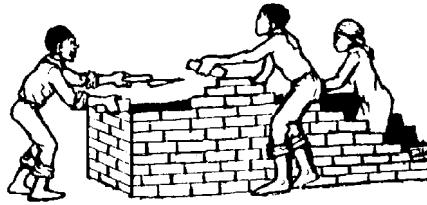


# Building Up One Another



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## Resources:

Much of this material comes from Gene Getz, *Building Up One Another* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986). <http://www.peacemakers.net/unity/buildinguponeanother.htm>

Hampton Keathley, “One-Another Commands from Scripture” at [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org).

John MacArthur, *The Body Dynamic* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 1996)

Others as noted.

**Introduction:**

The NT frequently uses the term “one another” when describing how believers are to interact. When all the “one another” passages are considered, several different responsibilities emerge. This study will examine several significant actions Christians are to take toward one another to help build up the local church. As the individual members of the church implement these responsibilities, the church itself will become stronger. This series of lessons is designed to help members of a local church to recognize their responsibilities to one another and to strengthen the unity and ministry of the church as members implement these principles.



## Building Up One Another

### Lesson 1: Fellowship, the Foundation and Motivation for One-Another Ministry<sup>1</sup>

One-another church ministry is primarily based on a clear NT principle: fellowship. The care and concern church members display toward one another is a result of the fellowship those members enjoy. Unfortunately, many believers have lost sight of what the Bible means when it speaks of fellowship. Too often when Christians think of fellowship, they think in terms of what goes on in that room in the church called “fellowship hall,” namely, eating and visiting. Such a definition falls far short of the NT teaching. Since fellowship is a very important part of caring for one another, this study will begin by answering the question—what is meant by fellowship in the New Testament?

*Ac 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

The biblical word “fellowship” (*koinonia*) is based on the word “common.” To “have fellowship” with someone means that you share something in common with one another. Fellowship implies communion or intimate communication based on this commonality. The concept can be boiled down to two main ideas:

- (1) “To share together, take part together” in the sense of participation and partnership, and
- (2) “To share with” in the sense of giving to or receiving from others, sharing what we have with one another.

Since fellowship is so important and forms an essential foundation for understanding the ministry we are to have with one another, let’s look at the main concepts of NT fellowship.

#### I. Fellowship Means Relationship (1 Cor 1:9; 1 John 1:3, 6-7)

What do all Christians share in common? Faith in Christ as their Lord and Savior. This common faith binds all genuine believers together. Christians can have fellowship with one another because they have a fellowship with God through His Son, and because they can share together in Christ’s life and hold His purposes in common. One’s union with Christ forms the basis and foundation for fellowship among believers.

- A. NT fellowship is first a sharing together in a common life, the life of the Savior, with other believers through relationship with God and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- B. Fellowship is primarily a relationship rather than an activity. Any activity that follows is to flow out of this relationship. Here is the common ground, the core and the heartbeat of all Christian fellowship that is truly biblical.
- C. This means that fellowship occurs in two spheres or levels—with God and with others who are properly related to God. Each supports and promotes the other.

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this material in this chapter is from J. Hampton Keathley, “One-Another Commands from Scripture” at [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org).

- D. The fellowship Christians experience with one another should far surpass the kind of camaraderie that other groups may enjoy. The church ought to be a place of warm, tender-hearted compassion, concern, and love (Jn 13:34; 1 Jn 4:11).

Note: The word “fellowship” when describing one’s relationship with God is synonymous with salvation (1 Jn 1:3). Technically speaking, genuine Christians cannot be “out of fellowship” with God. If you are saved, you have fellowship with God. Sin can hinder that relationship and take away the joy of our salvation, but sin cannot break our union with God.

## II. Fellowship Means Partnership

- A. As sharers together of the person and life of Jesus Christ, we are automatically partners in His work here on earth. Believers become partners with one another as they share in His concerns, goals, priorities, and leadership.

*Lu 5:10 And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners [koinonos] with Simon.*

- B. The word “partnership” describes how we are related to each other in our relationship with God: we are partners in an enterprise and calling in which we are to work together in a common purpose to obtain common objectives for the glory of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 28:18-20; Phil 1:27).

## III. Fellowship Means Companionship, Communion

- A. Definition of Companionship: The interchange or the communication (communion) that exists among companions, that is, those associated together through a relationship they hold in common. The key ingredient to companionship is communication – interchange, communion, sharing.

- B. Definition of Communication:

1. Communication is the interchange or the sharing of concepts, feelings, ideas, information, needs, burdens, etc., so all members can share and thus minister to each other.
2. What does companionship through communication include?
  - a) Communication with God through various forms of worship.
  - b) Communication with other Christians
    - (1) Through worship—the Lord’s supper (communion); the singing of hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs; prayer; the ministry of the Word; confession of sin
    - (2) Through sharing burdens and blessings
    - (3) Through exhortation, praise, prayer, and physical help
3. This means we must develop the loving art of communication for the purpose of ministry, encouragement, and edification. It implies:
  - a) a willingness to share our own hurts, burdens, and aspirations
  - b) a willingness to listen to others so we may minister to needs according to the directives of the Word
  - c) a willingness to conform our language to biblical guidelines and standards (Eph 4:29)

IV. Fellowship Means Stewardship (Management)

- A. A steward is one who manages the property of another. He is not an owner, he is only a manager. All that we have in reality belongs to God (Ps 50:10-11; 104:24-25; Dan 2:38), and it is required of stewards that they be found faithful to the stewardship entrusted to them (1 Cor 4:1-2).
- B. Having things in common requires that each partner in the work be a good manager of the things under his administration. What kind of partnership would it be if one partner took all the income and enjoyed all the privileges of the partnership, while the other partner did all the work and paid all the bills? Partners are to share in all the aspects of their enterprise (cf. Luke 5:7-10).
- C. Biblical stewardship includes five general areas: time, talents (spiritual gifts), temple (our bodies as the very dwelling place of the Spirit [1 Cor. 6:19]), God's truth (the Bible), and our treasures (our earthly goods, financial resources, etc.).
- D. One of the most prominent uses of the word "fellowship" in the NT is the sharing material blessings, i.e., giving money to meet financial needs (Rom 12:13, 15:26-27; 2 Cor 8:4, 9:13; Gal 6:6; Phil 4:15; Heb 13:16).
- E. As partners in Christ's enterprise on earth, we each need to share and invest all aspects of our stewardship with our partners in the pursuit of God's goals for the church.

Note the Quote: What is Christian fellowship today? ... Fellowship occurs when Christians get together to discuss the Word of God and share concerns in the power of the Holy Spirit. ... When there is true fellowship, Christians don't judge one another. They don't bite and devour one another. They don't provoke, envy, lie to, speak evil of, or grumble about one another. Since true fellowship builds up, Christians receive one another and are kind and tenderhearted toward one another. They forbear and forgive one another, serve one another, practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another, admonish, instruct, submit to, and comfort one another. That is the true fellowship of the Body. It is life touching life to bring blessing and spiritual growth.<sup>2</sup>

Conclusion: Fellowship is the basis and motivation for all of the "one another" responsibilities Christians have in the context of the church. Since we have a common relationship with God through Christ, it follows that we work together as partners, communicate properly with one another, and share resources to accomplish biblical goals.

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<sup>2</sup>John MacArthur, *The Body Dynamic* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Chariot Victor Pub., 1996), 117.



## Building Up One Another

### Lesson 2: Members of One Another

Rom 12:5 *So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.*

Paul frequently illustrates the truth of this verse by comparing the church to a human body. Approximately half of the times he used the word, he was referring to the human, physical body with its many parts and members. In the other half, he applied the term to the Church, the body of Christ.

#### I. The Analogy: a church is like a human body

In 1 Corinthians, Paul uses the word “body” 13 times to illustrate how a church body actually functions (read 1 Cor 12:14-27). The other major passages teaching the same truth are Romans 12:4-8 and Ephesians 4:4, 11-16, 25. Just like a human body, the members of a church must work together and help one another.

#### II. The Application: the church should be unified

- A. No member of Christ’s body should feel he is more important than another member of Christ’s body. The outwardly visible parts (mouth, hands, feet, eyes) can do nothing without the hidden parts (bones, ligaments, muscles, blood). Could the hands or feet or tongue operate without controlling muscles and the all-controlling brain? Obviously not.
- B. No individual Christian can function effectively by himself. A body of Christ (i.e., a local church) is made up of many members, and each one is important. No member can say “I don’t need you.” We all need each other.
- C. Although one person may have a more responsible position, in God’s sight even the person who may go unnoticed is just as important and necessary in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:22-23).

