

Committed Christian Life

Fellowship in the Family



*But grow in the grace and knowledge
of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

2 Peter 3:18

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Fellowship in the Family

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One of the most critical weaknesses of the church is the lack of unity in the body of Christ. This failure to maintain unity in the body of Christ has been a source of impotence and embarrassment throughout church history.

How can we promote unity? What part does the Holy Spirit play in unity in the church? What steps can we take to ensure better relationships with our fellow Christians? What are an individual's responsibilities in these relationships? These are some of the issues we will deal with in this lesson.

This lesson is part of the course *Committed Christian Life*. Other lessons in this course are:

- 1) "The Goal and Process of the Christian Life"
Do you know what the goal is? Are you struggling to be a "good" Christian? Learn what God wants to do in and through you in this supernatural life we are called to.
- 2) "The Power for the Spiritual Life"
Learn about the ministry of the Holy Spirit to unbelievers and believers and the three commands God's Word gives us about the Holy Spirit.
- 3) "The War"
We are in a spiritual battle with a determined enemy. Learn about the evil one's tactics and how to be victorious.
- 4) "Prayer: Worship and Praise"
Prayer is an expression of our relationship to God. Learn a fresh focus as you seek His face before you seek His hand.
- 5) "Prayer: Petition and Intercession"
Now with Almighty God in focus learn the joys of intercession. Included are the basic principles of prayer, hindrances to prayer and the importance of corporate prayer.
- 6) "Alive and Powerful — The Word Of God"
The Bible is our main source of communication from our Heavenly Father and the food of our spiritual lives. Learn how to make the most of this living, powerful resource.
- 7) "Walking By Faith"
The foundational principle of Kingdom living is faith. Learn how to deal with the challenges to faith as well as steps to knowing God's will for your life.

- 8) “Spiritual Transformation”
What God has promised is that He will transform us by the power of His Holy Spirit so that we become like Him. This lesson will begin to answer the question: As a result of my walk with Christ, what changes in my character should take place?
- 9) “Understanding Suffering”
Learn the five purposes of suffering and how our response to suffering will make or break us. We alone decide whether suffering will drive us to bitterness, or to spiritual maturity.
- 11) “Ministering To Your Fellowman”
This lesson which will challenge you as to examine how you can serve others. It will open your eyes to why God has given you gifts from His Holy Spirit, and how important it is for you to minister to those around you.
- 12) “Redeeming The Time”
What does the Bible say about work and how we should use our time? Do you know what your priorities are and do you set goals that reflect that? This lesson will help you redeem the time.
- 13) “Preparing for Revival”
There is much talk about revival, but little evidence of it. Take a look at the history of revivals and the principles we can use to bring revival now, here—in our own lives, in our church, in Ukraine.

Introduction

As you do this lesson, for the greatest benefit to your spiritual journey right now, we recommend three things:

- 1) Keep a spiritual journal, at least while you work your way through this lesson. This should include people and needs you are praying for, answers God gives and where you are reading in your Bible and what God is teaching you.
- 2) Make a goal to have a daily quiet time with the Lord. If you are in a leadership position we would challenge you to set aside an hour a day for one month. However if you do not already have a regular quiet time, start with a daily goal that you are willing to practice for one month.
- 3) Memorize 4 Bible verses. We suggest you choose 4 verses from Hebrews 11—the famous chapter on faith.

Throughout this lesson there are various questions, exercises and assignments that will help you interact with the material and apply it to your own life situation. Note that at the end of this lesson there is an answer key so that you may check your understanding of the material covered.

Use a notebook to write out your answers to the exercises. This is your “thinking” notebook so that you can put down your own answers and thoughts on what you are learning. Our learning is reinforced by writing it down so this is an excellent tool as you pursue growth in your personal life.

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. Fellowship
 - A. The Basis of Fellowship
 - B. Fellowship and Unity
 - C. The “Attitude” of Unity
- II. The Practice of Fellowship
 - A. Our Responsibilities to One Another
 - B. Resolving Conflicts
 - C. Accountability

Conclusion

LESSON OBJECTIVES

At the end of this lesson the student should be able to:

1. Write a brief definition of Christian fellowship.
2. Explain the part the Holy Spirit plays in the unity of the body of Christ.
3. Explain the place of encouragement and admonishment in relationships between believers, describing the characteristics and procedures for these functions.
4. List four steps for resolving conflict.
5. Demonstrate a desire for unity in the body of Christ by taking steps to restore any broken relationships with a believer or unbeliever.
6. Establish an accountability relationship with another Christian.

LESSON ASSIGNMENTS

1. Review the Lesson Outline and study the objectives.

2. Read this lesson and do the questions and exercises, referring to the Bible as requested.
3. Have a Quiet Time daily and also use a spiritual journal as mentioned above.
4. If you have taken other lessons from this course you know that it is important to develop a habit of memorizing and meditating on Scripture. Because Hebrews 11 is full of examples of faith, and all of us have a desire to grow in faith, we recommend that you memorize four verses from this chapter as you work through this lesson.
5. Find a fellow believer with whom you can develop an accountability relationship. Meet and share together (Project).

