

Members of One Another

Reading: 1 Cor 12:14-27

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

In our Summer Sermon Series, we are looking at some of the “one another” passages in the Bible, and today we’ll consider what it means to be “members one of another.”

Paul frequently illustrates the unity of the church by comparing the church to a human body. Like the human body, the members of the local body of Christ are supposed to function together in unity and harmony.

Sadly, that’s often not how a local church functions. Churches are commonly filled with division and discord. People cannot seem to get along together for various reasons. But that’s not how it should be. We ought to be able to function like the various parts of a body work together in harmony with each part fulfilling its role.

Paul describes that unity when he says that we are “members one of another.”

What does it mean to be “members one of another”? Let’s consider several implications of that idea.

I. A church is like a human body.

Paul’s point in describing the church in terms of a human body is to show that all the parts work together. The body must be united and harmonious for it to function properly.

The body contains different, distinct parts, but they have to function together for the whole body to work right. Like the human body is under the control of the head/brain, so the church is under the authority of Christ. When the church is following its Head, it is able to achieve its goals.

All Christians are part of the same body—the body of Christ. That means that we are united spiritually. If you are “in Christ,” then you are part of the universal body of Christ. And no matter what may divide members of that body, we are spiritually united to all genuine believers.

However, the universal church—the spiritual body of Christ composed of all Christians everywhere—will not meet until we all get to heaven. Sadly, there is often great divisions among the members of Christ’s spiritual body.

Fellow Christians often cannot agree and get along together. So in practical terms, the unity among believers is expressed within a local church, where believers of like faith and practice gather together regularly.

The context for our “one another” responsibilities is the local church, not the universal church. We fulfill our obligations to one another in the local church.

II. A church should be unified.

The point of all this language comparing the church to a body is that the parts of the body should work together harmoniously.

- A. No individual Christian can function effectively by himself. A body is made up of many parts. 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.

Sadly, many Christians today feel like they have no need to be affiliated with a local church. Many claim to have their own personal devotional life, so they do not need to be part of a larger group of believers. They can worship God through the TV, the radio, the Internet, or a small group Bible study. Their spiritual life has no contact with the church. That individualistic attitude is simply unbiblical. And it can be spiritually dangerous.

The NT does not allow for “lone wolf” Christians. Every Christian should be connected to a local church. The local church is God’s program for the world today; we live in the church age. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth, and every Christian should be connected to a local church.

- B. Every member of the church is important and necessary in the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:21

All members of the body are equally important. No member of Christ’s body should feel he is more or less 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). Every part is important.

Quote: In the church, every individual is not only necessary in his place as an individual, but is needful to the proper symmetry and action of the whole.¹

C. We live the Christian life as a community.

1. Some aspects of the Christian life are certainly personal and individual. No one can believe for you or have a devotional life for you. Each person is responsible for his own spiritual life. Many aspects of the Christian life are private and personal.
2. However, much of the Christian life involves the Christian community of which we are a part. We live the Christian life in interaction with others in the same church. The phrase “members one of another” certainly implies a close, personal bond that we ought to have with the others people in the church.
3. That suggests mutual dependence on each other. The individual parts of the body depend on the other parts. If some part is damaged or not doing its job, the whole body suffers. When all the parts are functioning well, the whole body is healthy.

D. Christians must pursue unity in the body of Christ.

The “many members” (1 Cor 12:12) of a body must work in concert or harmony, like a team. The parts of the body work together to achieve a set of goals.

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.

Quote: Every biblical [picture] 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 Family with one father; one Building with one foundation; one Body with one head.²

¹ Barnes Notes

²John MacArthur, *The Body Dynamic* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Chariot Victor Pub., 1996), 89.

Trans: The church, as a body, is to be unified, all the parts working together to achieve its goals.

And each member is to seek to function in unity with all the other members. We should not be free-lancing and doing our own thing. We must function along with other parts of the body.

What do we call it when one part of the body starts doing its own thing? That disease or a dysfunction. E.g., spasm.

III. A church should demonstrate unity.

The Bible gives us several keys to unity within a local church.³

A. Love

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

1 John 3:14 *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.*

1 John 4:11 *Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

1. The most basic and profound responsibility we have toward one another is love. And that is a command.
2. Biblical love is not what the world usually thinks of as love.
 - a) It's *not* based on feelings of romance or attraction. Biblical love is not sentimental or romantic.
 - b) Biblical love is *not* based on what the other person can do for you.
 - c) It's *not* based on circumstances or performance.These are all ways that the unsaved world thinks of love.
3. The most significant demonstration of love was Jesus' death on the cross.

John 15:13 *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*

³Some of these are from John MacArthur, *The Body Dynamic*.

Romans 5:8 *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Christian love is sacrificial.

