

Body Life - #5

Members of One Another

Introduction – We have one Head, and we are His body. This is inescapable, as much as our independent streaks and autonomous tendencies teach us otherwise. If you have been baptized into Christ, you have been bound by covenant and placed into His church. You are eternally connected to these people around you. This means you must learn how to live with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Connected to One Another (Rom 12:3-5) – Our connection to the body of Christ is through the Head, Jesus Christ. But our connection to the body, nonetheless, makes us “members of one another”. Establishing community must begin with this theological truth and not with our preferences. You don’t have the right to determine how involved you are going to be any more than your right lung gets to decide how involved it will be in your ‘body-life’.

Think Soberly – Elders and Deacons are to be honored, but none of us must think too highly of ourselves. How should we think? We must see ourselves as members of one body and never as autonomous individuals or part of an elite sub-group (see v16). Our giftedness is by grace (vv 6-8) and our use of those gifts should be gracious, generous, and with an eye to serving, not lording over.

Love Without Hypocrisy (vv9-13) – Look at this descriptive list again. This is the practical outworking of members who know they are connected.

Bitterness – Poison in the Body (Eph 4:31) – If we are a covenant people, then one member cannot have bitterness towards another without the whole body being affected.

The Tricks of Bitterness – *First*, bitterness grows out of a sense, real or imagined, of being wronged by someone else. If you keep it in, it makes you sick. If you let it out, it simply spreads to those around you (James 3:14-15). That is why it must be ‘*put away from you*’. *Second*, bitterness tries to look righteous, pointing out the transgressions of others, but it really is not interested in how great the sin is, but in how close the sin was to me. *Third*, bitterness keeps you from considering that it is quite often a sin to be offended. What happened to not thinking too highly of yourself?

Diagnosing Bitterness – Are you bitter? Can you remember the details of another’s sin – for weeks and years? Are you prepared to forgive *only* after he says that he is sorry and really means it? Do you know how many times he did that this last week, or since you have known him? When bitterness exists, soon there is “*wrath, anger, clamor...evil speaking...and malice*” as well.

Only One Way – Time does not remove bitterness. Someone else’s confession does not remove bitterness. Confession of your own sin of bitterness and repentance by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is the only way to be cleansed of this poison. As Amy Carmichael said, “*For a cup brimful of sweet water cannot spill even one drop of bitter water, however suddenly jolted*”. The bumps will come. What will spill out of you on the rest of the body?

Forgiveness – As We Have Been (Eph 4:32) – This is the fruit of God’s salvation in your life. You can forgive one another, and you must. Jesus taught us to pray that God would forgive us our debts in the same way that we forgive others (Matt 6:12). Christ is assuming He is speaking to a disciple, that is, one who forgives others. I must question my own forgiveness (and hence my salvation) if I am not one who extends forgiveness (Col 3:13).

Christlike Forgiveness – If we are to forgive as Christ forgives, then we must be prepared to do so immediately and completely. We must be prepared to forgive often, for we are forgiven often. And we must forgive with full reconciliation of the relationship, for we have been reconciled to God. “*For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy*” (James 2:13).

Building Community – (1 Pet 4:9-10) It is not enough to handle the bumps of relationships in our community (avoiding bitterness and extending forgiveness). This won’t be so hard if we never see one another. But we must love one another, and that means many things. Consider these two.

Hospitality – This means opening your home up to others. It is not the woman’s job, for the men must lead here as well. Elders are required to be hospitable (1 Tim 3:2). Your dining room table is to be a place of feasting, fellowship, remembering, teaching, and sharing. You are required to ‘*pursue hospitality*’ (Rom 12:13) and you are to do so ‘*without grumbling*’ (1 Pet 4:9). Of course, it will be hard work – but we are members of one another.

‘Deacon’ Your Gifts (v10) – What has the Lord given you? Time, talents, treasures. Who do you see with a need? Give yourself, your time, your things, your best, to the body around you. Why? We are members of one another. If we pursue this, we will be “*good stewards of the manifold grace of God*”. If we do not, then we will be like the wicked and lazy steward who buried his talent in the ground. Do not be found like that in the Day of Judgment.

Dave Hatcher – June 3, 2001