Rom 12:3 *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.*

- D. Christians must work hard at creating unity in the body of Christ. The “many members” (1 Cor 12:12) of a body must work in concert. Not one of us can function effectively by ourselves; need each other. Not one of us is more important than any other Christian, even though one of us may have a more obvious or significant position in the body.

1Co 1:10 *Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

Eph 4:3 *Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Note the Quote: Every biblical metaphor of the church, without exception, emphasizes its unity. The church is one Bride with one husband; one Flock with one shepherd; the Branches on one vine; one Kingdom with one king; one Family with one father; one Building with one foundation; one Body with one head. Each of these illustrations involves a group related to the same perfect leader, Jesus Christ. Positionally, each believer stands on the same ground in Christ.<sup>3</sup>

### III. Keys to Unity<sup>4</sup>

#### A. Humility (Phil 2:5–8)

Unfortunately, many Christians are more concerned about pleasing themselves than they are about serving others. Christians experience unity by humbly considering others instead of themselves and then reaching out to serve someone else. Christians are to care so much for each other that they are less concerned about what happens to themselves.

#### B. Love (John 13:34-35; 1 John 3: 14, 4:10-11)

1. This love for the other believer is not selective, neither is it based on that person's attractiveness. It doesn't depend on circumstances, neither is it linked to what the other person does.
2. How do we display love toward each other? Jesus demonstrated his love for the disciples by washing their feet, after which he exhorted them to do likewise for each other (John 13). Christian love is not primarily an emotion, but an act of selfless, sacrificial service to meet someone's need. If you have genuine love, you won't criticize others to build up yourself. You will love no matter the cost—whether in money, prestige, or position.

#### C. Diversity (1 Cor 12:14)

1. God has given Christians different gifts, and the measure of faith to go with each gift. In other words, He provides sufficient faith to exercise the various spiritual gifts. Christians need to complement one another; no one can be or do everything.
2. As all believers are being ministered to and are ministering their gifts, they all are maturing and working together as one Body.
3. Christians often make the mistake of expending too much energy on figuring out how they are gifted instead of simply doing what needs to be done. We should seek to serve where we are gifted, but we should not sit on the sidelines waiting to find out where our gifts lie. The best way for one's gifts to surface is to serve in a ministry and see how the Lord works.

#### D. Harmony (1 Cor 12:15–25)

1. All Christians are to be content with their gifts and are to harmonize with the whole Body. It is not always the most obvious gift that is most critical.
2. To be a healthy body, the church needs every Christian doing his or her part. In other words, the church needs more unity and more ministry.

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<sup>3</sup>John MacArthur, *The Body Dynamic* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Chariot Victor Pub., 1996), 89.

<sup>4</sup>John MacArthur, *The Body Dynamic*.



## Building Up One Another

### Lesson 3: Devoted to One Another: The Family Concept

Rom 12:10 *Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.*

#### I. The Family of God

- A. Being a part of a family is something with which most people can identify. Paul compares the church to the family unit. Just as a family should be characterized by love, affection, and tender care, so should the church express these kinds of attitudes.
- B. The concept of the family adds a dimension of warmth, tenderness, concern, and loyalty to church life. Paul drew upon the physical aspects in the illustration of the church as a body (previous lesson) to emphasize the necessity of every member's participation in the church. But when he used the "family" analogy, he was illustrating the emotional aspects of relational Christianity.

#### II. "Brotherly Love"

The term "brotherly love" (*philadelphia*) refers to the love that should exist between brothers and sisters within family units. Applied to the church, it refers to the love Christians should have for each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

- A. The term "brothers" (*adelphos*) is used to refer to the Christian family approximately 230 times in the NT by most of the NT writers. It was (and still should be) a common way of referring to fellow Christians.
- B. The word brothers literally means "from the same womb." It is distinctly a family term. When it refers to Christians, it means "fellow believers," "members of God's family," "brothers and sisters in Christ." It means we have all been born again into God's family. We are vitally related to each other through a common heritage. We are "joint heirs" with Christ (Rom 8:17; Gal 4:7).

#### III. "Kindly Affectioned"

- A. Paul's use of the words, "be kindly affectioned one to another," enhances and supports his emphasis on brotherly love and family relationships in the church. To "be kindly affectioned" refers to the mutual love of parents and children, husbands and wives. Loving affection or tender care is the idea. One translation renders it this way: "Love one another tenderly as fellow Christians."
- B. Paul's point is clear: Christians are to be just as devoted to each other as are the individual members of a close-knit family unit. Christians might think of themselves as "blood brothers," for in Christ "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Eph 1:7).
- C. Christians begin as infants in Christ and go through various stages of development. In our immaturity, we can easily fall into patterns of self-centered behavior. But as we mature, our lives should reflect the nature of Christ. This is why Paul exhorted the members of the Philippian family to "do nothing out of



selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil 2:3-4).

#### IV. Practical Steps for Developing Family Relationships in Your Church

- A. Take seriously what the Bible says about brotherly love. Showing affection and love to other Christians and treating them as brothers and sisters in Christ is a discipline one must pursue intentionally. Read the following texts and focus on what they say about brotherly love, affection, and care.
1. 1 Thes 4:9-10
  2. Heb 13:1-3
  3. 1 Peter 1:22-23
  4. 1 Peter 3:8-9
  5. 2 Peter 1:5-7
- B. Evaluate your attitudes and actions toward other members of your church. To what extent do you experience affection with each fellow Christian? Note that Paul, in the same context in which he exhorted Christians to “be kindly affectioned one to another in brotherly love,” also exhorted that we “rejoice with those who rejoice” and “mourn with those who mourn” (Rom 12:15). This involves emotion: deep feelings of joy as well as deep feelings of sadness.
- Hindrances to sharing deeply:
1. Fear of rejection, unwilling to risk being hurt, previous negative experiences
  2. History of poor family relationships, lack of family intimacy, little affection in the home
  3. Trauma, abuse
  4. Anger, resentment, bitterness
  5. Immaturity, selfishness, lack of concern for others
- C. Begin to act immediately on what you know to be God’s will. Even if you don’t feel like it, begin showing a kind, affectionate, loving attitude toward others. Feelings often follow actions. Act as if you care, and soon you will care. Expressing love in a tangible way will help you to eventually develop feelings of love which you can share verbally.
1. Show concern for the other person’s circumstances.
  2. Give or send a note of appreciation.
  3. Tell someone you are praying for him or her.
  4. Invite someone over for a fellowship meal.
  5. Share what has been going on in your life.
  6. Seek to meet a need.



## **Building Up One Another**

### **Lesson 4: Honor One Another**

*... in honour preferring one another (Rom 12:10).*

Because we are members of one another, from the same family, and partners in fellowship, every Christian should rejoice when others achieve, when others are honored, when others are successful. When this happens, the body of Christ will function beautifully and mature and grow in Christ.

#### **I. Christ's Supreme Example**

- A. John 13:12-15. Jesus set the supreme example in honoring others above Himself. After condescending to wash his disciples' dirty feet, He said "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." We don't carry on the practice of foot washing, but we should continue the spirit of the act—humble, sacrificial service for others.
- B. Matt 20:25-28. The Roman authorities were notorious for their harsh administration, and the Jewish leaders also exercised a heavy-handed approach to their exercise of authority. But followers of Christ must learn that leaders are servants. Those who lead must serve and sacrifice for others.
- C. Matt 23:5-12. While the Pharisees did their good works to gain human admiration, Jesus said that His followers must serve one another like humble servants.

#### **II. NT Applications**

- A. Phil 2:3-4. Do not act from a motive of selfish ambition, but humbly consider others before yourself.
- B. Phil 2: 5-8. Christ's attitude of unselfish, humble self-sacrifice is to be the example for all Christians.
- C. 1Pe 5:5 Humbly submit to one another.

#### **III. Practical Steps for Applying This Principle Today**

- A. Evaluate yourself.
  - 1. How many situations can you recall where you purposely attempted to honor someone above yourself? In what ways did you reflect sincere appreciation for the other person?
  - 2. Do you honor others for their benefit, or simply to get something from them? Do you scratch someone else's back just so they'll scratch yours?
  - 3. Can you say that you genuinely rejoice when others succeed, or do you resent them and envy the attention they receive?

