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Living Out Our Faith in Community

Romans 12:4-5

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and ***individually members one of another.***

When it comes to Christianity, to think correctly is to think corporately. As Millard Erickson puts it, “There is no such thing as an isolated, solitary Christian life” (Christian Theology, p. 1039). The Bible teaches that we share a common life in Christ and that we are joined to Jesus.

Since all true believers are intimately united to Christ as the common Head of the whole body, and we share a common life, it follows that we must be intimately united together.

In Ephesians 4:11-13a, it says that Christ “gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God.”

These men that are given by Christ help the church to mature and bring stability to it. Their ministry helps the Church resist the forces that could corrupt or destroy it. “As a result, we are no longer to be children tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine . . . but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him.” And “the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body ***for the building up of itself in love***” (Eph. 4:14-16).

Key to the doctrine of the church is the understanding that the Church builds itself up in love and every person is involved in the process; as Ephesians 4:16 says, this building up takes place through the proper working of each individual part. In other words, we live out our Christian faith in real life, in real relationships, in real ministry to real, flesh-and-blood people in community. We live out our faith with pleasant, gentle, and mature saints. We also live it out with people who are hard to live with and those who are socially awkward and drain our energy. And yet, “it is as if God were saying, ‘Until you learn to love this person, to put up with mind-numbing annoyances, to forgive him for the same sin over and over again, to invite him into your home even when he repulses you – until you learn to relate to this impossible person, you’ll never know what it is like for Me to relate to you’” (The Enduring Community, 121). These are all means of grace appointed by God to help us be Godward.

With these things in mind, it is not a surprise to discover that Paul used the word “one another” (*allelon*; ἀλλήλων) nearly 40 times to instruct Christians in their mutual responsibilities to their fellow believers. “Without question, when members of the local church faithfully practice these one-another injunctions, the Body of Christ will build itself up in love (Eph. 4:16)” (Getz, Measure, 189-190).

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1. Love one another:

- John 15:12: This is My commandment, that you **love one another**, just as I have loved you ...
- John 15:17: This I command you, that you **love one another**.
- John 13:34- 35 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that **you also love one another**. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you **have love for one another**."

"The new commandment is simple enough for a toddler to memorize and appreciate, profound enough that the most mature believers are repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they comprehend it and put it into practice: *love one another even as I have loved you, that you also love one another*" (Carson, 484).

The commandment to love one another is not new because nothing like it has ever been said before.

Leviticus 19:18 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

The Law and the prophets were summed up by these commandments:

Mark 12

30 AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.'

31 "The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Romans 13

8 Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.

9 For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Galatians 5

14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

The commandment to love in John 13 is new for at least three reasons:

(1) This love is based on the new relationship we share in common with Christ (Morris); it is *possible* that this love is tied to the new covenant (I Cor. 11:25) and the promise of the transformation of the heart and mind (Jer. 31:29-34; Ezek. 36:24-26).

(2) It is based on a new, higher standard. Jesus said, "Love one another EVEN AS I LOVED YOU."

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(3) The love Jesus is speaking about is to reflect the love relationship between the Father and the Son and is designed to bring about the type of unity that characterizes the Father and the Son (Jn. 17:20-26). Therefore, to love one another is not only an obligation to be lived out, it is the means by which the love of the Father and the Son is expressed before a watching world. Christians are not to love each other more and the world less, rather their love for one another is to reflect their new status and experience as children of God – reflecting the mutual love between the Father and the Son and imitating the love that has been shown to them (Carson, 484-485).

Jesus said the key to *His* love was his relationship with God the Father: “I abide in His love” (Jn. 15:10). Jesus lives in constant and perfect union with the Father. The effect is that the Father’s love moves into Jesus and lives there. Then in John 15:9 Jesus said, “Abide in my love.” So He abides in His Father's love, and we are to abide in His love. That’s how we are able to love each other “as He loves us.” He loves us by abiding in the love of the Father. We love each other by abiding in the love of the Son—which is the love of the Father.

“We can see the picture Jesus has in His mind in John 15:5: “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” You cannot love each other as I command you to love, if you do not abide in Me as I abide in My Father.”

“So the newness of Jesus’ commandment is not only that Jesus has become our *pattern* for love by taking the role of a servant, but also that Jesus has become our *power* for love by Himself abiding in the Father so that as we abide in Him we are given the very love of the Father with which to love each other” (Piper, September 14, 2008 John Piper John 13:31-35 By John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: desiringGod.org).

