, who attended

the local Presbyterian Church. One Sunday in the late 1970's, her pastor preached on being an encourager. On Monday, Mabel stood on the doorstep of a neighbor with a freshly baked cake. When her neighbor answered the door, she was somewhat confused by what she saw, and asked Mabel why she had baked a cake for her. Mabel responded, "Well, yesterday at church, my pastor said we should go out this week and do something nice for someone we don't like, so I baked this cake for you." (True story).

While Mabel's method was questionable, her intentions were noble. The New Testament introduces to us perhaps the greatest encourager of the Christian age – a man who was called "Barnabas" by the apostles, which means, "Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:36).

The early church in Jerusalem was over-burdened by the many converts on Pentecost, and it became necessary to make distribution to meet the many physical needs (Acts 4:32-35). Barnabas, who being a Levite would have had no land of inheritance, did have property that he owned, which very likely indicates that he was a fairly wealthy individual. He sold this land and brought the proceeds to the apostles to assist with the distribution (vs. 36-37).

Saul had been a very effective persecutor of the church, and as such, many were frightened by him after his conversion (Acts 9:26). Barnabas took the opportunity to not only encourage Saul, but also the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem by vouching for Saul (v. 27). As a result, Saul was not only among the Christians, he was able to speak boldly in Jesus' name and confound the Hellenists (vs. 28-29).

After the persecution that came about from Stephen's death, the gospel was preached in Antioch (Acts 11:19).

When this news reached Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to investigate the situation (v. 22). Upon his arrival, "...he encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord" (v. 23, emphasis mine). He then proceeded to find Saul and bring him to Antioch for the sake of edifying the Christians there (vs. 25-26).

Barnabas traveled with Saul on their first missionary journey, and John Mark was their assistant (Acts 13:1-5). When they departed Pamphylia for Paphos, John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem (v. 13). At a later date, Barnabas was desirous to return and visit the brethren where they had previously ministered. However, a dispute arose over John Mark, whom Barnabas was determined to take with them, but Paul was opposed because of his abandonment in Pamphylia (vs. 36-38). The contention led to Barnabas and Paul parting ways, with Paul and Silas going to Syria and Cilicia, and Barnabas and Mark sailing to Cyprus (Acts 15:39-41). The result of Barnabas' actions on this occasion was not realized for several years, when Paul, in his letter to Philemon (c. AD 60-62), mentions Mark as a fellow laborer (v. 23), and in his farewell letter to Timothy he writes, "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11, emphasis mine). It is quite obvious that Barnabas' encouragement of the young Mark was critical to Paul acceptance of him in the later years.

Benevolence

Barnabas was not only a great encourager, but also was very benevolent (Acts 4:37). The first century Christians understood the importance of meeting the needs of those who could not meet them for themselves, and were even

commanded, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10), and “But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Heb. 13:16).

As Jesus answers the question of the lawyer who sought to justify himself, He tells him of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). We often focus on what this man did, but for a moment, let us consider what he did not do. First, he did not go to Jericho with the intention of helping someone. Like everyone else passing along the way, this road was just the means of getting them from point A to point B.

Second, this man did not pass up the opportunity to assist someone in need. Unlike the priest and the Levite, who purposefully chose to not aid the man who fell among the thieves, this Samaritan had compassion (v. 33). In today’s language we would say that he went “above and beyond the call of duty.” Without regard for his own safety and schedule, he bandaged and cleaned the man’s wounds, set him on his animal (which meant that he would now be walking), and took him to a place where he could rest and receive further care (v. 34-35). He even paid the expenses for his care.

Third, this Samaritan did not ask for anything in return. What a far cry from today’s climate of notoriety! There are few today even within the Lord’s church who would follow the Lord’s admonition, “But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (Matt. 6:3).

Jesus was very clear in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew regarding how He expects His followers to treat those who are in need: “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch

as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (v. 40). With our charitable deeds, we are investing in a very bright future (Luke 12:33-34).

Conclusion

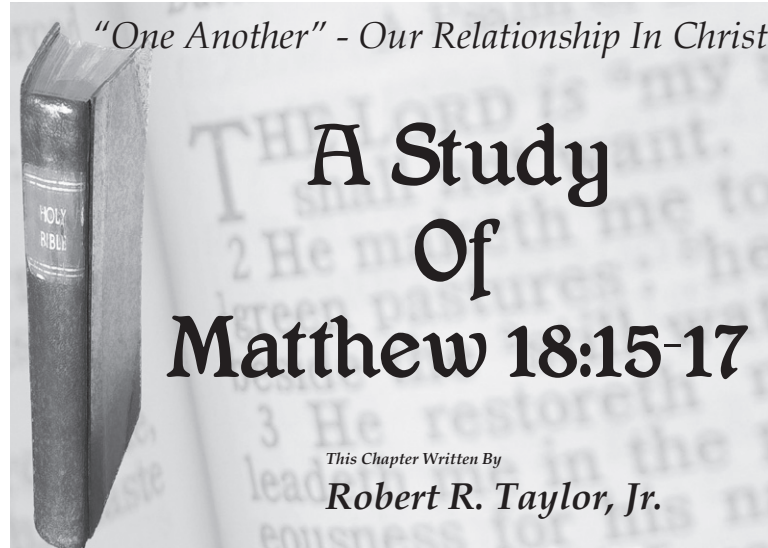
We need to follow the pattern for evangelism displayed by those who walked with the Lord by recognizing who Jesus is, by recognizing that people are impotent to save themselves, and by recognizing that people need to be brought to Jesus. Oh, that the Lord would raise up more Barnabases among His people, who see and meet the need to encourage, enrich, and edify the brethren of all walks of life. And even though we might not be going about with the intention of helping someone, may we never pass up the opportunity to assist those in need and may we never ask for anything in return.