- B. Follow the biblical commands to honor one another.
1. Respect others. In the OT, the word “honor” literally means “to be heavy, weighty.” You honor someone by assigning him value or “weight.” It’s a term of respect.
  2. Recognize the value of others. In Romans 12:10, the word “honor” has the sense of “a valuing.” It involves placing a value on something so that it comes to have our honor and respect. “To prefer” someone literally means “to go before as a leader, to lead the way.” When you prefer someone above yourself, you let them take the lead, allow them to set the agenda. Many of the problems which disrupt peace and unity and thus the mission and effectiveness of the church concern rights and privileges, places and prestige. If we value what others have to contribute and defer to one another, rights and privileges become secondary.<sup>5</sup>
  3. Be generous with complements (Rom 12:14; Eph 4:29). To “bless” means “to speak well of.” Don’t complement simply to “butter up” others, but to affirm them and to recognize their value. Send a greeting card or note of thanks. Notice the good things others do.
  4. Rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom 12:15). Seek to genuinely enjoy the success of others.
  5. Serve others with humble, self-sacrificial acts (John 13:12-15). Follow Jesus’ example of washing the disciples’ feet.
  6. Allow someone else the place of prominence (1 Pet 5:5).
  7. Listen to what the other person has to say (John 4:44)
  8. Obey legitimate authorities; pay your bills and taxes (Rom 13:7).
  9. Take care of someone in need (1 Tim 5:3).
  10. Consider what you can do to help a weaker brother (1 Cor 12:23-24).
  11. Respect legitimate spiritual authorities (1 Tim 5:17).
  12. Treat your spouse with respect and dignity (Eph 5:33; 1 Tim 4:4).
  13. Insist that children honor their parents (Eph 6:2; Heb 12:9).

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<sup>5</sup> Keathley, *One-Another Commands in Scripture*.



## Building Up One Another

### Lesson 5: Be of the Same Mind with One Another

Rom 15:5 *Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:*

One outstanding lesson we can learn from church history is that Satan's primary strategy to disrupt and discourage Christians involves destroying unity among them. He is the author of deception, confusion, insensitivity, false doctrine, and church splits. The biblical strategy for defeating such disunity is like-mindedness in the body of Christ.

#### I. Christ's Prayer for Unity

- A. A primary aspect of Jesus' prayer in John 17 is unity among believers. Read John 17:11, 20-23.
- B. The unity existing between God the Father and God the Son is to be reflected in the unity experienced within the Body of Christ, the church.
- C. Lack of unity destroys the church's ability to carry out its purposes—evangelism and edification.
- D. The natural state for mankind this side of the Fall seems to be disunity. Division, discord, splits, fights, and disagreements commonly divide people. This is true both in the secular world and in the church.
- E. The church should stand in stark contrast from the world by being united. Unity is one way we differentiate ourselves from the ungodly culture. Unfortunately, many churches are just as disunified as any other element of society. It need not be so.

#### II. The Jerusalem Church: A Dynamic Example

- A. Shortly following Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the church was founded as thousands of people responded to the gospel message preached by the apostles (Acts 2). That group enjoyed remarkable unity, at least for a while.  
*Ac 2:46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,*  
*Ac 4:32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.*
- B. It wasn't long before problems erupted. Luke records that certain needy widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. This created unhappiness and complaints; in short, lack of unity. But the apostles, facing the problem with wisdom and discretion, appointed qualified men to handle the situation, and the problem was soon solved. Once again unity was restored (see Acts 6:1-4).

### III. Paul's Primary Concern

- A. Unity is a primary theme in Paul's preaching and writing. We find many exhortations in Paul's letters that believers be unified.

Read the following texts: Rom 12:16, 14:19, 15:5-6; 1 Cor 1:10; Eph 4.3; Phil 1:27, 2:1-2.

- B. The biblical expectation for the church is that it would be united, having the same mind, pursuing the same goals, affirming the same values and doctrines. Lack of unity is a seriously disordered condition that must be rectified if the church is to have any positive influence.

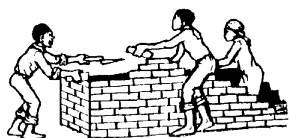
### IV. Ideas that Promote Unity

- A. Affirm that unity is an important goal to be realized for a local church. The church should be enjoying a concrete, visible, and practical unity, not merely a theoretical form of unity that exists among all believers. Unity is a primary goal that the NT writers required of local churches. We must affirm this goal and pursue it.
- B. Unity is greatly enhanced when the church seeks to implement all the "one another" commands in the NT. That's what this series of lessons is all about. As we fulfill our responsibilities to one another in the context of the church, higher degrees of unity will naturally result.
- C. Recognize that disunity is essentially a result of spiritual immaturity. Read James 4:1-4. Spiritual immaturity was also a major problem for the believers in Corinth (read 1 Cor 1:10-11).

### V. Practical Steps to Enhance Unity within a Church

- A. Affirm the same doctrine. A church's doctrinal position, and the members' affirmation of it, provides a solid foundation for unity. It's a good idea to review and explain the church's doctrinal statement periodically.
- B. Expect and allow a degree of diversity (Rom 14:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12). Churches need not require that all members march in perfect lock-step with one another. Within limits, we can make allowances for different views and practices. We must tolerate some differences of opinion and practice within the body.
- C. Participate with others in church services, programs, and special events. Get involved; don't just spectate (Phil 1:27).
- D. Deal with problems as they arise. Seek solutions that satisfy the majority without compromising biblical principles (e.g., Acts 6, 15).
- E. Refuse to dignify the trivial. Arguments over petty issues (e.g., decorations, scheduling, housekeeping, etc.) should never be tolerated. Debates over the "hot topics" of the day should be kept to a minimum, and members should be given the freedom to hold their own opinions. People must recognize the differences between opinion, preference, conviction, and doctrine.
- F. Encourage interaction on various levels—religious (church), social, cultural, educational, recreational, etc. As believers spend time together in different contexts, close bonds of affection and understanding develop.

Ps 133:1 *Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*



## Building Up One Another

### Lesson 6: Accept One Another

Rom 15:7 *Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.*

Acceptance in many churches is based on how well a person conforms to expectations. It's easy to accept those who meet our expectations and reject those who do not come up to our standards. Some people place themselves outside the boundaries of church fellowship because of their behavior (e.g., 1 Cor 6:9-11; Titus 1:15-16; 1 Jn 2:19). But others display minor differences that should not prevent us from accepting them into the fellowship.

Paul deals with this subject clearly in his letter to the Romans. In fact, he presents acceptance of fellow Christians as a basic key to unity. Read Romans 15:5-7

#### I. The word “accept” (KJV “receive”)

A. The word literally means “to take, to receive, to welcome.” Thus, to “receive one another” means that we must accept or welcome one another, seek unity, and pursue peaceful fellowship and cooperation.

B. Texts:

Ac 18:26 *And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they **took** him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.*

Ac 28:2 *And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and **received** us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.*

Ro 14:1 *Him that is weak in the faith **receive** ye, but not to doubtful disputations.*

Ro 14:3 *Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath **received** him.*

Phm 17 *If thou count me therefore a partner, **receive** him as myself.*

#### II. The model for acceptance: “as Christ also received us”

A. How does Christ accept believers?

1. Mercifully. Christ received us “while we were yet sinners” (Rom 5:8; cf. Luk 15:2). We must accept others as they are—as imperfect humans. We shouldn’t expect perfection from anyone. All of us have weaknesses and blind spots. Such human failures should not normally prevent us from accepting others.
2. Graciously (Eph 2:8-9). We must put up with (“forbearing”) one another (Rom 15:1; Eph 4:2; Col 3:13).
3. Lovingly (Jn 13:34). Love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet 4:8).

4. Particularly (Jn 1:12, 6:37). Christ accepts those who accept him, i.e., those who are saved. Christ will refuse to accept some people (Mt 7:21-23). Acceptance of others has limits and conditions.