2. Be devoted to one another:

- Romans 12:10: **Be devoted to one another in brotherly love**; give preference to one another in honor;

The particular Greek word for “be devoted” is only used once in the NT; however, it is not a rare word outside the New Testament. In Greek, it refers to “tender affection, particularly family affection” (Cranfield, Romans, II, 632); that strong, natural affection between parents and their children or between siblings.

In other words, this verse is calling for Christians to have “tender affection toward each other in family love.” Christians should love each other with the same affection that they have toward their nearest relatives.

In Philippians 1:8, Paul also speaks of his affection toward the church in “family language.” He says, “For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.” “The word for ‘affection’ is ‘intestines’ or ‘inner organs.’ The idea is: I long for you and love you not just with an act of will power but with deep and tender affections. I miss you. I am homesick for you” (Piper, Ro. 12:9-10, June 4, 1995). In other words, I am to speak to you, to act toward you, and to think of you as I do my own flesh-and-blood brother.

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3. Give preference to one another:

- Romans 12:10: Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; **give preference to one another in honor;**

To “give preference” has the idea of going before another or leading. Figuratively, it means to set an example. We are to set an example in honoring, or take the lead in honoring others. Instead of looking and waiting to be praised, we should seek to honor others. In essence, this is humility.

I Peter 5:5 says, “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

Likewise in Philippians 2:3-4 Paul says, **“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”**

“Selfish ambition” comes from the idea of a “hireling,” or, “one who works for pay.” One man describes it as “the nature of those who cannot lift their gaze to higher things.” It’s the person who puts their own interests first, seeking something in return. Do not act like a hireling in your actions toward fellow believers.

“Conceit” is composed of the word “glory” (doxa, δόξα) and forms a stark contrast to the glory Paul mentions in the gospel. In its proper perspective glory is the fruit of the Christian’s life (Phil. 1:11), the result of confessing Jesus as Lord (Phil. 2:11), an attribute of Christ (Phil. 4:19), and will be attributed to God forever (Phil. 4:20). Conceit is trying to move the glory from God to self and is not only unbecoming of a Christian but destructive to the body. In contrast to conceit, the spirit of humility exemplified in Christ (Phil. 2:6-8), builds the body. Until we possess true humility we will never be able to put another’s interests above our own.

4. Be of the same mind toward one another:

- Romans 12:16: **Be of the same mind toward one another;** do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.

Being of the same mind emphasizes unity or harmony (II Cor. 13:11; Phil. 2:2; Ro. 15:5). The church shares the same Lord and faith. We have the same Head. Our desire should be to work together for the common good of the body and for the cause of Christ, rather than seeking personal advantage. We should be united in our feelings, interests, and objectives, not trying to personally aspire, or having an arrogant attitude or condescending spirit toward others. We should exalt Christ and build up His church by being imitators of Him (Phil. 2:1-8).

The biggest barrier toward accepting all men equally is pride, which is being wise in our own estimation. “Overly exulted opinion of ourselves, leading us to think that we are always right and others wrong and

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that our opinions matter more than others, often prevents the church from exhibiting the unity to which God calls her. The positive antidote to such pride, Paul says, is in association with 'the lowly'" (Moo, 783).

This verse goes beyond agreement in theology; it speaks of a harmony where we are to actually feel toward one another the way Christ feels toward us.

5. Build up one another:

- Romans 14:19: so then let us pursue the things which make for peace and ***the building up of one another.***

The image is one of building a house. The opposite of this is found in the next verse; Romans 14:20. There it says, "Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. "

Believers are to be built up, not torn down. We are to pursue "such things as will have a tendency to increase the faith and establishment of each other" (Haldane, Romans, p. 606).

In the context of Romans 14, we are to even abstain from personal freedom to pursue peace and build each other up in service to Christ. We should not be spending our time correcting or judging other people's freedoms. Neither should we pursue exercising our freedoms at all costs. We should pursue the things which "make for peace and the building up of one another."

6. Accept one another:

- Romans 15:7: Wherefore, ***accept one another***, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

Romans 15:7 sums up and draws the conclusion from all that has been said from Romans 14:1. Paul has stressed that the strong are to accept the weak, but now he insists that every Christian must accept one other. There should be mutual love and agreement.