I. Fellowship

One of the special things that happens to us when we come to Christ is our entry into the family of God. God in His wisdom and mercy has not left us alone in this world but rather has given us each other for enjoyment, comfort, encouragement, and edification. The concept of the “family” of God is most clearly stated in Ephesians 2:18-19:

...through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household...

We have one Father, we are His children, and therefore brothers and sisters in Christ—the family of God. The term “brother” is used throughout the New Testament as a spiritual brother; the term “sister” is used less frequently but with the same spiritual meaning. Paul talks about many of his fellow workers as brothers and sisters (Philemon 1:7; Romans 16:1). He often instructs us to care for our brothers, or gives a rebuke as to how one should treat his brother (Romans 14:21; James 4:11). And the Apostle John addresses us as children and specifically “children of God” (1 John 3:1). Even Jesus used family terminology when He spoke of us, “For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother” (Matthew 12:50). So, when you look around at a gathering of your local church, you are looking at your family, the ones who help you and the ones whom you need to help. As in all families we have obligations because of our relationships, as well as benefits of fellowship and belonging.

But just like in our human families we do not choose who our brothers and sisters are, and we do not always get along with them, so it is in our spiritual family. We do not choose who will be in God's family. And it is easy for us to exclude those with whom we do not get along instead of appreciating the diversity God has created in His family and accepting and appreciating each one. Many of the epistles address how we are to interact with each other in this unique family. So let's look more closely at what we mean when we talk about our “fellowship” together in this huge family.

A. The Basis of Fellowship

Fellowship takes place on different levels with different people as we look around our world. For example, there is a certain amount of fellowship with fellow workers on the job because there is the common bond of working in the same place, perhaps even performing the same or similar tasks. But what makes Christian fellowship unique? In what way is it different from the camaraderie we might experience on an athletic team or when working on a common project? Let us see what the Bible says about fellowship.

Fellowship defined. The Greek word for fellowship is the word *koinonia*. Its basic idea is to share something, but it is also used for participating together in a common activity. Thus, we might say

that to have fellowship means possessing something in common (e.g. a goal, work, or frame of reference). A survey of the use of the word in the New Testament will help illustrate this concept.



Exercise 1

Look up the following references, and write in your notebook a one-sentence summary of how each verse illustrates the idea of having something in common.

- a. 1 Corinthians 1:9
- b. 2 Corinthians 8:4 (“participation” = *koinonia*)
- c. Galatians 2:9
- d. Philippians 2:1
- e. 1 John 1:3-7

But why is Christian fellowship special? The idea of mutual involvement or shared goods and experiences still does not fully explain the one-of-a-kind, dynamic fellowship pictured in the New Testament. We need to probe further to see the foundation for this relationship.

A closer look at the above verses will make this clearer. Turn again in your Bible to 1 Corinthians 1:9. Here Paul reminds the Corinthian believers of one of the great benefits of their salvation, namely, that they now live in personal fellowship with Jesus Christ. Now turn to Galatians 2:9. Here Paul explains the reason he and Barnabas were accepted into the fellowship of the other apostles. The so-called pillars of the church--Peter, James, and John-- recognized the presence of the grace of God in Paul’s life and in the life of Barnabas. The “right hand of fellowship” was given them on the basis of their salvation.

Finally, turn to 1 John 1. In verses 3-7 we have the clearest expression of the New Testament concept of fellowship. A close examination of the passage reveals an interesting correlation between our relationship to God and our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ. John recalls the firsthand experience he had as a disciple who walked with Jesus, and in verse 3 he states the purpose of his letter--a desire to have fellowship with these believers. Then he qualifies the idea by saying that, indeed, their fellowship is really with the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, fellowship between Christians is a function of their relationship to God. Christian fellowship is unique because only the Christian knows God the Father personally and is experiencing that for which man was created. Furthermore, only Christians in right relationship to God can really know one another in the fullness God intends.

John does not stop there, however. He says that fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ is impossible when something is wrong with our relationship with God. Note 1 John 1:5-7. God is absolutely holy, and the goal of the believer is to walk in that same light (a metaphor for holiness) that is in God. In fact, if we claim to be in fellowship with God and live in sin, then we are lying. Finally, John tells us that to walk in the light, and thus in fellowship with God, results in our being in fellowship with each other. Our relationship to each other is totally dependent on our relationship to God.

Christian fellowship, then, is the mutual sharing by believers of their personal walk with God. This encompasses our growth, worship, and ministry as we seek to build one another up and proclaim the love of Christ to the world.

Fellowship illustrated. To solidify our thinking on the subject, let us see this principle illustrated in the early church.



Exercise 2

Examine fellowship in the early church. Turn in your Bible to Acts 2:42-47.

Study this passage and analyze how fellowship was expressed among these early believers. In your notebook write your thoughts as to how their fellowship reflected their faith in Christ. How did their idea of community affect their life-style? What parallels do you see to your own experience of fellowship?

Then write out a brief definition of fellowship, based on what we have studied so far. Be prepared to discuss in your group the principles you glean from this study.