B. Implications of Christ's example in this regard:

1. Our acceptance of one another is based on our mutual acceptance of Christ. Salvation is the common ground that unifies believers and brings them into fellowship. If someone is genuinely saved, he should enjoy at least a basic level of acceptance with other believers.<sup>6</sup>
2. We shouldn't expect or require people to be perfect. Even believers are still sinners. We don't downplay the seriousness of sin, but we recognize that everyone has failures and faults. "We all stumble in many ways" (James 3:2).
3. We can tolerate difference in opinions, behaviors, preferences, and convictions—to a certain degree. Greater unity comes from greater agreement. But we need not require cookie-cutter conformity.
4. We should extend common courtesy to everyone. Even those with whom we seriously disagree deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

III. Errors to avoid

A. Judgmentalism (Rom 14:1, 15:1)

1. Judgmentalism may be defined as a hypocritical, fault-finding, harsh attitude that fails to take human weakness into consideration. Instead of accepting another believer, judgmental people focus on differences and perceived weaknesses.
2. Don't confuse judgmentalism with discernment. Jesus, who said "Judge not, lest ye be judged" (Mt 7:1) also said "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (Mt 7:21). Christians must use their God-given wisdom to evaluate situations and make judgments. In some cases, differences do indicate spiritual weakness or immaturity. We must insure that we are using the proper criteria for judging spirituality—the Bible, not our own personal preferences.
3. Acceptance of an individual does not imply acceptance of his behavior, his lack of spiritual maturity, or even his faulty doctrine. Read Acts 18:24-26. Most of the NT epistles reflect the author's desire to see his audience grow and change. Acceptance often requires gracious toleration of differences, but it does not imply that one need not change or grow.
4. The area in which we are especially not to judge is "doubtful disputations" (Rom 14:1 KJV), i.e., disputable matters (adiaphora). In Paul's day, eating food offered to idols was a disputable matter that divided brethren. It should not have caused such division. Paul teaches that people are free to eat or not eat, depending on their consciences. One should not look down

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<sup>6</sup> One exception to this rule would be for someone under church discipline. In that case, the church cannot "accept" that person or tolerate his attendance at church. Depending on the nature of the sin, the offender may be considered to be unsaved (Mt 18:17; Rom 16:17) or just an errant brother (2 Thes 3:14-15).

on his brother on account of such matters. One should especially not encourage a brother to violate his conscience on such matters.

5. If we are truly mature, we will be sensitive toward our brothers and sisters in Christ who are not strong as we are. We will be careful to do nothing that would cause them to stumble and fall into sin.

B. Showing Partiality (Rom 12:16; Jam 2:1-9)

Prejudice, favoritism, and discrimination in the body of Christ violate the law of God. Furthermore, they violate the very nature of the local church. We are all one. Every member is important, whether rich or poor, young or old, black or white, weak or strong. If we show favoritism, we also destroy the unity, harmony, and oneness in the church which Christ and Paul both prayed for and commanded.

IV. Practical Steps Toward Accepting One Another

- A. Seek to be a welcoming, friendly, warm church. Make sure that everyone receives a warm welcome, especially visitors.
- B. Evaluate how well different people are welcomed at church. What if someone of a different color, economic class, or social background attends church—how will he be treated?
- C. Does the church tolerate (within limits) weak believers? Do we rush to judgment? Is there a strategy in place to help new believers grow in the faith?
- D. Insure that minor, disputable matters do not become major issues. Don't allow the trivial to take precedence. Secondary issues must remain secondary, and allowance must be made for differences of opinion and preference.
- E. Insure that cultural or traditional standards do not replace genuinely biblical standards. In other words, make sure that expectations are truly biblical, not merely traditional or personal. Being "spiritual" or "mature" entails more than mere external conformity to traditional rules.
- F. Be careful that strong Christians do not influence weaker believers to fall into sin.

Note: An independent church has the right to govern itself, which means that it can establish rules of conduct that it deems appropriate. If the church determines that certain behaviors are inappropriate, it has every right to withdraw fellowship from (i.e., refuse to accept) those who violate those standards. It doesn't really matter what non-members think of the rules. Obviously, such rules of conduct should reflect biblical expectations. The danger always exists that people assume that "keeping the rules" amounts to "being spiritual," which it does not. Institutional standards are often not the proper basis for judging personal spirituality (e.g., requiring a coat and tie for platform ministry).





## Building Up One Another

### Lesson 7: Admonish One Another

*Ro 15:14 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.*

Paul complements the believers in Rome for their capacity to “admonish one another.” While admonishment might not seem like a positive thing, it is. Confrontations have great potential, both for positive growth and for negative reactions. There is no greater sign of love than to be willing to risk rejection and broken relationships with others through the process of confrontation.

#### I. Definition of “admonish”

- A. The word has the sense of verbal instruction, counseling, warning, or rebuke. It describes a confrontation that occurs when one Christian approaches another believer about his sin, error, or problem.
- B. Paul’s statement that believers can “admonish one another” implies that mutual confrontation is to be expected in the normal life of the congregation. The first step in the process of church discipline requires this kind of warning or rebuke. See Galatians 6:1.
- C. Admonishing is normally negative in tone—rebuke, warn, correct. But it may also be positive, as we teach and admonish one another “in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (Col 3:16).

#### II. Prerequisites for admonishing one another

- A. “full of goodness.” Believers must have one another’s best interests in mind. They must be mature enough to make sure that they have removed the “beam” from their own eyes before dealing with the “speck” in someone else’s eye (Mt 7:3-5). A proper attitude and purpose must prevail. A confrontation is not for retribution or revenge; it’s always for the benefit of the one being rebuked.  
Christians who are sensitive about their own walk with God are capable and responsible to admonish other Christians. They have earned the right to warn those who display characteristics that violate the direct teaching of Scripture. It is one of the most difficult exhortations to obey, but it is necessary for the body of Christ to mature and grow.
- B. “filled with knowledge”
  - 1. Knowledge of God’s word. Admonishment must be based upon God’s specific will and ways not on what we think other Christians should or should not be doing. Always have chapter and verse support for any confrontation.
  - 2. Knowledge of the facts. Before confronting anyone about his sin or failure, make sure you have all the correct information. Perhaps your

information is mere rumor or hearsay. Don't proceed until you are sure you understand the circumstances.

Note: If you are currently unqualified to admonish, it is your responsibility to become qualified. You should seek to be mature enough in the faith to admonish a fellow believer when necessary.

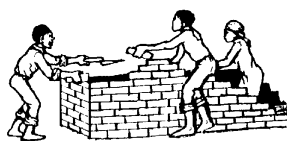
### III. The proper process for admonishing one another

- A. Admonishment must be done with deep concern and love (Acts 20:31).
- B. Admonishment is normally done privately. Occasionally a general warning or rebuke to a larger group or even to the entire church is appropriate. But in most cases, especially if the sin is not yet publicly known, the confrontation should be carried out in private. Public rebuke should happen only after private admonishment has failed (Mt 18:15-17; 1 Tim 5:20). We want to help people, not embarrass or alienate them.
- C. Admonishment must be persistent if it is to be effective. Paul warned the Ephesians "night and day" and for a period of "three years" (Acts 20:31). Mutual exhortation must be continual. It cannot stop after a brief encounter. The Word of God is filled with a multitude of exhortations, warnings, and instructions. It takes a lot of time to communicate them all and a lifetime to apply them.
- D. Admonishment must be done with pure motives and proper goals (see 1 Cor. 4:14). There should be only one basic objective when we admonish others: to help them become more mature followers of Jesus Christ (see Col 1:28-29).

### IV. Practical steps for helping Christians admonish one another

- A. Evaluate your own attitudes and spiritual condition.
  - 1. Can I say my own life is "full of goodness"? That is, am I living a holy and righteous life before God? If I am deliberately violating Scripture, I am not in a position to admonish others. I must first deal with sin in my own life before I am ready to deal with sin in someone else's life.
  - 2. Do I really know what the Bible teaches about the particular issue at hand? I may not know everything, but I must have a good grasp on what the Bible teaches in a particular area before I proceed.
  - 3. Can I admonish an erring brother while reflecting deep love and concern? Or do I come across with a harsh manner and appear to be angry? See 2 Tim 2:24-25.
- B. Seek a private setting for the initial confrontation. Don't lecture the crowd if you are trying to send a message to one person. Don't admonish in a public setting.
- C. Try to be persistent without being overbearing or insulting. Let the person know exactly how he has violated clear biblical commands or principles.
- D. Set out the proper response—repentance and restoration.
- E. Let him know what the consequences will be for continued rebellion.