Truly, Jesus taught His disciples that “...a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him,” but He also practiced what He preached – “...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). We are the servants and we are the ones who have been sent; therefore, let us resolve to strive and work with one another in accomplishing His will.

Mark Jamieson



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Introduction

It is an annual delight and high honor to come to beautiful Pulaski, Tennessee, each spring for this good, great and grand lectureship at East Hill in marvelous May. Special thanks are given Paul, Robert, the elders and all precious people at East Hill for the invitation to speak and pen a chapter for the published volume. Paul is a master craftsman in putting together a powerful and profitable lectureship. It is always executed beautifully and orderly.

The Text, Its Context And Abuses Of It

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.⁽¹⁶⁾ But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two

more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. ⁽¹⁷⁾And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican (Matt. 18:15-17).

In the first fourteen verses of this chapter Jesus corrected false pride among His disciples, explains true conversion, stressed the essentiality of humility, explained how common the creation of offenses would be and warned the creators of such what the sure consequences would be. Fleshly sins were to be cut off using very graphic language of amputated limbs and the plucking out of eyes rather than retaining pleasurable sins at the soul's expense. They were warned not to despise little ones. Angels beheld God's face and the Almighty would not look lightly on such.

The Messianic mission is stressed in verse 11. The lost sheep attracted the Father's notice, love and concern. Joy, deep and wide, was felt at the sheep's return to the fold in safety. God does not want a single lamb to be lost.

It was but natural that Christ should speak about offenses, guilty offenders and those innocently offended or sinned against.

This trio of verses is couched in crystal clarity and easily understood language. Yet, abuses have entered by people who pay no attention to context or word intent of the message conveyed.

Those who are soft on error and wish to give every advantage to false teachers are fond of saying to defenders

of truth, “Have you talked to this person or these people personally prior to objecting to their error orally or in print?” We heard it constantly when Crossroadism was at its height of popularity. We were asked, “Have you been to Gainesville?” More and more we are hearing it about Change Agents and their projected agenda. “Have you been to these Change Agents personally before speaking or writing against their agenda?” Uniformly, they will urge Matthew 18:15-17 as their attempted proof for their actions. What they do is a total misuse of Matthew 18:15-17. Here Jesus is speaking of personal offenses and how to correct them — not the propagation of flagrant falsehood. Why is this so hard to comprehend in this crystal clear trio of verses?

Did Jesus have to go personally to all 6,000 Pharisees in first century Palestine prior to refuting publicly their man-made traditions in Matthew 15 and Mark 7? Did He have to go to every Sadducean skeptic in Palestine before condemning their rejection of the whole gamut of Biblical finals? Did He have to go to Herod Antipas before He spoke words of condemnation about that fox in Luke 13:31-33?

Did Paul have to go personally to every Judaizer in the first century before refuting their false teaching in Galatians? Did he have to go personally to every false teacher at Colosse before writing Colossians 2? Did he have to go personally to every enemy of Calvary before unmasking them in Philippians 3:18-19? Did he have to go personally to two feuding women at Philippi, Euodias and Syntyche, before writing Philippians 4:2? Did he have to go personally to Hymenaeus, Alexander and Philetus before writing 1 Timothy 1:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:17 and 4:14-15? Did he have to go personally to Phygellus and

Hermogenes who had turned away from him before writing 2 Timothy 1:15?

Did Peter and Jude have to go personally to errorists throughout the whole first century before writing 2 Peter 2 and Jude 3ff?

Did the apostle John have to go personally to all Docetic and Corinthian Gnostics before refuting their God-dishonoring and Christ-bashing teachings near the end of the first century? Did he have to leave Patmos and go to the mainland to meet every patron of error before refuting such in the book of Revelation? Did he have to go personally to Diotrephes before writing 3 John 9-10?

Matthew 18:15-17 needs to be kept in its proper context. Brother Guy N. Woods often stated, "A text taken out of its context becomes a mere pretext!"

What Is The Purpose?

Alienation between two brethren is never a pleasant or good thing. Such should be avoided if at all possible. Unless it is solved with rapidity, it can spill over into the lives of the two families, the congregation, among friends of both parties and even into the community of which they are a part. Jesus' plan calls for a quick solution and with as few lives touched as possible. In step one Jesus provides the desired purpose — "thou has gained thy brother." Reconciliation can be such a beautiful blessing to both parties. The offending brother will no longer have the burden of this personal transgression weighing upon his heart. He has been forgiven by meeting all essential stipulations. The offended one is relieved because the disruptive sins has been removed once and for all. He can feel really good toward the formerly alienated party.

They can be brethren in good standing with each other and can be comrades in Christ once more. Fellowship is no longer shattered; it is now firm again.