B. Fellowship and Unity

From the very beginning of the church the Holy Spirit was there in fulness and we see an unusual phenomenon among these early Christians. There was a unity and caring among them that could not be explained in human terms--a source of fellowship that could only be supernatural.

One of the functions of the Holy Spirit that we did not cover in the lesson "The Power for the Spiritual Life" is that of "unifying". For true fellowship there must be unity and the greater the unity the greater the fellowship. Let's look at a few verses that explain more on how the Holy Spirit is involved in fellowship.



Question 1 Read 2 Corinthians 13:14. What was attributed to the Holy Spirit?

In this verse which mentions each member of the trinity, it is specifically this unifying aspect for which Paul looks to the Holy Spirit to deepen in the lives of the believers.

1 Corinthians 12 speaks about all the different members of the body of Christ, about different positions, different gifts, different functions, different backgrounds, but the unity is "in the Spirit" even when there is all this diversity because in verse 13 Paul states: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." We would think that people with this many differences would not be able to get along together, but Paul emphasizes that, especially with the different gifts the Holy Spirit has blessed us with, we are drawn together because we complement each other and must depend on each other.



Question 2 Read 1 Corinthians 12:18-25 and write your own paraphrase of this passage.

Paul emphasizes unity further in the book of Philippians when he says: "If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any *fellowship of the Spirit* ... make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose" (Philippians 2:1-2 emphasis added). Still on the theme of unity Paul speaks of us being united into a temple of God through the work of the Spirit in Ephesians 2:22. Paul en-

courages the Ephesians in “being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

In Galatians Paul emphasizes the difference between walking in the flesh and walking in the Spirit.



Question 3 Read Galatians 5:19-21 and list specifically the acts of the flesh which are directly opposed to unity.

Those who are walking in the Spirit, who are led by the Spirit, are going to have the distinguishing characteristic of love. The fruit of the Spirit is love and “the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5).



Question 4 According to Colossians 3:14 what does this love do?

We have a picture here of the loving harmony that the Holy Spirit brings into our fellowship. This concept of unity runs throughout Scripture. In Psalm 133:1 we are told that it is good for brothers to dwell together in unity. Likewise in Proverbs 6:19 it says that God despises the one who sows discord among the brothers. The importance of unity among believers is woven into the entire fabric of the Bible. We will see evidence of the Holy Spirit in a community of believers and in the individual lives of those believers when we see unity and love for each other.

C. The “Attitude” of Unity

We have seen that fellowship and unity go hand in hand. This unity is of great importance to God and is crucial in the witness of the church to the world. How then do we maintain this fellowship? The work of the Holy Spirit is critical in this and we need to seek more of His fruit in our lives.

But we will now turn our attention to the matter of our personal responsibilities in fostering a spirit of unity. As in most matters of obedience, we must begin with our attitude. How we act will be determined largely by the attitude of heart and mind that we bring to our involvement in the lives of others.

One passage of Scripture--Philippians 2:1-11--gives an excellent summary of the attitude required of believers. Take time to read this passage now.

Paul begins this discussion with a statement about the seriousness of the subject. Notice the strong emotional appeal he makes. In verse one there is a sense of urgency and concern as he pours out his heart. If the Philippians’ love and concern for him is genuine (and it is), he begs them to hear his words; this urgency is echoed in other places in Scripture as well. On the basis of this strong emotional appeal, Paul urges the Philippians to unity. He specifies four elements of this unity: to be one in **mind, love, spirit, and purpose**. This is the goal of the body of Christ, but how is it to be realized? Paul gives us an answer.



Question 5 In your own words state how Paul answers this question in Philippians 2:3-4.

Paul concludes this passage with the ultimate example of self-sacrifice, the Lord Jesus. We are enjoined to have the same mind the Lord had when He laid aside all the glory of heaven and humbled Himself to an ignominious death on a cross. He did this so that our deepest need would be met. This is the spirit that creates unity. We must be willing to lay aside all our own rights and desires in order to meet the needs of our fellow believers.



Exercise 3

Apply Philippians 2:1-11. Pause for a moment to reflect on the teaching of these verses. Are there attitudes in your life that are counter to those presented here? Can you honestly say that it is your desire to see your brothers and sisters in the Lord prosper spiritually? If you can identify any wrong attitudes or lack of concern on your part, record it in your notebook, and make it a matter of prayer.

II. The Practice of Fellowship

We will now look at the practical “how to’s” of living in harmony with fellow believers. First, we will survey what the Bible instructs us to do for one another. Second, we will address the problem of dealing with conflict and division when they occur. Our aim will be to develop a positive strategy for deepening our fellowship.

A. Our Responsibilities to One Another

The New Testament writers gave many instructions to believers concerning how they were to minister to each other. One term in particular was used to convey this special relationship: “one another.”¹ Dr. Gene Getz, in his books *Sharpening the Focus of the Church* and *Building Up One Another*, has pointed out that, if all the uses of this special term are studied and categorized, they can be grouped into twelve actions that believers are to perform for one another.² These twelve actions are seen by Getz as the outworking of the greatest “one another” exhortation—loving one another. In order for you to get an overview of these “one anothers”, the following exercise has been provided:



Exercise 4

Research the different categories of “one anothers.” Using the list below, in your notebook set up a half page or perhaps a whole page for each of the concepts. Look up the references provided, and write a brief summary of your understanding of the concept. Then, for each one write down one example of how you might apply this exhortation in your own church setting.