Note: Parents should seek to evaluate whether they are admonishing their children with the proper attitudes and procedures.



## Building Up One Another

### Lesson 8: Greet One Another

*Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: ... Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on us .... Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you. (Rom 16:3, 6, 16).*

Paul mentioned 26 people by name in his epistles, which shows his personal interest in many friends and colleagues. His exhortation to “Salute [i.e., greet] one another with a holy kiss” is one of five such exhortations in the NT letters (see also 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thes. 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14).

Do these five injunctions (four by Paul and one by Peter) have any relevance to Christians living today? When an exhortation is repeated five times in the NT, Christians ought to consider it seriously before dismissing it as irrelevant.

On the one hand, to “greet one another” seems to be normative, still to be applied in the church today. On the other hand, the form of that greeting varies. Put another way, Christians are always to sincerely greet one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. The way that greeting is expressed, however, depends on what is appropriate and acceptable in a given culture.

#### I. The Interpretive Issue

- A. In order to properly interpret scriptural exhortations, we must understand the difference between timeless principles and cultural forms.
  1. Timeless principles apply in all times and places no matter what the situation. The exhortation to “greet one another” is a timeless principle.
  2. Cultural forms are local expressions of the timeless principle. For people living in the Middle East in Paul’s day, a proper and normal form of greeting was the “holy kiss.” This sort of thing is still practiced in many cultures today—usually a kiss on the cheek or on both cheeks.
  3. Christians make a serious mistake when they confuse timeless principles and cultural forms. To insist that a cultural form is a timeless principle, or that a timeless principle is merely a cultural form, is error. Often a particular custom or tradition becomes so entrenched in a group that people think of it as necessary for the Christian life.
  4. Examples:
    - a) Cultural forms promoted to timeless principles: head coverings on women; meeting in private homes for church; lifting up hands when praying; footwashing ; abstaining from meat offered to idols; circumcision
    - b) Timeless principles written off as mere cultural forms: male leadership in the church and/or in the home; baptism; capital punishment

5. Correct Bible interpretation tells us the timeless principles, but the Bible usually leaves us free to develop the forms that are most appropriate in any given culture. The principles still apply, but we are not locked into a first-century expression of them. Biblical objectives guide us in creating unique forms for a given moment in history and in particular cultures. If the church had to duplicate the same exact patterns and structures of the first century, it would never have made a world-wide impact.
- B. With this in mind, the injunction to “greet one another with a holy kiss” also becomes an understandable concept relevant in the first century as well as the twenty-first. On the one hand, the injunction to “greet one another” is a timeless principle; on the other hand, the “holy kiss” represents a form of greeting very common in the first century. In NT times, men normally kissed men and women kissed women in this way. This was a culturally acceptable form of public affection.
- C. Paul’s and Peter’s concern was that the kiss be a “holy” one, sanctified as an expression of true Christian love. It was to demonstrate that believers were truly brothers and sisters in Christ.

## II. Applying the Principle

- A. It is always appropriate (and important) for Christians to “greet one another.” And though we may use the common and accepted form of greeting in a particular culture, it should be a holy form a form that has deep meaning, reflecting sincere Christian love.
- B. Greetings among people generally tend to be quite empty. People say, “Hello, how are you?” without any thought of wanting to know how you really are. People glibly say, “It’s good to see you” or “We’re glad you’re here” without meaning anything of the kind. All such off-hand remarks are meaningless and empty, if not in many instances downright dishonest and hypocritical, if we are not careful.
- C. Paul’s concern (and Peter’s) was that these NT Christians would greet one another with pure motives. It was to be a true expression of concern and love. And today when Christians greet one another, it must reflect the same dynamic. There is no place for hypocrisy and dishonesty among members of Christ’s body.
- D. If we cannot greet one another in this way, we are admonished to confess our sins to each other to “pray for each other,” and to forgive one another (James 5:16; Col 3 :13) . We are not to be out of harmony with other Christians. If a brother has sinned against us, we are to go to that person and, with grace and love, express our feelings. If we have sinned against someone, we are to ask his forgiveness (Mt 18:15).

## III. Practical Steps for Helping Christians to Greet One Another in a Biblical Fashion

- A. Deal with any issues separating you from other people. If you need to confess your sins to someone or confront someone about his error, do so. Just make sure you pull the log out of your own eye first. Selfishness and fear can also hinder you from developing genuine interest in others.

- B. Forget about yourself and reach out to others. We may feel slighted when others don't notice us, when at the same time we fail to notice others. Show interest in others and don't worry about whether others show interest in you. Show yourself friendly and you'll have plenty of friends.
- C. Consider the proper cultural expression for applying the timeless principle.
  - 1. Mature Christians can and should show physical affection. In our society, shaking hands or a friendly hug is usually fine. On some occasions, a quick peck on the cheek is appropriate (usually between women).
  - 2. In many societies, a kiss is a bit too familiar for some and may be downright uncomfortable for many.
  - 3. All public demonstrations of affection must be based on pure motives, discretion, and above all, true Christian love. When it is expressed inappropriately, reflecting impure motives, indiscretion, and selfish actions, it can lead to severe hurt, bitterness, and even immorality.
  - 4. Be aware of the dangers that physical affection may present to some. It's hard enough for some people to guard their thoughts and stand against temptation without the added pressure of close physical contact



## Building Up One Another

### Lesson 9: Serve One Another

*For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. Gal 5:13*

Freedom emerges as a major theme in Paul's letter to the Galatian Christians. Before the work of Christ on the cross, people were "confined" under the power of sin and "kept" under the OT Law (3:22-23). The Law did not set them free from sin; it simply made them more aware of how captive they were to their old natures. Once Christ began His ministry, the Law of Moses became God's means "to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith" (3:24). Christ fulfilled the requirements and penalties of the Law on behalf of believers. Freedom from the dominance of the Law frees believers to serve others.

#### I. Freedom: What Is It?

- A. Freedom in Christ is not freedom to sin (Gal 5:13). The Galatians, like so many Christians today, had gone to two extremes. On the one hand, some had reverted to trying to become righteous by keeping the OT Law. This only brought them back into bondage (Gal 5:2-4). On the other hand, some, having heard Paul's teaching about freedom, felt they were now at liberty to do anything they wanted. Thus Paul wrote yes, believers are free, but they are not to use their freedom as an "occasion to the flesh" (Gal 5:13). Believers are "dead to sin" and should no longer live in it (Rom 6:1-2). Freedom should motivate believers to serve one another.
- B. Freedom in Christ is not freedom from the struggle against sin. Believers will always have to contend against the old nature. Nowhere does the Bible teach that a believer can totally overcome sin in this life. When Christ died for our sins, He did not eliminate mankind's sinful nature. Thus Paul had to warn the Galatians not to indulge themselves in sin.
- C. Freedom in Christ is not freedom from servanthood. Rather than using others to indulge our sinful natures, we are to serve one another in love.

How can Christians be free and yet be slaves? Herein lies one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith. Jesus spoke about it when He said: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it." (Mark 8:34-35).

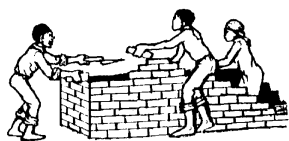
The Christian who wants to experience true freedom in Christ must live in total commitment to Christ. It sounds contradictory, but in turning our lives over to Him completely, we discover freedom. One consequence of submitting to Christ is the necessity of serving other believers. We are part of a body of which Christ is the head. Being "in Christ" also means being "a part of each other." This is why Paul told the Ephesian Christians to "submit to one another in the fear of God" (Eph 5:21; see also 1 Peter 5:5).

## II. Freedom and Human Relationships

- A. People generally are dominated by a sinful nature. No matter what man has done to try to improve the world, society eventually deteriorated, primarily because man is sinful and selfish. Rather than desiring to serve others, he desires to serve himself. And even in so-called Christian cultures, social programs, as good as they may be, do not work effectively because mankind is basically selfish and dishonest.
- B. Wherever the Christian Gospel penetrates a society, revealing that Christ died for the sins of the world, people discover that they can “live by the Spirit” rather than by the desires of their sinful natures. True, there will be a conflict between the two, even in a Christian’s life, but he can now be “led by the Spirit” rather than by the desires of the flesh. Man can now choose whom he will serve. Believers can obey the commands to love and serve one another because God empowers them to do so.
- C. As a member of Christ’s family, with all of its rights and privileges, a Christian is to be a servant to all other members of that family. And in “serving one another in love” we find true freedom in Jesus Christ. Our deepest needs are met in legitimate ways as we minister to one another. Our relationships with others can be truly satisfying and enduring.