Accept does not refer here to condoning sinful behavior or overlooking that which threatens or disturbs the peace and purity of the church. The word means "receive." It means to take to oneself. It means to take a special interest in the other person. It means to warmly welcome them into fellowship. In Acts 28:2 Luke wrote, "And the natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and *received* us all."

Our acceptance of each other is modeled by Christ. His actions flowed from His heart's desire to give glory to God. He did this by denying Himself and bearing our weaknesses. We would be ignoring His work if we did not apply the same attitude in our relationships with others. "Now Christ has received, and does receive, all who believe the truth even in the feeblest manner. He accepts those who have the lowest degree of faith in Him" (Haldane, 613). We should be as accepting of others as Christ is of us.

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7. Admonish one another:

- Romans 15:14: And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to **admonish one another**.

The Greek word for “admonish” is made up of two words: “mind” (nous; νοῦς) and “to place” (tithemi; τίθημι), perhaps meaning to put ideas in the mind. “It presupposes an opposition that has to be overcome. It seeks to correct the mind, to put right what was wrong, to improve the spiritual attitude. . . . The basic idea is that of the well-meaning earnestness with which one seeks to influence the mind and disposition by appropriate instruction, exhortation, warning, and correction” (TDNT IV, 1019). It “is designed to correct without provoking or embittering.” It is to “show the hearer what he is and what he should be” (TDNT, IV, 1021).

Biblical admonition is a specific kind of instruction. In the words of Charles Hodge, it is “to bring the truth seasonably to bear on the mind and conscience” (Romans, p. 437). Admonition is not the duty of pastors and elders exclusively. This is a mutual obligation that may be effectively carried on and properly done by those who are full of kind feelings (goodness) and who are well-informed Biblically and theologically (knowledge).

8. Greet one another:

- Romans 16:16: **greet one another** with a holy kiss.

The kiss is a near Eastern mode of salutation akin to our handshake here in the West. This is an injunction to more than a common courtesy. The Scripture qualifies this kiss as “holy” (I Cor. 16:20; II Cor. 13:12; I Pet. 5:14). That adjective lifts this action to an expression of that peculiar love Christians should have for one another.

You would think that every Christian would be able to at least greet one another. But there are many who enter the place of corporate worship, take a seat, and speak to no one, seemingly incapable or unwilling to take the initiative to extend even the most basic courtesy among Christians – a warm greeting (Ferrell, *Life Together: Called to a Community of Faith*).

9. Serve one another:

- Galatians 5:13: For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love **serve one another** (cf. I Pet. 4:10).

The root of the verb “serve” is related to the word “slave.” The Greeks found personal dignity in the fact that they were free. To be a slave meant that human autonomy was set aside and the will of another took precedence above their own. It meant that a person had no possibility of evading the tasks set upon him, or no right of personal choice. It was a repugnant concept and utterly rejected by the Greeks

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and Greek philosophers. The Greek believed that the real man should serve his own desires with boldness and cleverness (TDNT II, 82, 265).

Christians, though they have been rescued from the powers which aimed to subjugate them and isolate them from the life of God (Ro. 6:17-18), realize that their new freedom is not autonomy.

In Luke 22:25-30, Jesus said to His disciples, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves."

A Greek would have had no trouble answering Jesus question, "For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves?" Jesus doesn't even dispute the answer, but He points to a new pattern for human behavior. The uncontested leader of the disciples, the one who knows He is Lord of the Kingdom of God and has authority to appoint the disciples to positions of authority declares, "I am among you as the One who serves"(Carson).

Christ has set us free from your bondage to sin to be servants of one another.

10. Show forbearance to one another:

- Ephesians 4:1-3: Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, **showing forbearance for one another in love**, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- Colossians 3:12-13: And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; **bearing with one another**, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against any one; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

The word "forbearance" means to be patient with, to endure and to put up with. "Showing forbearance" clarifies what it means to be patient. As believers bear with one another's sins, weaknesses, tensions and conflicts, they exhibit a lifestyle that is in harmony with their divine calling (O'Brien, 278). This can only be possible because God's love is the source, as the words "in love" make clear. Paul has just prayed in 3:17 that the believer be rooted and grounded in love; now he urges them to live accordingly.