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| 1. Members of one another | Romans 12:5;
1 Corinthians 12:14-26 |
| 2. Be devoted to one another | Romans 12:10;
Philippians 2:3-4 |

¹ The Greek word is **allelon**, which is usually translated “one another.” Outside the Gospels the word appears in the New Testament fifty-eight times, forty times in the letters of Paul. Often these are repeated uses of the same injunctions.

² Gene A. Getz, *Building Up One Another* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1976); *Sharpening the Focus of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1984), 163-164.

3. Honor one another	Romans 12:10; John 13:12-15
4. Be of the same mind with one another	Romans 15:5; Acts 4:32
5. Accept one another	Romans 15:7; James 2:1
6. Admonish one another	Romans 15:14; 1 Corinthians 4:14
7. Greet one another	Romans 16:3-16; 1 Peter 5:14
8. Serve one another	Galatians 5:13-15; Matthew 20:25-28
9. Bear one another's burdens	Galatians 6:2 (<i>Note the context here is in relation to restoring a brother who has fallen into sin.</i>)
10. Show forbearance to one another	Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13
11. Be subject to one another	Ephesians 5:21; Philippians 2:3-4
12. Encourage one another	1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 10:24-25

This survey should give you at least an introduction to the scope of the responsibilities that we as Christians have toward each other. Every one of us has fallen short in one area or another, maybe even in most of them! The emphasis is often on what I get from others, not what I am giving. We have a plague, a disease among believers, of self-centeredness. The world says, "What's in it for me?" And we see this attitude exhibited in believers who go from church to church trying to find the one that will best meet "their" needs, with no thought of being committed to a family in which there is a constant giving as well as receiving.

We have already spent a lot of time on the topic of godliness and developing our Christian character. In Lesson "Spiritual Transformation" we identified and researched 13 of those traits: love, humility, contentment, thankfulness, joy, holiness, self-control, faithfulness, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, meekness. Of these traits nine of them are listed as the fruit of the Spirit. Obviously the test of how we are maturing spiritually is measured in practical terms by how we are relating to our fellow believers. Let's think about how our personal holiness affects our ability to have proper fellowship in the body of Christ.



Exercise 5

Reflect on how our Christian development affects our responsibility to one another. Turn in your notebooks again to the pages where you have listed the "one another" actions. For each one list what character trait(s) from the list in Lesson 8 would improve your ability to perform better in that area. As you examine this, evaluate how your further development in those areas would bring deeper fellowship and unity.

Two of these concepts, “encourage one another” and “admonish one another”, deserve closer examination in the context of this lesson since they are both crucial in our development as spiritual leaders and difficult to implement in a godly and effective way.

Encouragement. One benefit of being in the family of God is the mutual encouragement that believers can give to one another. Not only is encouragement a privilege, it is required of each believer as he obeys God and lives out his faith in Christ.



Question 6 Read Hebrews 10:19-25. What three things are we told to do on the basis of our redemption in Christ and the resultant access to God?

Far from being an isolated element of ministry reserved for pastors, encouragement is the duty and privilege of every believer.

Because the Spirit of God lives in us and because we all have a personal knowledge of God and His Word, we all possess the potential for effective ministry toward our fellow believers. But, while the church can be a rich reservoir of spiritual strength, unfortunately often conflict and division are more characteristic than healing, encouragement, and security. How, then, can we become encouragers?

Becoming an encourager. Talking about encouragement is easy; becoming an encourager is more difficult. Basically, a commitment to, and development of, a few specific skills are what is necessary to become an effective encourager.

Becoming an encourager begins with a very specific kind of commitment--an absolute commitment to the good of others. It must be our desire to see the needs of others met even if ours go unmet. Without this basic perspective we will almost always let our own selfish desires and needs get in the way of effective ministry to others.

This may seem like an unrealistic goal, because if we put the needs of others first all the time then our own spiritual lives will become weak. However, we are not saying that we put our ministry to others ahead of our own spiritual development. On the contrary, the encourager must maintain a vital relationship with God. What we are saying is that in our relationships with others we seek to meet their needs rather than expecting them to meet ours.

In their excellent book *Encouragement: The Key to Caring*, Lawrence Crabb and Dan Allender have outlined a helpful perspective to this issue. They draw a distinction between what they call “desires” and “goals.”³ Our goal is to meet the needs of others. It may be our desire that they meet some need of ours, but, if this ever becomes our goal in a relationship, then we can no longer adequately meet the needs of the other person.