## III. Practical Tips for Serving One Another in Love

- A. Evaluate how much you and others may be reflecting “the lusts of the flesh” (Gal 5:15-21) in your relationships rather than “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22-23). Which set of characteristics is more evident? It’s easy to overlook the fact that the works of the flesh include behaviors like hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissention, factions, and envy.
- B. Make sure that love is the motivating factor in your service to others.
  - 1. Love for God must be primary. Our devotion to God and obedience to His Word require that we love one another.
  - 2. Love for others is secondary. It is only because we love God that we are able to love one another.
- C. “Serve one another” is a broad command that could involve a wide range of activities. Think of practical ways of demonstrating love to others by serving them. Each of the “one another” passages tells us how to do this.
  - 1. Be devoted to one another.
  - 2. Honor one another.
  - 3. Be of the same mind with one another.
  - 4. Accept one another.
  - 5. Greet one another.
  - 6. Bear one another’s burdens.
  - 7. Submit to one another.
  - 8. Be hospitable to one another.
  - 9. Encourage one another.
  - 10. Pray for one another.



## Building Up One Another

### Lesson 10: Bear One Another's Burdens

Gal 6:2 *Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

#### I. Meaning of the word "bear"

- A. The verb "to bear" occurs more than twenty-five times in the NT. It is used in connection with carrying a water jar (Mark 14:13; Luke 22:6), a coffin (Luke 7:14), stones (John 10:31), money (carrying it away, stealing it: John 12:6), a corpse (transferring it from one place to another: John 20:15), a yoke (Acts 15:10), a man: Paul (Acts 21:35), and a woman (Rev 17:7).<sup>7</sup>
- B. To bear someone else's burden does not mean to simply put up with it or tolerate it, but to jointly shoulder it, to help carry it.
- C. In this passage, Paul exhorts us to carry one another's "burdens." We are not told exactly what Paul had in mind by a "burden."
  1. He may have exhorting us to cooperate in bearing burdens of suffering, grief, or persecution brought on by social, economic or spiritual conditions. Believers must help one another shoulder the load of life's troubles, whatever they may be. We should rally around those who suffer and throw our support behind them.
  2. The context suggests that another "burden" fellow-believers must bear is related to the spiritual restoration of a man "overtaken in a fault" (Gal 6:1). When members of the church experience particular temptations and struggle with the flesh, the entire body must respond by supporting or helping the struggling member (Rom 15:1). Unfortunately, the tendency among believer is often to "shoot the wounded" instead of helping them overcome their sins. We cannot tolerate flagrant sin among the body, but at the same time we must work with people who are struggling to overcome sinful patterns of life.
- D. Who is responsible to bear these burdens?
  1. Note the plural in the command: "bear ye one another's burdens." Everyone in the church should seek to render aid when possible and practical. Respond corporately (as a body) to the problems of the members. In some cases of spiritual restoration, "ye which are spiritual" must take action to help a brother overtaken in a fault (Gal 6:1).
  2. In some cases, an individual can deal with the burden confidentially. When dealing with issues of sin, one person may confront an erring brother about a problem without involving others (Mt 18:15).
  3. In any case, help to bear weighty burdens should come from fellow believers, either in one's local church or in the wider community.

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<sup>7</sup>William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 8, *New Testament Commentary*



4. Note that the primary responsibility in view here lies within the local church (or perhaps a fellowship of churches, cf. Gal 1:2). Members of like faith and practice should devote themselves to helping one another bear the burdens of life.
- E. How do we bear one another's burdens?
1. Friendship/fellowship
  2. Prayer
  3. Counseling/admonition
  4. Biblical teaching
  5. Physical or financial help
  6. Referrals or networking to find other avenues of help
- F. Barriers to effective burden-bearing
1. Lack of communication: those struggling with burdens must share their struggles with others—unburden yourself to someone. Tell someone in the church about the problems you are going through. Don't expect people to read your mind or somehow see the difficulty you are experiencing. You can't blame others for not responding if you keep your burden to yourself.
  2. Lack of interest/concern: we all get caught up in our own worlds, and we often focus on our own set of problems. When under the pressure of our own burdens, it's hard to sympathize with others who have different problems.
  3. Lack of biblical commitment: failure to help others in their time of need is simple disobedience to clear biblical commands. When people are burdened, fellow believers must respond; it is our biblical responsibility.
- II. How to fulfill the "law of Christ"
- A. We fulfill the law of Christ by bearing one another's burdens.
- B. What is the "law of Christ"? The "law of Christ" encompasses the whole of Jesus' teaching personally while He was on earth and through His apostles and prophets from heaven following His ascension (cf. Acts 1:1–2). It boils down to the command to love God wholeheartedly and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Mt 22:36–40; John 13:34–35; 15:12; 1 John 3:23).<sup>8</sup> James calls it the "royal law," namely, "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (James 2:8). Bearing one another's burdens is a way to demonstrate our love for one another, thus fulfilling Christ's commands.
- C. Freedom from the law of Moses (one of the major themes in Galatians) does not mean freedom from all responsibility. Christ's law demands that we demonstrate genuine love for our neighbors. And as the Parable of the Good Samaritan teaches, our neighbors are those in need. We show our love for Christ and for one another by bearing one another's burdens.

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<sup>8</sup>Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Ga 6:2 (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003).



## Building Up One Another

### Lesson 11: Bearing With One Another

Eph 4:2 *With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;*  
Col 3:13 *Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*

In the previous lesson, we studied Paul's command to the Galatians to "bear one another's burdens." Now Paul directs us to "forebear" one another, that is, to be tolerant towards other Christians; to bear with them; to patiently endure their idiosyncrasies and weaknesses; to have a forgiving spirit toward others who may sin against us.

All of us have to deal with difficult, unlovable people. Sometimes such people attend church with us—perhaps they sit in our row! Even Christian people, especially immature believers, can be self-centered and hard to get along with.

How can we "bear with" such people?

#### I. Have Patience

- A. In both passages where Paul exhorted Christians to "bear with one another," the key word in the context is patience ("longsuffering" KJV), one aspect of "walking in the Spirit" (Gal 5:22). It is also the focus of Paul's prayer for the Colossian Christians (read Col 1:10-12).
- B. To "bear with one another," then, means being patient with each other's weaknesses. Not one of us is perfect. All of us fail, particularly in human relationships. How easy it is to expect more from other Christians than we expect from ourselves!
- C. Tolerance and patience is especially needed in the home where we often let down our guard. Parents often expect more from their children than they do from themselves. Children often have unrealistic expectations of their parents. When expectations are not met, family members may respond negatively.
- D. The same is often true in the church, the family of God. Members of small churches especially get to know each other's idiosyncrasies, weaknesses and failures in intimate detail. Patience is especially important for members to get along with one another.

#### II. Extend Forgiveness

- A. Paul combines the ideas of forbearing and forgiving (Col 3:13). We are to forgive others as God forgave us. Holding a grudge against a fellow believer is sin. If you deal with offenses biblically, and if you forbear and forgive others, bitterness will never be a problem for you.
- B. People become offended at the smallest, unintended slights—being ignored, being forgotten or overlooked, lack of recognition or attention, disagreements, etc. If we are attending church and serving God for the right reasons, such unintended slights will not deter us from faithful service.