The Sin And The First Step

The trespass here is not an imaginary one made up by one brother against another brother. It is a real trespass, an actual sin. Wrongdoing has occurred. It is not the case where both brethren have mutually sinned against each other with no innocent party in the picture at all. One is guilty; the other one is innocent. The party sinned against is not to remain passively silent expecting the guilty one to make the initial step. Jesus had dealt with that type of sin in Matthew 5:23-24. There the matter was to be settled by the one committing the wrong before acceptable worship could be offered to God. This shows its gravity, its serious nature. The offended one is to go. He is not to go to everyone else except the offender. So frequently, this is the commonplace occurrence. He is to go to the one who has sinned against him. He is to go and tell (KJV). He is to go and show (ASV). The literal Greek import here is rebuke, reprove or chide (Woods, Robertson, Vincent). It should be done conclusively proving to the man that he has committed a trespass. He should not be left with the impression that such is a trivial matter; it is far more serious than that! He stands in sin and must be convicted of its seriousness. Galatians 6:1 is a good guideline for the one doing the telling, the showing, the rebuking, the reproof and the chiding.

If the guilty one is willing to hear the sage reproof, then he will need to repent, confess his wrong to the offended and pray for its forgiveness. Implied here surely is God's second law of pardon for an erring child of

God. Be it kept in mind that two brethren are under consideration here!

The desired result is a happy one for both parties. The guilty one is forgiven. The innocent one now has a gained-back brother. Friction is gone; fellowship is on the front burner once again. The matter never need come up again between the two of them. That only would open up an ugly wound.

Scholarly comprehension of verse 15 surely shows this to be a personal one from one brother toward another brother. Jesus is not talking about situations where falsehood has been taught and refutations of a public nature have occurred such as with the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Herodians in Matthew 22, Mark 12 and Luke 20.

Step number one may not work. The guilty one may be unmoved, even implacable. Sinful pride may get in the way of his making this matter right. Plan B must come into play.

The Second Step

The innocent one has not discharged all his demanded duty in this matter by the failure of step number one or the one-on-one meeting. If the guilty one refuses the telling, showing, rebuking, reproving and chiding, then one or two others were to be brought into the picture in order that "every word may be established" (v. 16). This is a principle found in both testaments. Moses alluded to this principle in Deuteronomy 19:15. The apostle John alluded to it in John 8:17 and seemingly has his inspired eye riveted on this very Mosaic declaration. Paul does more of the same in 2 Corinthians 13:1 and again in 1 Timothy 5:19. Approval of this practice is thus found in

both covenants – Mosaic and Christian.

It seems obvious that the one or two taken must be honest, competent, of good reputation and of excellent character. The added presence of such men should be a strong inducement for the impenitent man to come to his senses and make right the wrong. If he can resist this step, it shows the sin to be deep and really has a tenacious hold upon the impenitent brother. There is another sage reason for Step Number Two preceding Step Number Three. Should the matter have to be taken before the church, then every word spoken in Step Number Two can be verified as valid. There is no way he can turn Step Number Two to his own profit or for self-advantage.

Jesus knew Step Number Two could fail just like step number one did. Therefore He gave step three which is to be prosecuted in the process. Jesus is surely the Master Teacher in these three verses. He does not leave anything to chance.

If Step Two does not work, Step Three is to follow promptly. This is **no** matter for procrastination.

Step Three

The church, local – not universal – is the next step in this demanded process. If the impenitent brother refuses the two or three people involved in Step Two, then the matter is to be brought before the church. Incidentally, this is the second mention of the word church in Matthew. The initial one is Matthew 16:18.

The word church derives from *eklesia* which means the called-out or the summoned-out. It **never** refers to a physical ediface – its common usage today. (1) It is used universally to refer to all the saved as in Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22-23 and Colossians 1:18. (2) It is

used in a local sense such as we have in Revelation 2-3 with the seven churches of Asia. (3) It is used in an assembled sense such as we have in 1 Corinthians 14:19, 23. We are members of the church universal and our local congregation 24/7. But we are not in an assembled state 24/7. That would be quite impossible. There are specific periods for assembled worship.

Jesus does not have in mind here the church universal but the local church when it is assembled since the matter is to be **told** the membership. Again, this exhibits the gravity of the impenitent sinner and his yet unforgiven sin. Quite likely, the impenitent man may have family members who belong to that congregation. Surely, he has friends in the membership. When he can face them in the gravity of an assembled service and remain stubborn and impenitent, sin has really hardened his heart and is now in control of his life. He thinks more of his sin and the pride it has produced than family, friends, the congregation, the one he has wronged and the entire Godhead. It amounts to utter contempt for the Godhead and the glorious gospel of Christ. He has spurned Christian friends and turned up his spiteful nose at the entire Godhead. He has reached the river of no return. He could be forgiven and restored but not in his determination to play by his own rules – not by God's commandments.

If All Fails, Then What?

Corrective discipline must follow. Instructive discipline has already run its course and without success in restoration efforts.