For example, when a father comes home from a very busy day at work, what he wants to do most is have a few moments of peace and quiet to relax. But, when he walks through the door, he has a little boy who has been waiting expectantly for him to come home. Now he can do one of two things. On the one hand, if he is more concerned about his own needs being met, he can ask the boy not to bother him for a few minutes while he relaxes; or he can ask his wife to occupy him for a while (which she has been doing all day--now she needs a break!), so that he can have his desired

³Lawrence J. Crabb, Jr. and Dan B. Allender, *Encouragement: The Key to Caring* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 52-54.

tranquility. In so doing, he has made the meeting of his needs his goal. On the other hand, if his goal is to meet the needs of his family, then, while he may **desire** to get his peace and quiet, he is willing to lay aside his needs and give his son the attention that he needs and wants. By doing this, he has become an encourager to his family.

Beginning with a commitment to the needs of others, we must also develop certain skills. The first of these is to **become a good listener**. We have all gone through the frustration of trying to explain our feelings or opinions only to receive a response from the listener revealing that they have totally missed our point. Nothing is quite as useless and irritating as hastily given advice that reflects little understanding of a problem.

Not only does failure to listen lead to poor understanding, it also gives the impression that we are uninterested in the other person's problems. Being good listeners, with good eye contact, we communicate to people that we think that what they say is important and that their problems are of concern to us. Attentive listening demonstrates sensitivity to the needs of others.

When people perceive that we care enough to listen, they are much more likely to open up to us. Many people are afraid to let their needs be known. Fear of being thought of as unspiritual, bad experiences in the past, and a number of other things keep people from coming out of the shells in which they hide. Patient listening goes a long way toward helping people drop their masks.

Good listening is more than just hearing words however. It is also being aware of the non-verbal ways people communicate. Careful attention to others allows us to "hear" what their drooping shoulders, sad eyes, and hurt faces are saying to us. All of this increases the sensitivity to the real needs of people.

The second skill follows the first. Not only do we need to learn how to listen, but we must also learn how to **speak words of encouragement**. Words are powerful and have the ability to destroy, build up, or do relatively little, depending on how well they are chosen. The Bible has much to say about the power of words.



Question 7 Look up the following verses from the book of Proverbs that illustrate this point. For each reference write a brief statement on the power of words.

- a. Proverbs 12:25 _____
- b. Proverbs 15:1 _____
- c. Proverbs 15: 2 _____
- d. Proverbs 15:4 _____
- e. Proverbs 16:24 _____
- f. Proverbs 18:21 _____
- g. Proverbs 25:11 _____
- h. Proverbs 25:23 _____

The importance of our words cannot be overestimated. But what are we to say? First, the encourager needs to learn how to **ask good questions**. Thoughtful questions can be the key to people letting us minister to them. Questions should reflect care and concern as we seek to let them know that in us they have one who welcomes opportunities to listen.

Not only do we need to ask good questions, but we also must learn how to **express our experience of Christ** and our knowledge of the Word in an encouraging way. In doing this, two extremes should be avoided. The first is the temptation to quote Scripture verses in the face of any problem. Reactions against this sort of input are not because people do not want to hear what the Word of God says about their problems but rather against the insensitivity that accompanies these thoughtless quotations.

The other extreme is failure to offer spiritual insight because we feel we do not know enough. One does not have to have a seminary degree to know enough Bible to help someone. This fear is often based on the wrong assumption that we have to “solve” the problem. In reality, our thoughtful concern and personal care are in themselves powerful instruments of encouragement, even if we say little of a “spiritual” nature or cannot provide the “answer” to the problem. Our lack of Biblical knowledge should not keep us from helping others but rather should motivate us to deeper study.

One final skill will enhance our ability to encourage others. This is the ability to **discern and do helpful deeds**. We can encourage a lonely brother with a visit, a burdened friend by sharing some of his burdens, an overworked and tired colleague by either helping where appropriate or with a phone call or letter of appreciation and thanks. Thoughtful deeds can be powerful tools of encouragement.

Pause for a minute to consider what we have said about encouragement.



Question 8 If we are to be a real encouragement to others what four areas do we need to be developing?



Exercise 6

Evaluate your own skill as an encourager in light of the above thoughts. Record in your notebook some thoughts for each area. You will be asked to review this assignment in the final project at the end of this lesson.

Admonishment. A very difficult aspect of stimulating others to growth in Christ is dealing with our brothers and sisters who are have fallen into some area of sin. This topic could rightly be considered a part of encouragement, but its importance and delicacy warrant some special attention.

All believers find themselves occasionally in the uncomfortable position of observing a brother or sister in some kind of sin. The offense may affect us directly, or we may merely be aware of the act. What should our response be? What are our responsibilities in these situations? Is there a limit to how involved we should become, and if so, how do we decide what these parameters are in a given case?

In seeking answers to these questions, people tend to gravitate toward one of two extremes. Some people seem to think that it is their God-given duty to point out the sin in everybody’s life. Usually these people tend to be legalistic and display very little love. On the other extreme are people who are too timid or too uninvolved to say anything to anybody. The motto of these people is “judge not lest you be judged.”

In contrast to these two extremes, the Bible presents a balanced view. The fact that we are commanded to admonish one another prohibits us from always remaining silent. What, then, are we to do? Dr. Gene Getz, in his book *Building Up One Another*, outlines six instructive guidelines for dealing with this matter:⁴

1. **Admonishment must be done with deep concern and love.** Without the assurance that we genuinely love them, those that we would warn are more likely to erect barriers and be unwilling to receive what we have to say.