- C. Jesus told Peter to forgive “seventy seven times” (Mt 18:21-22). He followed up that statement with the story of the Unjust Servant, a man who enjoyed great forgiveness but who was unwilling to forgive anyone else (Mt 18:23-35).
- III. Work at it.
  - A. Patience, forbearance, and forgiveness are not automatic actions following conversion to Christ. These involve deliberate acts of the will.
  - B. Unfortunately, bitterness, the tendency to hold grudges, and unforgiveness seem to be natural for humans. We must struggle to overcome these sins.
- IV. Practical Steps for Bearing with One Another in Love
  - A. Remember Jesus’ attitude of forbearance and patience toward us. This should motivate us to extend the same to others.
  - B. Perhaps you are the one that others have to tolerate. Evaluate whether your weaknesses, sins, and habits are a problem that cause difficulty for others. Consider how you act at home, at work or school, and among your friends.
  - C. Evaluate these weaknesses in the light of your attitudes and actions towards other Christians. Do you expect more from them than you do from yourself? Do you criticize others in the areas of your own weaknesses? We tend to excuse our own failures and emphasize the same weaknesses in others.
  - D. Make a list of all Christians you have difficulty relating to, especially if you are holding a grudge against anyone. Ask yourself why you can’t relate to these Christians; or why you are angry at them. Is it because of something they’ve done to hurt you? Are they aware of how you feel? Are your feelings justified? Or is it because of your imagination? Or are you upset with them because they remind you so much of yourself?
  - E. Consider whether you are being overly sensitive about the supposed offense. Some Christians are super-sensitive and feel deeply offended by what they interpret to be the slightest rejection. Those who cause the so-called offense may likely not even know that they did anything hurtful.
  - F. Consciously and deliberately forgive every person who you blame for such offenses. If possible, talk to the Christians about whom you feel badly. If they hurt you, tell them why you feel as you do. Ask them to forgive you for your attitude even though they may be at fault.

Warning: Don’t base your forgiveness on the condition that they offer an apology. Take care of your own attitudes and God will take care of theirs.

Note: If a Christian has sinned against you (and others) in such a way that it demands a repentant response, and if you have approached that person in love, then you’ll need to follow the procedure Jesus outlined in Matthew 18:15-17. Make sure, however, that your approach is characterized by attitudes such as compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. If it is, chances are good that you’ll get a positive response.

Rom 12:21 *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*



## Building Up One Another

### Lesson 12: Submit to One Another

Eph 5:21 *Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*

In modern American culture, submission of one person to another is not a popular concept. Many voices in society urge us to press for our rights, to assert ourselves, and to insist on equality. The NT authors urge just the opposite, that we must submit to others in many cases. Even among professing Christians, mutual submission is often downplayed. Such is unfortunate, because submission is a clear NT command.

#### I. Submission Defined

- A. The Greek word literally means “to arrange under.” It’s a military term meaning “to arrange [troop divisions] in a military fashion under the command of a leader.” In non-military use, it was “a voluntary attitude of yielding, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.”
- B. Submission is in essence a synonym for obedience. In its most general use, it means to yield to another’s request or advice. In Scripture it appears in contexts describing servanthood, humility, respect, reverence, honor, teachableness, and openness.
- C. Paul commands submission “to one another.” That is, personal relationships among Christians, and especially within a church, should be characterized by mutual submission.

#### II. Submission Described

It goes without saying that Christians must submit themselves to God (1 Cor 11:3; James 4:7). Submission to God requires that we also submit to one another. Submission to God is often difficult, and submission to other people is even more troublesome in many cases. The context following Eph 5:21 describes the contexts in which mutual submission is played out. What does Paul mean by “submitting to one another”?

- A. Marriage: wives submit to your own husbands (Eph 5:22-33)
- B. Church:
  - 1. Pastors submit to Christ (Eph 5:24; 1 Pet 5:4).
  - 2. Church members submit to Christ (Eph 5:24).
  - 3. Church members submit to legitimate pastoral authority (1 Cor 11:1; 1 Tim 5:17-20; Heb 13:7, 17).
- C. Family: children submit to parents (Eph 6:1-4).
- D. Employment: workers submit to employers (Eph 6:5-9; Titus 2:9; Col 3:22; 1 Pet 2:18).
- E. Other relationships:
  - 1. Young people submit to elders (1 Pet 5:5)
  - 2. Citizens submit to their government (Rom 13:1; 1 Pet 2:13-17)

3. Everyone ought to submit to “one another” (Eph 5:21)

Christianity is unique in that Jesus taught a new approach to human relationships. In the secular world, there is no such thing as mutual submission. Man basically operates out of selfish motives. He has little or no interest in helping others reach their goals except when it might benefit himself. He may listen to someone else’s advice, but usually not out of respect and honor. Obedience and submission become a means to a selfish end. Jesus taught a new idea—that mutual submission and a servant’s heart make human relationships much more satisfying and peaceful.

III. Submission Delimited

- A. We must remember that submission is not absolute in human relationships. If submission would require disobedience to God, one need not submit in that case (Acts 5:29). Other commands show that submission is balanced by love and concern. Husbands are directed to love their wives “just as Christ loved the church” (Eph 5:25). Fathers are to deal sensitively with their children, understanding and meeting their needs (Eph 6:4; Col 3:21). Elders are commissioned to serve those under their charge (Mt 20:25-28). They are not to lord it over other Christians by using their position as a means of unjust gain—either financially, psychologically, or socially (1 Pet 5:1-4). Masters are to treat their servants fairly and sensitively just as Christ treated us when He gave Himself for us (Eph 6:9; Col 4:1). Biblical submission is never abusive or rigid. Submission is not subservience.
- B. Paul made it very clear that submission to other Christians should not be based on personal impulses and reactions. Rather, the guidelines for mutual submission are rooted in the authority of Jesus Christ and His Word. No Christian has the right to request or demand something of another Christian that is contrary to the teaching of the Word of God.

IV. Practical Steps for Implementing Mutual Submission

- A. Make sure that love and concern mark your relationships to others in the church.
- B. Be humble and willing to defer to the other person. Take advice, be willing to yield.
- C. Make sure you fully grasp the meaning of the Scriptural teaching on submission.
- D. Insure that church leaders are serving the church, not lording over it.
- E. Ask yourself the following questions:
  - 1. How do I view others in the church who are in positions of leadership? Do I respect them and honor them as fellow members of Christ’s body? Or do I feel I am more important than they are?
  - 2. How do I react when someone disagrees with me? Am I threatened? Do I respond emotionally and defensively? Do I insist on doing things my own way?
  - 3. How often have I admitted to others I have been wrong? Do I always have to be right to feel comfortable?
  - 4. Do I ever share my inner life and struggles with other church members? Do I keep my weaknesses to myself?



## Building Up One Another

### Lesson 13: Comfort One Another

1Th 5:11 *Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.*

Today we will examine the ideas behind the word “comfort” or “encourage.” The word (*parakaleo*) literally means “to call to,” but extends to broader ideas, each of which is important within the church. This word is used over 100 times in the NT, often by Paul as he teaches believers how to relate to one another.

How do we comfort/encourage one another?

#### I. Ask for Help.

- A. Many examples in the Gospels show how the word is used to ask for help, especially as those in need ask Jesus for aid.
- B. Texts:
  - Mt 8:5 *And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, **beseeking** him,*
  - Lu 7:4 *And when they came to Jesus, they **besought** him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this:*
  - Mr 5:18 *And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil **prayed** him that he might be with him.*
  - Mr 5:23 *And **besought** him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her; that she may be healed; and she shall live.*
- C. As applied to church life, this meaning of the word suggests that members ought to feel free to ask one another for assistance. Following Jesus’ example, Christians should render aid whenever possible.

#### II. Exhort One Another.

- A. The word occurs especially in Acts and in Paul’s letters for exhortation by the Word proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit. The word “exhort” means “to make an appeal, to entreat, to urge or press strongly, to insist.”
- B. Texts:
  - Lu 3:18 *And many other things in his **exhortation** preached [John the Baptist] unto the people.*
  - Ac 2:40 *And with many other words did he testify and **exhort**, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.*
  - Ro 12:1 *I **beseech** you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

2Co 5:20 *Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did **beseech** you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*

Heb 13:22 *And I **beseech** you, brethren, suffer the word of **exhortation**: for I have written a letter unto you in few words.*

- C. As applied to church life, this meaning of the word suggests that members ought to strongly persuade one another to do the right thing (read Heb 10:24). Peer pressure, in this sense, is a positive thing. It's proper for us to persistently urge fellow Christians toward biblical goals. And we should appreciate it when others exhort us in the same way.

### III. Encourage One Another.

- A. One aspect of the word implies positive verbal encouragement.

- B. Texts:

2 Co 10:1 *Now I Paul myself **beseech** you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you:*

Eph 4:1 *I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, **beseech** you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,*

1 Th 4:1 *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 Ti 5:1 *Rebuke not an elder, but **entreat** him as a father; and the younger men as brethren;*

1 Pe 2:11 *Dearly beloved, I **beseech** you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;*

1Pe 5:12 *By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, **exhorting**, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.*

- C. As applied to church life, this meaning of the word suggests that members ought to support one another verbally.