4. Jesus demonstrated genuine Christian love for the disciples by washing their feet. He performed a humble service for their benefit.
5. That's a good definition of love—serving others for their benefit, doing what is best for others.
6. Jesus exhorted his disciples to do likewise for each other (John 13)—serve humbly.
7. We demonstrate Christian love primarily through acts of selfless, sacrificial service to meet one another's needs.
8. When we serve one another sacrificially, we are promoting Christian unity and harmony.

B. Humility

Phil 2:3-4 *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*

Christians experience unity by humbly considering others instead of themselves. Christians are to care so much for each other that they are less concerned about what happens to themselves.

Unfortunately, many Christians are more concerned about how well others are serving them than they are about serving others. Many Christians are consumeristic in their view of the church—"how can the church serve me?"

We must continually struggle against self-centeredness and strive to put others first. Humility is necessary for unity.

C. Service

1Co 12:25 *That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.*

Gal 5:13 ... *by love serve one another.*

1. God has given Christians different gifts, and the measure of faith to go with each gift. The church benefits from all its members exercising their spiritual gifts.
2. The intent or purpose for spiritual gifts is the building up of the church. God gives gifts for us to use for the benefit of others.
3. 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 has gifted you.

D. Harmony

Ro 12:6 *Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, ...*

1. In music, melody and harmony go together and make a pleasant sound. As music becomes more complex, it brings more voices or sounds together into a symphony, where many sounds all go together to make a very pleasant experience.
2. Everyone has different gifts and different places in the body of Christ. All Christians are to be content with their gifts and are to harmonize with the whole Body. We seek to use our gifts in a way that everyone finds beneficial. We seek to harmonize with others, i.e., to interact in a way that works with everyone else.
3. If someone is playing or singing off key or playing their own tune, then it does not sound good with how others are playing.
4. To be a healthy body, the church needs every member singing from the same sheet of music and trying to harmonize with everyone else.

We have to be intentional about fitting in with everyone else. We have to make sure that our contribution is actually harmonious with what others are doing.

E. Appreciation

1Co 12:22 *... those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:*

1. As we get older, it's common for some part of the body to be "feeble," in pain, or not functioning properly. It's a real blessing when every part feels good, or at least every part is functional.
2. When a part of the body starts malfunctioning, we come to appreciate how important that part is.
3. We should have esteem and appreciation for everyone in the church, even the "feeble" parts. Everyone contributes something in his own unique way. Even eccentric people add something to the overall distinctiveness of the church.
4. We believe that God has brought all of us into this local church, and we believe that everyone is here for a purpose and is necessary.

We should try to appreciate everyone.

F. Commitment

1. The text says that we are members one of another. That statement implies the reality of church membership. Membership shows our commitment to the local church that we attend.

The concept is found throughout the pages of the NT.

- a) Biblical precedent/examples imply church membership.
 - (1) The normal pattern that we see in the NT is that people hear the Gospel, believe in Jesus, get baptized, and join the church. We should follow that pattern (Acts 2:41-47).
 - (2) Members could be removed from the local church (1 Cor 5:12-13). One obviously cannot be removed from something he is not a part of.
 - (3) Members could transfer from one church to another (Rom 16:1).
 - (4) Churches kept records of membership (1 Tim 5:9).
- b) Biblical principles imply church membership.
 - (1) The principle of accountability

The local church is the context in which one makes himself accountable to other believers. Members of a church are responsible to exhort, encourage, warn, and disciple one another. We should welcome and seek such accountability.

Local churches have pastors. These men are the shepherds of the flock. They are obligated to feed, lead, and guard the flock. So the sheep are accountable to the shepherd as well as to one another.

Some people do not want that accountability.

(2) The principle of commitment

The members of the early church had a sincere commitment to one another (Acts 2:41-47). The author of Hebrews exhorts his readers not to forsake the assembly of believers (Heb 10:25). Members of a church ought to be firmly committed to one another and to the ministry of their church.

Most churches have a formal covenant that members agree to when they join. A covenant is an agreement or contract which lists the obligations members voluntarily take upon themselves. Such a document spells out very clearly the commitments people are making when they join the church.

(3) The principle of orderliness

In the local church, all things are to be done in an orderly manner (1 Cor 14:40). Church membership facilitates orderliness by clearly identifying who is part of a local church and who is not. If one is part of a church, the church members have the right and responsibility to help that person live an orderly life. Non-members do not have the same connection or ownership as members have.

2. It's true that the local church is a voluntary fellowship of believers. We do not compel or force anyone to become a member. Membership is voluntary.

But membership is the biblical pattern and expectation. It's beneficial for both the individual and the church.

The Bible describes believers as “members one of another.” That implies that the local church is a unified body. We should be operating in unity and harmony.

The church contains many different parts, and all of those parts are necessary. All the parts ought to be concerned about the other parts, especially those parts that are suffering or are having trouble.

All the parts of the body are different, but all are necessary, and all should be functioning in love, unity, humility, appreciation, and commitment as we serve God by serving one another.

If you are not part of this body, I encourage you to join our team.