The Lord is stern and unbending. He does not sugarcoat the sin. He does not sweep it under the rug. Plainly and positively, He states weighty words of woe,

“let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican” (v. 17). This means a withdrawal of fellowship. When this is done God the Father has no fellowship with him. God the Son has no fellowship with him. After all, He is the One who has given this entire procedure. God the Holy Spirit has no fellowship with him. His innocent brother whom he wronged has no fellowship with him. The one or two that were drawn into the picture have no fellowship with him. His own home congregation has no fellowship with him. Family and friends have had to sever fellowship ties with him. It thus becomes obvious to all beholders that the flagrant sin has greater hold on him than Diety, family, friends and the entire congregation. Oh, the power of one sin tugging at the heartstrings of a man now on his sure way to hell. It is obvious he cannot have the hope of heaven in his heart while so hardened and deepened in slavish sin. It surely is true that sin will take us further than we intended to go. It will keep us longer than we intended to stay. It will cost us far more than we intended to pay. It did this man. It is a grievous and merciless taskmaster. No Egyptian taskmaster was ever so hard on an Israelite slave than sin is upon its proud possessor who refuses to let it go.

Conclusion

This impenitent man, should he die in this condition, is as bound for hell as are those mentioned in Revelation 21:8 and 22:15. We must not take lightly personal sins we commit refusing all individual and collective entreaties for our restoration.

We need to take seriously what Jesus taught in Matthew 5:23-24 and His sage counsel in Matthew

18:15-17. Souls, our own, are at stake in rejecting these powerful passages of Sacred Scripture when applicable to us.

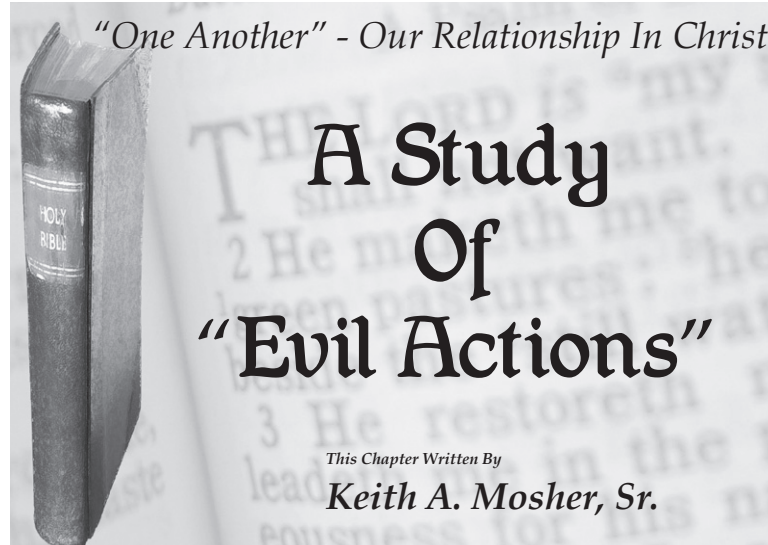
Endnote

1. All quotations are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.



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When the assignment came to write on the subject of a “Study of Evil Actions,” I was somewhat perplexed as to the content. Brother Sain informed me by phone that he had in mind the ill-treatment by brethren of other brethren. The study then took on an entirely new thought process for me and I thought of several instances of such evil actions mentioned in Holy Writ. The subject assigned, though unpleasant, is a needed study and is approached here as a “necessary evil.”

Introduction

The “Messianic” prophet, Isaiah, was ordered by God to “clear his throat” (“cry aloud”) and to make sure that Judah understood why God considered her a nation of sinners (Isa. 58:1, KJV). Those ancient Judeans came to the temple on a daily basis and “acted” as if they were a “nation that did righteousness” (Isa. 58:2a). They were even so hypocritical as to pretend to be interested

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in God’s “ordinances of justice,” but in reality they took no delight in approaching God (Isa. 58:2b). They were even so carnal that they asked God why they fasted, if He were not going to notice, because they wanted to earn some special blessing for going without food for a day; a day in which they kept on doing business and making their hired help work harder (Isa. 58:3)! Why did they fast; so they could argue with God about how good they were (Isa. 58:4a). Why did they fast; so they could pound their fists of wickedness in God’s face and tell Him how much they had sacrificed (Isa. 58:4b). God said: “...ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high” (Isa. 58:4c).

God never chose a ritualistic fast day so that His people in Judah could argue about how much they had given up to be His followers (Isa. 58:5). [In fact, only one day of fasting was ever commanded under the Mosaic covenant—the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16).] Those ancient Jews, who decided to fast, were never to think of such an activity as “special.” God wanted His people to “fast” by serving others (Isa. 58:6). God wanted the hungry fed, the poor helped, the naked clothed, and families protected (Isa. 58:7). [The latter activities are conspicuous at the judgment day (Matt. 25:41ff.)] Those who “fasted” in God’s appointed way would also take away the “yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity” (Isa. 58:9b).

Those who “put forth the finger” and speak “vanity” (strife) are still a serious problem under the new covenant of Christ. To be contemptuous of a brother in the Lord by “pointing the finger” is as vile a sin as one can commit (Matt. 5:21-26). This brief essay will include a word study of the term, evil, and a listing of some of the “evil

actions” brethren could and have committed, but should not have so done.