### IV. Admonish One Another

- A. Admonition, which is a verbal warning or challenge, is designed to lead believers toward conduct worthy of the Gospel. The emphasis here is a bit sharper and more pointed than mere encouragement.

- B. Texts:

Phil 4:2 *I **beseech** Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.*

1 Ti 6:2 *... These things teach and **exhort**.*

2 Ti 4:2 *Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, **exhort** with all longsuffering and doctrine.*

Titus 2:6 *Young men likewise **exhort** to be sober minded.*

Titus 2:15 *These things speak, and **exhort**, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.*

Jude 1:3 *Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and **exhort** you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*

- C. As applied to church life, this meaning of the word suggests that members ought to challenge or warn one another regarding proper behavior and attitudes. Believers have the right to strongly confront those who fall into sin.

V. Comfort One Another.

- A. One of the most significant responsibilities church members have toward each other is that of comfort or consoling help. In times of distress and sorrow, believers should rally around one another to offer comfort and support.
- B. Texts:
  - Ro 15:4 *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and **comfort** of the scriptures might have hope.*
  - 2Co 13:11 *Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good **comfort**, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.*
  - Phil 2:1 *If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any **comfort** of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,*
  - Col 2:2 *That their hearts might be **comforted**, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;*
  - 1Th 4:18 *Wherefore **comfort** one another with these words.*
  - 2Th 2:16 *Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting **consolation** and good hope through grace,*
  - Heb 6:18 *That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong **consolation**, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:*
- C. As applied to church life, this meaning of the word suggests that members ought to sympathize with those experiencing pain and sorrow; “weep with those who weep” (Rom 12:15).

Needless to say, there is some crossover and blending of meanings with this term. A broad range of meanings fits in many cases (e.g., 1 Th 4:18). All Christians should affirm the responsibility they have to fulfill the implications of this word: ask one another for help, strongly appeal to one another to do the right thing, encourage one another with positive words, challenge or warn one another regarding sin or proper conduct, and sympathize with each other when facing distress and sorrow. By doing so, we will “edify one another” (next and final lesson).





## Building Up One Another

### Lesson 14: Edify One Another

1Th 5:11 *Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.*

Today we will finish our series on building up one another by focusing on the word “build up” or “enable,” which is the meaning of “edify.” The root word is used forty-two times in the NT, although it is translated “edify” only three times. The word is often used literally of building a structure (cf. Luke 7:5 “he hath built us a synagogue”) and figuratively of Christian growth (cf. Col 2:7 “built up in him”).

The command in 1 Th 5:11 is to “edify one another.” How does that happen?

- I. Take heed to your own spiritual condition.
  - A. Each individual is responsible to be very careful (“take heed”) about the kind of spiritual life he builds for himself (cf. 1 Cor 3:10-15). Everyone will stand before God to give an account for himself. Thus, we should use permanent materials to “build” our lives, not meaningless, trivial materials that cannot stand the fire of God’s judgment.
  - B. Col 2:7 associates several ideas: “Rooted and **built up** in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.” Thus, strict adherence to apostolic teaching (i.e., Bible doctrine) is required for one’s faith to be stable and permanent.
  - C. A church is no stronger than its constituent members. If the members of a church are immature and untaught, the whole church will be weak. On the other hand, strong members constitute a strong church. Before we can edify anyone else, we must make sure that we are “sound in the faith” (Titus 1:13, 2:2). Note Jude’s words in Jude 20-21.
- II. Follow legitimate spiritual authority.
  - A. Paul says in 2 Cor 10:8 that apostolic authority was “given us for edification.” (See also 2 Cor 12:19 and 13:10). Paul’s priority in his teaching was to establish and build up the community of believers in the faith.
  - B. A primary goal for pastors and other Christian workers is “the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). Pastors seek to work with those who are “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” and help them “grow up into him in all things” (Eph 4:14-15). They accomplish this by “speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:15).
  - C. Biblical, accurate, understandable preaching edifies the church (1 Cor 14:4, 17). When pastors and others “preach the word” (2 Tim 4:2), the congregation receives spiritual knowledge and is motivated to behave biblically. Even unbelievers are edified in the sense of being challenged and convicted. Simply listening to the preacher is a means of edification.
  - D. When everyone in the church is doing his part, mutual edification is the result; the body builds up itself in love (Eph 4:16).



- III. Use the resources God has provided.
- A. Ultimately, God builds people up through the Word of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit (read Acts 20:32). Edification is God's work, yet it is directly tied to each of the spiritual disciplines—Bible reading, church attendance, prayer, singing, worship, giving, meditation, fellowship, service, etc. We build ourselves up in the faith, both individually and congregationally, as we participate in these activities.
  - B. How will one grow in the faith if he ignores the resources God has provided? Little or no growth is possible for those who neglect these spiritual disciplines. Failure to grow, backsliding, apathy and ignorance result from such neglect.
- IV. Pass on to others what you have received.
- A. The command “edify one another” implies that individuals pass on to others the things they have learned themselves. After being built up ourselves, we seek to build others up. In other words, it is important for every believer to have an outlet for service. As we are helped, we seek to help others. This assumes some kind of interaction among believers, either formally (e.g., teaching a class) or informally (fellowship gatherings, conversations).
  - B. The word “edify” is commonly used in association with other important words, like admonish, encourage, warn, and support (cf. 1 Cor 14:3 and 1 Th 5:14). A body of believers is built up and strengthened as members do such things for and with one another. Again, this assumes a good deal of interaction and mutual care. This is not going to work where members are disconnected and disinterested.
- V. Love the brethren
- A. The desire to edify others is an expression of Christian love. Paul insists that “knowledge puffs up, but love edifies” (1 Cor 8:1). Genuine Christian love seeks the best for the other person. Love motivates us to build up, not tear down. Unfortunately, even Christians at times use words and actions that tend to tear down rather than build up. We must guard against this.
  - B. In 1 Cor 8:10, Paul criticizes those who would “embolden” (lit. “edify/build up”) a weaker brother to violate his conscience. We should be very careful (1 Cor 8:9 “take heed lest by any means...”) that we do not present a bad example for others to follow. Christian love demands that we willingly limit our behavior for the benefit of others. We should be willing to get rid of anything in our lives that “edifies not” (1 Cor 10:23).
  - C. Love ought to be the essential, central element in our relationships. We build up others because we love them.

# A “One Another” Covenant

Let's review what the Bible says regarding our responsibilities to one another.

1. **Fellowship, the Foundation and Motivation for “One-Another” Ministry:** Because we share a common unity in Christ, we share a common relationship with one another. We are partners together in the work of God.
2. **Members of One Another:** Because we are all members of the body of Christ, we will be unified, working together, sharing together, and recognizing the importance of each individual to the success of the body.
3. **Devoted to One Another:** As part of the same family, we will display brotherly love and tender care toward one another. Kindness and humility will mark our behavior.
4. **Honor One Another:** Following the example of our Lord, we will humbly and self-sacrificially respect, value, and serve one another.
5. **Be of the Same Mind with One Another:** Because of our unity in Christ, we will seek peaceful cooperation and unity with one another. We will not allow trivial disagreements to divide us.
6. **Accept One Another:** Understanding human weakness, we will welcome and receive one another graciously, avoiding judgmentalism and favoritism.
7. **Admonish One Another:** Armed with the right attitude and good understanding of the facts, we will confront and warn one another regarding proper behavior when necessary.
8. **Greet One Another:** We will seek to demonstrate brotherly love in appropriate ways.
9. **Serve One Another:** Setting aside our tendency to be self-serving, we will willingly submit to Christ and find ways to serve one another.
10. **Bear One Another's Burdens:** We will help one another bear the burdens of life, both physical and spiritual, as we seek to fulfill the law of Christ.
11. **Bear With One Another:** We will patiently extend forgiveness to erring brethren, remembering Jesus' forgiveness of us and admitting our own need.
12. **Submit to One Another:** We will willingly yield to the needs and desires of others when appropriate.
13. **Comfort One Another:** We will ask one another for help, appeal to one another to do the right thing, encourage one another with positive words, warn one another regarding sin or proper conduct, and sympathize with each other when facing sorrow.

14. **Edify One Another:** We will build one another up in the faith by taking responsibility for our own spiritual growth, following legitimate authority, using the resources God has supplied, and displaying brotherly love.