William Hendriksen says, "The person who endures injury tries to pay no attention to it ... We, too, at times use a somewhat similar expression when we say, "You should put up with his ill behavior." However, in saying this we do not always mean exactly what the apostle has in mind. We may simply be referring to suffering injury without open resentment, though we boil within! Paul, however, very aptly combines the forbearance of which he is speaking with the inner disposition of love" (Galatians / Ephesians, 184). John MacArthur says, "Forbearing love takes abuse from others while continuing to love them" (Ephesians, 127).

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11. Be kind to one another:

- Ephesians 4:32: And **be kind to one another**, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

The word for “kind” also means “helpful” or “mild.” All three meanings reflect a type of attitude toward others (TDNT, IX, 487). The reason kindness is important is that it is so clearly linked with the Gospel. In Ephesians 4:32 it is tied to the forgiveness of Christ along with being tender-hearted. Romans 2:4 states, “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance.”

Kindness is a quality of God Himself (Ps. 24:7; 30:19; 65:11). In Jeremiah 33:11; 24:2,3,5, the prophet speaks of God’s kindness in the midst of Israel’s sin (cf. Eph. 2:7; Ro. 11:22; Tit. 3:4).

- Luke 6:35: love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.

In response to God’s kindness, those who have put on the new self are to be kind to fellow believers. Kindness cannot be generated from the human will, but is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Simply put, to be unkind to others is to show that you have forgotten God’s kindness to you in Christ.

12. Confess your sins to one another:

- James 5:16: Therefore, **confess your sins to one another**, and pray for one another so that you may be healed . . .

The Bible emphasizes mutual or reciprocal confession of sin. “Confession” in its Greek root means “to say the same thing.” When we confess our sins we agree to call sin what it really is. Confession isn’t made with excuses; it is a frank identification of sin as sin. Regular confession is healing. Though the context implies physical healing, healing also takes place in the soul (Matt. 13:15; Jn. 12:40; Heb. 12:12-13; I Pet. 2:24).

13. Pray for one another :

- James 5:16: Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and **pray for one another** so that you may be healed. . .

James’ emphasis is on the power of prayer that is available to ordinary people. God stopped the normal cycle of the earth in response to the prayer of Elijah. This, of course, does not mean that Elijah could stop the rain at will, but rather because he was righteous and his thoughts aligned themselves with the thoughts of God, God used Elijah’s prayer as the medium to accomplish His will.

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We must pray for those individual persons with whom we are in fellowship. We must pray for those over us in the Lord - pastors, elders, and deacons. We must pray especially for the weak, the vulnerable, and the struggling among us. Puritan Thomas Manton, in his commentary on James, says, "Joint striving [in prayer] mutually for the good of each other makes the work prosper. Not to pray for others is uncharitableness; not to expect it from others is pride" (p. 461).

14. Be hospitable to one another:

- 1 Peter 4:9: **Be hospitable to one another** without complaint.

Simply defined, hospitality is the willingness to welcome people into your home who don't ordinarily belong there. Most see hospitality as primarily an act where Christians would invite other Christians into their homes as overnight guests. Because Inns were unavailable, this was a courtesy extended to others. Though this was no doubt true, there is nothing in the context that suggests that this is the only application of hospitality. God says believers are to be hospitable "to one another", which suggests that it was an activity that took place in the local Christian community where reciprocal action could be experienced. If that is so, then Peter could have been referring to believers opening their homes for worship and fellowship since at that time local assemblies of believers didn't have a building dedicated to such purposes, but met in homes instead. Hospitality could be costly to the family who was offering their home, for it marked them as Christians and set them up as a target for persecution by the unbelieving community.

Looking far back in the history of God's people, hospitality was considered to be an act of the righteous. When Job was protesting about his suffering, he reminded God of his virtues. He told God that he had never neglected hospitality. In Job 31:32 he said, "The stranger did not lodge in the street: but I opened my doors to the traveler." This is not surprising because the Lord himself said that Job was "blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil" (Job 1:1). Lot also opened his doors to the strangers who approached him at Sodom and went to extreme measures to be hospitable.

With these examples in our history, it is odd that for many Christians hospitality is not even on their radar as something that pleases God.

CONCLUSION: "God intends for each member of a local church to function in order for the Church to become a loving and unified community" (Getz, Measure, p.189). It is according to the proper working of each individual part that causes the growth of the body *for the building up of itself in love*" (Eph. 4:16).