EVIL: A Word Study

Two words that are often used in the Old Testament and translated evil are *aven* and *rah* (Gesenius, 21 and 775). The Hebrew term, *aven*, (aw-wen) is a negation and can be translated as nothing or vanity as in Isaiah 58:9 mentioned above and connected to “pointing the finger” and speaking “vanity.” To speak in such a way as to say “nothing” is to engender strife by lying in a wicked way (Gesenius, 21). Wilson notes that *aven* denotes a “false good” which means that one is speaking in a lying way, but is trying to appear as if one is a good person (465)!

The Hebrew term, *rah*, is a strong word that implies the idea of raging and is derived from a root that means breaking, rushing, or trembling from being struck (Gesenius, 775). In the descriptive form, *rah* means to be hurtful, wicked, noxious, or envious (Ibid.). Note the use of *rah* by Joab at the time he rebuked king David for mourning too greatly over Absalom and for ignoring the king’s people: “Now therefore arise, go forth and speak comfortably unto thy servants: for I swear by the Lord, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night: and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee from thy youth until now” (2 Sam. 19:7). Joab’s use of *rah* and the way he used it shows his anger toward David in the strongest possible way. Wilson suggests that *rah* has the sense of “to break in pieces” (150). Imagine pointing a finger at someone in order to destroy!

The New Testament term translated evil is either *kakos* or *poneeros* (Bauer, 397 and 690-691). There are

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at least four concepts related to *kakos*. One can be evil in a moral sense. "But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming" (Matt. 24:48). Too, the emotions, characteristics, or plans of one can be evil. "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. 3:5). "Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. 15:33). Third, one is evil who acts contrary to law. "Jesus answered him (the high priest, K.M.), If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil, but if well, why smitest thou me" (John 18:23). And fourth, anything that is injurious to another and is done in a pernicious way is evil, whether in word or deed. "But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). [Friedrich notes that *kakos* is never positive and denotes the complete absence of good or the capability to do anything good (Vol. III, 469).]

The term, *poneeros*, on the other hand, carries the idea of doing something that is not only injurious to another, but is dangerous. This latter Greek term is translated grievous at Revelation 16:2 and Bauer suggests that such evil actions are "in the ethical sense, wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, degenerate" (690). Bauer adds that such evil is characteristic of demons and connected to the intentions of anyone practicing harm against another (691). Note that the devil is called *poneeros* or the evil one (Mat. 13:19). Again, as with *kakos* cited above, *poneeros* is connected to words and deeds which actions spring from one's heart: "All these evil things come from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:23). [Herod Antipas

is a perfect example of such an evildoer (Luke 3:19).] So dangerous is an evildoer and speaker that Jesus instructed His disciples, concerning attacks by such a devilish person, that they “resist not evil” (Matt. 5:39b). To resist such attacks, because of the evil intent of the one attacking, is simply to invite more and worse attacks. Brethren often wonder why some are not “answered” when they falsely accuse brethren and the response is found in Jesus’ admonition not to resist such evil and thus engender more evil. Jesus did not revile when He was reviled (1 Peter 2:23).

Evil Actions: Brother To Brother

All Christians are subject to persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). However, when a brother-in-Christ attacks, such evil is very hard to bear. Paul, in fact, informed the Thessalonians that if they did not stand fast in the Lord, he could not “live” (1 Thes. 3:8). That is, the apostle had such deep care for those brethren that he desired above all that they would prosper in their spiritual pursuits. Suppose those Thessalonians had turned against Paul. How would he have felt? Well, some brethren in another city called Corinth did attack Paul and he responded with heart-felt irony. “We are fools for Christ’s sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honorable, but we are despised” (1 Cor. 4:10). Paul was not a “fool,” but he was describing the attitude the brethren in Corinth had toward him, and Paul had baptized some of them (1 Cor. 1:14-16)! Robertson notes from Paul’s use of the term, “fool,” that “Excited partisans can easily excite themselves to a pious phrenzy (sic); hypnotize themselves with their own supposed devotion to truth” (99). It is the case that self-deluded brotherhood

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"watchdogs" have ever been devoted to name-calling and attacks on the faithful. The Corinthian brethren have many descendants in the modern church.

Perhaps one of the most popular, evil actions of a brother against a brother is to "whisper" or gossip. The apostle, Paul, "feared" such actions would be found being practiced by the members of the congregation at Corinth.

For I fear, lest, when I come, I should not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envying, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults (2 Cor. 12:20).

The term, whisperings, is *psithurismos* in the original and Bauer notes that secular Greeks (apocryphal writings) placed the term with *diabolai* (devil or demon) and with *katalalia* (412). The latter term literally means downspeaking and is often translated slander (cf. 1 Peter 2:1). Evil speaking can destroy a Christian brother and such actions are not to be a part of the characteristics of brethren. "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou are not a doer of the law, but a judge" (James 4:11).

Quoted above is 2 Corinthians 12:20, and in the verse are the terms, swellings and tumults. The word, swellings, is linguistically related to whisperings, but tumults derives from *akatastasia* and means something like commotions or confusions (Word Study, 21). Paul wrote of the times he was in tumults because of mistreatment (2 Cor. 6:5) and certainly those who cause disturbances in the church are

to be censored. External or secular commotions, however, are not to be feared by brethren. “But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by” (Luke 21:9).