⁴ Gene A. Getz, *Building Up One Another*, 54-56.

2. **Admonishment**, to be effective, **must often be personal**. While public admonishment through the preaching and teaching of the Word is an important means of dealing with sin, it can never be a substitute for personal contact.
3. **Admonishment must be persistent**. Often an offending brother will not immediately respond. We must be willing to patiently continue in our exhortation.
4. **Admonishment must be done with pure motives**. It is not to be our motive to destroy or shame another but rather to uplift.
5. **Admonishment must be done with a proper goal**. In Colossians 1:28-29 Paul states that he admonished and taught them in order that they may be presented complete in Christ. Also, in Galatians 6:1 Paul states that the goal of dealing with a brother in sin is to restore him.
6. **Admonishment must be an outgrowth of proper body function**. This means that the ministry of admonishment cannot be isolated from an atmosphere of loving community where people are committed to the building up of one another.

To this list of guidelines we must add two prerequisites for confronting the sin in another person's life, as found in Romans 15:14. Here Paul states that the Roman Christians are able to admonish each other because of two qualifications. First, they are full of goodness. The one who would admonish another must **have his own spiritual life in order**. A parallel idea is found in Galatians 6:1 where the injunction is that the ones who are "spiritual" are to restore those who have fallen.

The second qualification listed in Romans 15:14 is that they are filled with all knowledge. This does not imply that we must know everything, but we should **be well acquainted with the Biblical teaching in the area being dealt with**. A word of caution is in order here. Often we confuse what is essential and what is non-essential in the area of obedience. We must be careful not to impose our own ideas of what is right and wrong on others. It takes great discernment to be able to be sensitive to the danger of legalism.

In summary, fellowship is the sharing of our experience of redemption with others who also know the Lord. With a commitment to the needs of our brothers and sisters, we seek to promote their spiritual growth and well-being. Encouragement and admonishment are especially important and sensitive areas in the development of fellowship that goes beyond surface issues to the heart of spiritual need. When the members of the body of Christ each function as designed, the church grows strong.

In reality, however, it never works perfectly. We are still humans with needs and weaknesses, and no matter how mature we are, we fail. We will not always agree. At times we will be selfish and unloving. In the best of churches conflict will arise. How we deal with that conflict will in itself be a testimony to our maturity. It is also our next topic in this lesson.



Exercise 7

Reflect on the responsibility of admonishment. Write down the two qualifications for admonishment. Do you meet those qualifications? What can you do to be better qualified to admonish? Now list the six guidelines. Commit them to memory. How have you dealt with someone in the past when you have seen sin in their lives? What would you change if you were to face the same situation now? Is there someone God is laying on your heart to talk to now? Pray for that person and for your attitude towards him, and then for wisdom in how to approach him, keeping in mind the guidelines you have learned.

B. Resolving Conflicts

Before we enter into the discussion about conflict, it is important to note that not all conflict has to be a bad thing. Sometimes it is perfectly legitimate for two members of God's family to have differences of opinion about interpretation of the Bible, modes of worship, or simple tradition. God did not make us mindless robots programmed to all act a specific way, and differences are natural. As long as the differences are resolved in love, it is not necessarily wrong for them to exist, and they can even be the cause of growth in the church. In this section, however, we are discussing the more plentiful and negative type of conflicts.

We would all like to avoid conflict among believers. But one quick glance through the pages of church history from the days of the New Testament church until today reminds us of the severity of the problem. Why is this so? The causes of disunity can be condensed into five root causes.

We want our own way. At the heart of the problem is the basic selfishness of man. James 4:1-2 points out that conflicts arise because we are consumed with our own desires. Until we are willing to put the needs of others and the body of Christ above our own needs and desires, we will continue to live with conflict. This brings us back to what our commitment to Christ is, and whether we have surrendered all to Him and are filled with His Holy Spirit.

We cannot control our tongues. Nothing fuels the fires of controversy like gossip. Eager to gain support for our point of view and to find justification for our actions, we enlist all the reinforcements we can find, even if it means marring the character of another to achieve the end purpose. The result is that factions are created involving people who have nothing at all to do with the problem.