Perhaps an attitude not generally studied, in terms of an evil action against a brother, is backbiting (cf. 2 Cor. 12:20). Backbiting is translated from *katalalia* (see above) and is connected to those who hate God (Rom. 1:30)! The sense of the word, backbiting is to speak against (James 4:11) or to talk back to another in a disrespectful way (Bauer, 412). Christians are to be respectful of all others:

Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren: The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters with all purity. Honour widows that are widows indeed ... Against an elder, receive not an accusation, but before two or three witness ... Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed (1 Tim. 5:1-3,20; 6:1).

To be impertinent is an evil action and not to be any part of the attitudes of Christians. People who are impolite, rude, insensitive, and “sassy” are actually blaspheming God! It is sad to know that the true, faithful servant of God is, often, not treated with respect by those who follow their carnal instincts. One brother was once asked where he got the material he had published about another and the answer given was, “From a worthy source.” In other words, there was no factual source for what was printed and, thus, no truth. Such a lack of integrity stems from

the sin of backbiting.)

The apostle Paul wrote of his "perils among false brethren" (2 Cor. 11:26). The evil of doctrinal error is rampant today and affects the universal church and all individual congregations. For example, false brethren from universities operated in connection with churches of Christ have published a commentary in which Old Testament prophecies are denied as existing, which error is an attack on the very verbal inspiration of God's Holy Word. And, some of those same brethren preach in pulpits of local congregations of churches of Christ and lead astray countless numbers of gullible brethren. Too, the untaught among God's people, today, trouble the church with "praise teams," "baby dedications," and a general lack of respect for the authority of scripture. Countless numbers of gospel preachers have been maligned, fired, disrespected, mocked, and lied about by those who cannot tolerate healthy, factual, Bible preaching (cf. 2 Tim. 4:1-5).

The worst thing is, that some of those attacking fellow Christians consider themselves to be gospel preachers, but on the other hand they do not practice compassion! In 1984 a brother wrote:

The practice of kindness and compassion is urged (although the words themselves are not used) in Ephesians 4:28: "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor; working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need." Galatians 6 contains several charges that can flow only from a heart of kindness and compassion: The erring brother is to be restored "in a spirit of gentleness" (v.1). We

are to “bear one another’s burdens” (v. 2). We are to supply the “good things” our teachers and preachers deserve (v. 6). We are to “do good unto all men” (v. 10). These beautiful traits are a inherent part of the practice of pure religion that will cause one to supply the needs of the orphan and widow (James 1:27). (McClish, 202).

The above sentiments should be part of every Christian’s arsenal in terms of how one should treat a brother-in-Christ.

One preacher, now deceased, but known to this writer, kept a file filled with mistakes made in writing by other preachers, which files were often used to “put down” those fellow preachers. The “file-keeper” also used the material to “write up” other preachers whenever the “file-keeper” thought it would further his reputation as a keeper of orthodoxy. In the last years of his life, the “file-keeper” repented of such activities and would often lament his earlier practice and comment that “No good ever came from my efforts to make myself look good at the expense of others. I have learned,” he said, “that there is a vast difference between defending the faith and attacking faithful brethren.” Paul wrote: “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32).

A Warning About Evil Actions

Jesus admonished His disciples that worship to God is impossible, if one knows that a brother-in-Christ has “aught” against one:

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Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and come and offer thy gift (Matt. 5:21-24).

The reverse would also be true. For if one had "aught" against his brother, that too would need to be settled before fellowship with the brother is restored (Matt. 18:15-20). God does not accept worship from those who hold evil thoughts or practice evil things against the family of God.

In fact, Jesus takes very personally attacks on His people. Note that when Saul of Tarsus made havoc of the early disciples, Jesus told Saul that he was persecuting Him. "And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me" (Acts 9:4)? Saul responded with amazement because he had no idea who was speaking to him. "And he said, who art thou Lord" (Acts 9:5a)? [The term, Lord, is kurios and in this instance means "Sir," for Saul did not yet know Jesus as Saul's Lord. (Bauer, 458-460).] Jesus answered Saul, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest" (Acts 9:5b). One must conclude from the reply from Jesus to Saul that actions against the church are, in essence, actions against the person of Christ.

Conclusion

The people of Judah of Isaiah's time were hypocritically "pointing the finger" at God and their fellow Jews (Isa. 58:9b). The condemnation of such actions was to be trumpeted throughout Judah and serves as a lesson for Christians today (Isa. 58:1; Rom. 15:4).

It seems, however, that evil actions such as castigating, gossiping, whispering, backbiting, tumults, false teaching, and thinking evil (among others) are still rampant among brethren today. It is quite evident that God is not pleased by such actions and certainly all such evil, impertinent, thoughts and deeds violate the golden rule: "Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12). May the Father help all of us avoid evil thoughts and actions.

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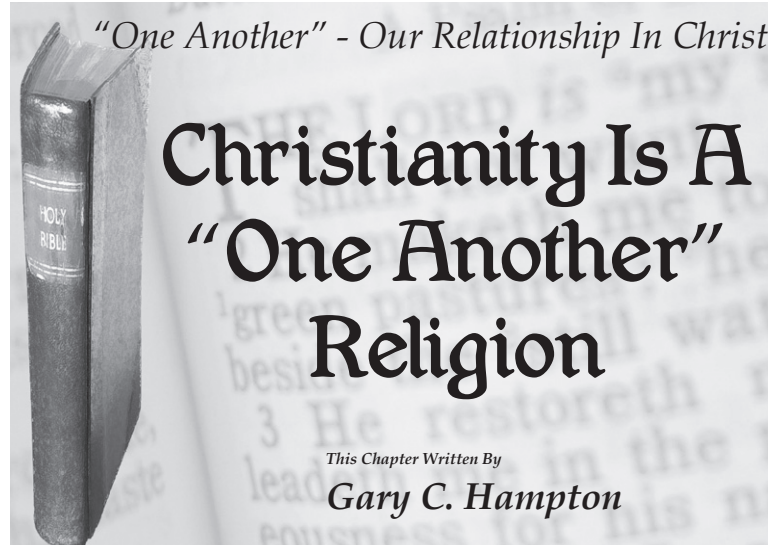
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In an era when many people insist on having their rights, the emphasis on “one another” in the New Testament seems odd. True followers of Christ must constantly be looking out for one another, because that is what the Lord did.

Serve One Another

The contrast between the two approaches is readily seen in Jesus’ response to a request made by James and John. They wanted to sit one on the right hand and the other on the left hand of Jesus when he was in his glory. The ten, having overheard the conversation, were very upset with the two sons of Zebedee.

But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever

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desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:35-45). [All quotes will be from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.]

Jesus also taught the apostles through his example on the night of his betrayal when he took up the towel and basin and washed their feet. After he had put his outer garments back on, he asked them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:12b-15).

The early church took the Lord’s example to heart, as is evidenced in the lengths to which they went in order to provide for one another’s needs. Luke reports that, “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need” (Acts 2:44-45). Paul commended Phoebe because of her service to the brethren. “I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also” (Rom. 16:1-2).

The Galatian brethren were freed from the law of Moses. However, Paul did not want them to think they were freed to do wicked things. Instead, they should

have been motivated in their actions to lovingly serve one another. Jesus considered loving one's neighbor as second only to the love of God (Mark 12:29-31). Thus, refusing to serve one's brethren is the first step on a hateful course. Paul cautioned the Galatian Christians that this would lead to biting and devouring until they finally consumed one another. When a negative spirit is allowed to run wild, it will eventually kill all the good a church has been doing and leave it to suffocate on its own critical breath (Gal. 5:13-15).

Love One Another

As has already been seen in Paul's words to the Galatians, love and service go hand in hand. Such was certainly the case with our Lord. After they had gone out from the meal on the betrayal night, Jesus explained that he would soon be glorified and go to a place they could not come. So he told them,

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:34-35).

John wrote his children in the faith and told them, "He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes" (1 John 2:9-11). Later, he explained that love for God is shown through loving one's brethren. "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates

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his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also” (4:20-21).

Paul saw love as an essential ingredient in the Christian’s service.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

He went on to conclude, “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13). So, at the end of the letter, Paul urged the Corinthian brethren, by saying, “Let all that you do be done with love” (16:14).

For love to truly be effective within the family of God, it must be practiced to the fullest. Remember, Peter said, “have fervent love for one another.” Vine says the word translated “fervent” means strained or stretched out. Imagine one of your children has fallen in a river and is floating downstream toward a waterfall. As you run down the bank, you see a limb extending out over the river. You climb out on the limb and reach down, only to discover you cannot quite reach out far enough. Surely you would stretch and strain to reach that child

before it went over the precipice. That seems to be the idea contained within Peter's command. Christians are to stretch and strain to aid their brethren.

In Hebrews 12:12-15, Christians are pictured as running a race, like a marathon, through enemy territory. They are urged to support each other and make special provision for those who are weak. Further, they are told to be sure no bitterness arises that could cause people to be troubled and defiled. After similar admonitions, Paul writes, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:1-4). John went so far as to say the brother who had what another brother needed and withheld it did not have the love of God in him (1 John 3:16-19)!

Forgive One Another

Love exercised completely among brethren will cover a multitude of sins, as Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:8. This may be accomplished in several ways, especially in forgiveness. Christians practice forgiveness because of what the Lord did on Calvary. "Therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do" (Col. 3:12-13). A similar reference is found in the apostle's letter to the church in Ephesus. "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (4:32).

When one really loves, it will result in a readiness to forgive like Jesus displayed when He said, "Father, forgive

them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). Of course, they still had to repent, but Jesus had already exhibited a willingness to forgive before they acknowledged their sins and turned away from them by putting Him on in baptism (Acts 2:22-23, 36-38). After all, love “does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth” (1 Cor. 13:6). Stephen exhibited the same characteristic as his Lord when he was being stoned to death. Luke reports, “When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’” Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’” Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’” And when he had said this, he fell asleep (Acts 7:54-60).

Such a forgiving attitude will cause brothers to go in search of their straying brother in hope of getting him to come home to God in repentance. “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20). Those who are spiritual will humbly seek to restore them and will gladly help to bear their burdens (Galatians 6:1-2). This is especially true of the shepherds who watch over the

flock, which is the reason Christians ought to obey them. “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17). Of course, care should be taken lest the one seeking to restore a brother is caught in Satan’s web. “And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh” (Jude 22-23).