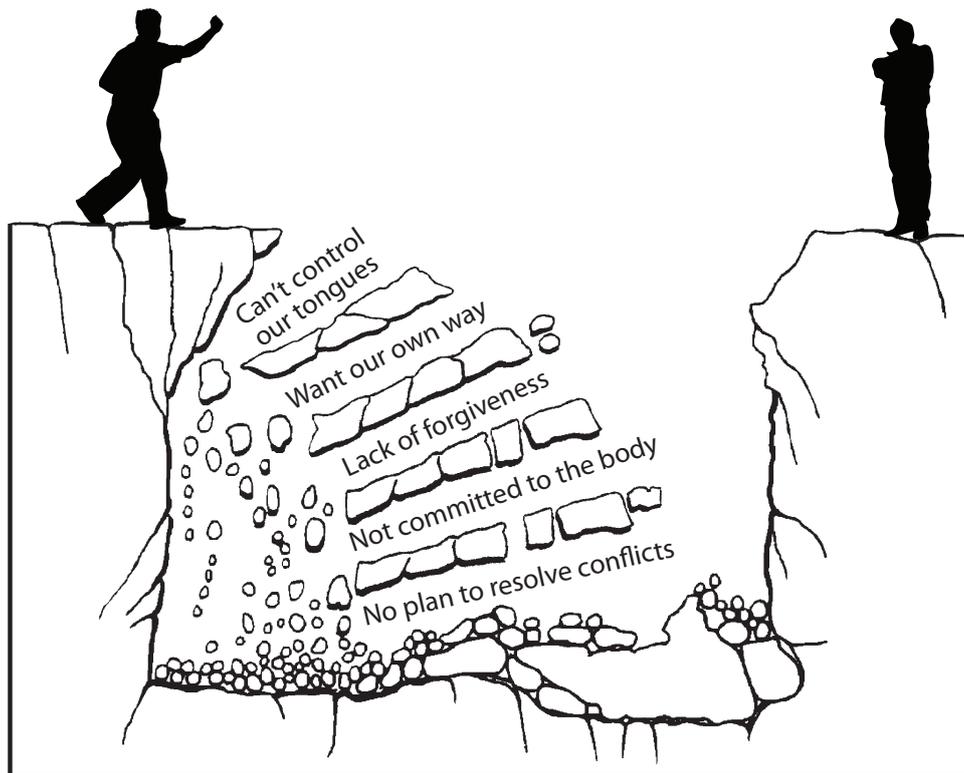


Diagram 10-1

We are not committed to the body. Much has been said already in this lesson about commitment to the body. In this context, however, we see the results of the absence of such commitment. When we do not view ourselves as part of a greater entity, the family of God, and work for the benefit of this family, then we are ripe for asserting our own way.

We are unwilling to forgive. A critical area in inter-personal relationships is that of forgiveness. Nothing will tear apart a church body more quickly than holding grudges. Christ was very clear on our need to forgive, nor is it to be based on whether the other person asks for forgiveness. It is just simply, “Forgive us as we forgive those who sin against us.”

We have no plan to resolve conflicts. Conflicts that begin as small matters have a way of blossoming into full-blown wars when left unattended. Sometimes this is a product of an unwillingness to resolve the conflict, but often it flows from a lack of a definite plan of action. Most Christians do not know how to properly approach a brother to seek restoration of a relationship.

In this lesson we want to develop a plan of action and adopt some principles to prevent conflict from arising. By doing so, we should be able to make major steps toward the unified body that God desires.

The Bible is very clear on the need to resolve conflicts. Consider the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5:23-24:

If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

Division among brethren is a serious offense. Our acts of worship are **not** acceptable to God until the restoration of broken relationships.

The Bible not only exhorts us to seek reconciliation; it also suggests how to bring it about. From the teaching of Scripture we can develop a four-point plan for resolving conflicts. When these steps are followed, we should begin to see a deepening of love in the church.

1. **Check your attitude.** Like so many things in the spiritual life, attitude is the key. Ask yourself: Is my relationship with God strong? Have I confessed my sin, especially that related to the problem I am now trying to confront? Am I committed to the needs of the other person or persons involved? Is my desire not to get my way but to restore unity? When we deal with our attitude and clear our motivations, then we are ready to proceed (Matt. 7:1-5; Gal. 6:1).