Bearing With One Another

Bearing with one another goes hand in hand with forgiveness. To the saints in Ephesus, the apostle to the Gentiles wrote,

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love (Eph. 4:1-2).

Similarly, he told the Colossian saints,

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do (3:12-13).

Christians endure with fellow members of the family of God by refusing to speak evil of each other (Jam. 4:11). Further, James warned his Christian readers against grumbling and blaming others for their problems, even though such might have been natural as they endured

the great external pressure of persecution. James said such blaming of one another would lead to condemnation. Instead, he told them to always be prepared for the judge’s return by picturing Jesus at the door ready to enter. They would not want to be guilty of wrongful, or harsh judgment, knowing the judge was ready to come any time (James 5:9).

Forbearance likewise might be encouraged by following James’ instruction to “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (5:16). Literally, he was instructing his readers to “keep on confessing” their sins to one another and to “keep on praying” for one another. Observe that no one in the Lord’s church is set above any other one. Each is instructed to confess to one another. When every brother is willing to acknowledge his sins and ask for his brothers’ prayers, there is an attitude of openness which invites each to endure with the other.

Care For One Another

To help the Roman Christians understand the nature of the church, Paul compared it to a body. He explained, “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (Rom. 12:4-5). In the physical body, the members are sympathetic to one another to the point that the whole body hurts when a toe is stubbed or a finger is smashed. Thus, Paul told the Corinthian brethren, “But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same

care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor. 12:24b-26).

The care Christians have for one another will lead to numerous thoughtful actions. Paul told the members of the Roman church, “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way” (Rom. 14:13). These instructions immediately followed his explanation of what had been happening. Apparently, the weak brethren judged, or condemned, the strong, while the strong looked down upon the weak and counted them as unworthy of their fellowship. Both should have recognized that God will judge all according to His law and all will ultimately submit to his authority (Isa. 45:23). Each will answer to God and should not condemn others in matters of opinion. Senseless arguments over unanswered questions risk causing a brother to stumble (Rom. 14:10-13; 1 Cor. 8:12).

Later, the apostle went on to say,

Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God (Rom. 15:5-7).

This was the apostle’s injunction to strive for unity and the good of the brethren, following the example of the Savior. This was to be accomplished through unity both in inward feelings and outward expressions of praise and devotion toward God.

To Christians at Philippi, Paul wrote,

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Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others (2:2-4).

The Philippian church had already given Paul much cause for rejoicing (1:4; 4:1). He pleaded with them to complete his joy by being united in thought, love, work and purpose. Even elders are not to be self-willed (Titus 1:7). Christians agree in Biblical principle. That agreement can form the basis of a working relationship, which would produce a likemindedness.

To avoid division, they would have to avoid selfish ambition, or the promotion of a party spirit for personal gain (1:16; 3 John 9-11). Conceit, which is very similar to selfish ambition, is a desire to have self lifted into a high, honored position in men's eyes. In place of these things, Christ's followers should be humble, which is another way of saying lowliness of mind (1 Peter 5:6). Disciples should learn to appreciate, even look for, the good qualities of others and always treat the other man as one who is worthy of service. Consideration for others' needs, in the Christian life, must come before self. As Paul told the Roman brethren, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another” (Rom. 12:10; John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:10-11, 18). Of course, this is not the interest shown by a busybody, but the genuine concern of one who would help another bear his burdens.

Care for fellow Christians is also displayed in simple acts of thoughtfulness. For instance, Paul told Roman

Christians to, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another” (12:10). When the church in Corinth combined the eating of a common meal with eating the Lord’s supper, they only took care of their own hunger or thirst. Paul said this resulted in a failure to thankfully remember the great sacrifice of the Lord on Calvary’s tree and was jeopardizing the souls of brethren.

Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment (1 Cor. 11:33-34a).

Provoke One Another

Each believer’s care for the other will surely shine in the assemblies of the saints, as the previous verse shows. The writer to Hebrew Christians who were evidently considering going back to serve God under the Law of Moses were given specific directions concerning their assemblies.

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching (Heb. 10:24-25).

Christian assemblies stir up through a number of means. For instance, singing is a means of stirring up through teaching. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16).

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Christian gatherings also present a good opportunity to confess trespasses to one another and pray for one another (James 5:16). Gathering around the Lord’s table is a wonderful reminder of the unity Christ’s followers have in his one spiritual body, the church (1 Cor. 10:16-17). Hearing messages from God’s word likewise challenges and provokes Christian growth.

Conclusion

Just as surely as Christ focused on others when he came to earth to conquer death, his followers are enjoined to focus on one another. Jesus came to serve others and his disciples should serve others. Christians should demonstrate love for one another as Jesus demonstrated love for them. Forgiveness is a natural outflow of love, both in the life of Christ and in his body, the church. When one loves another, he will also bear with him even though he makes slow progress toward the goal or repeatedly falls. As a part of the body of Christ, Christians should exhibit care for their brethren. They should similarly provoke each brother through faithfully attending the assemblies of the saints. Ultimately, the goal of every Christian should be to spend eternity with each brother with whom he comes in contact. Thus, Christ’s brethren will focus on “one another.”

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