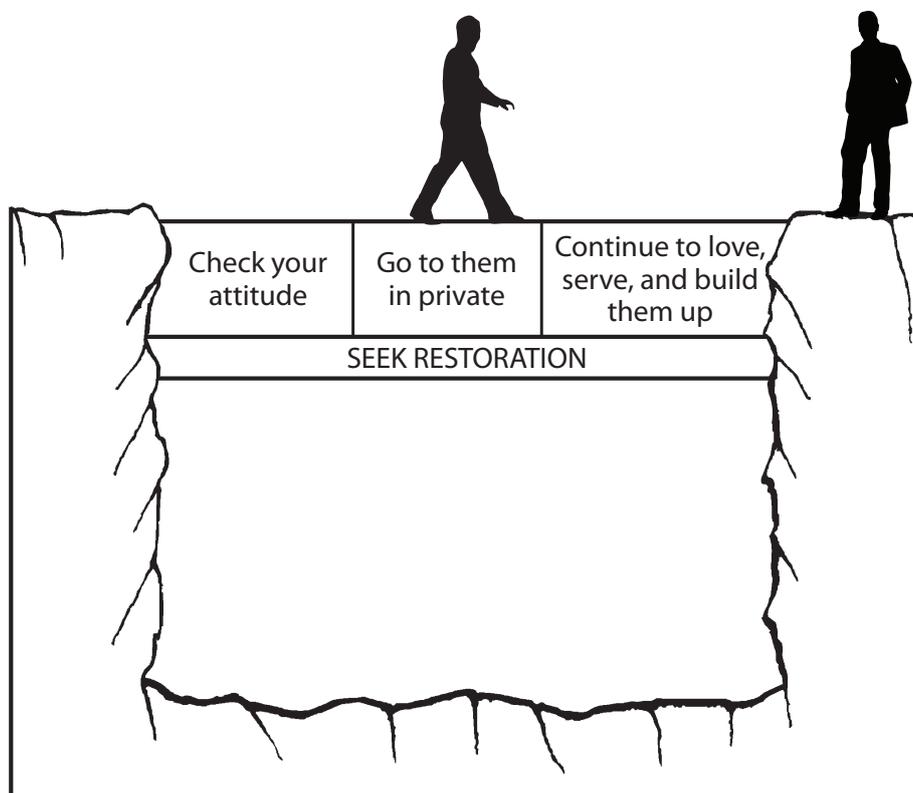


Diagram 10-2

2. **Go to the person in private.** Two things are important here. First, take the initiative. We are not to wait for the other person to come to us; we are to go to them. This is true even if we are not the source of the problem. Second, the reason we go in private is to limit the involvement to only those directly responsible for the problem. As stated earlier, one of the chief causes of factions arising in the church is our enlisting the support of others in our disagreements.
3. When you have fulfilled your obligations and the other person does not respond positively, **continue to love that person, and seek ways to serve him and build him up.** In doing so, you will sow the seeds for his later restoration.
4. When the one to whom we go refuses to respond to our initiative and the problem is severe enough to affect the function of the whole body, then we should **prayerfully follow the steps of Matthew 18:15-17.** This passage gives guidelines for dealing with a brother in sin but is also applicable when interpersonal conflict threatens the body as a whole. These steps are:
 - a. **Take another mature brother with you.** This person can seek to act as a mediator to the restoration of unity and as a witness to your efforts at restoration.
 - b. If this also fails, then **bring the matter before the church.** Now the pressure on the individual to respond increases as more people are brought into the restoration process. The goal is still to seek restoration.
 - c. **If there is still no restoration, the offending person should be treated as an outsider.** That is, he is not allowed to share in the blessings and benefits of the assembly of God. In doing so, the person is confronted with the seriousness of his sin and the commitment of the church to holiness. It does not mean that the people of the church treat the offender unkindly. Rather, they seek to call him back into fellowship with God and the church.

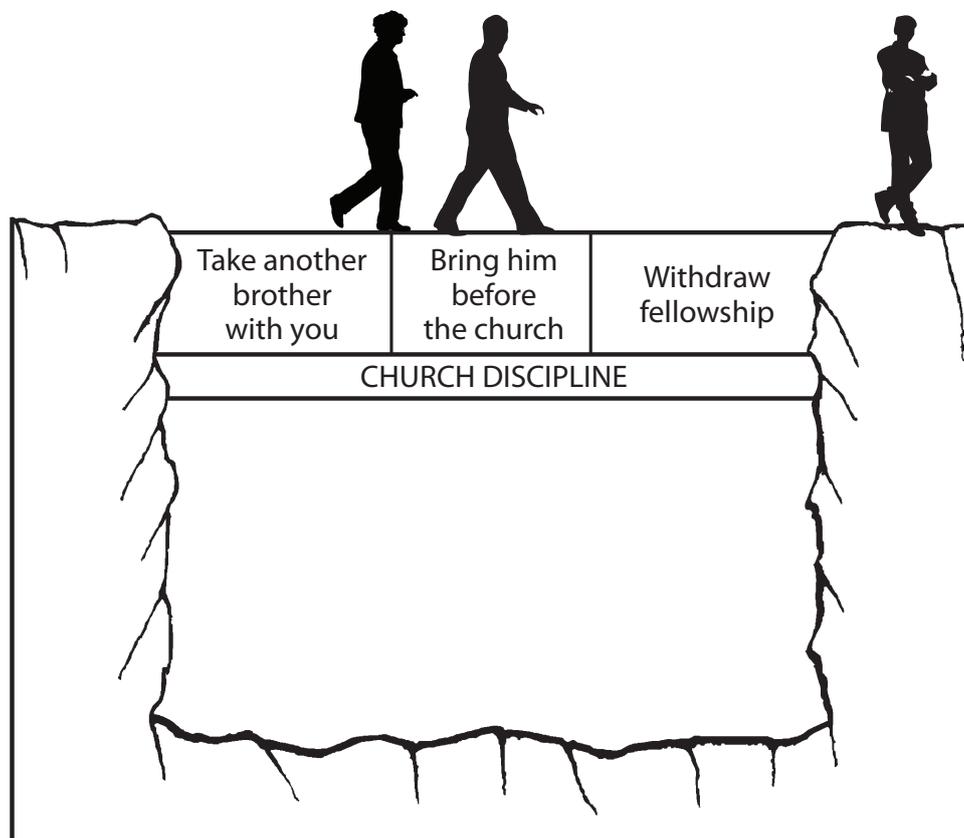


Diagram 10-3

A word of caution is in order. These last steps should be taken **only** as a last resort and when the function and testimony of the body is being hampered. A critical test is whether this person is leading others into sin because of his example or influence.



Exercise 8

Evaluate your relationships with your fellow believers. The issue of restoring relationships is of critical importance. Because of this, take time right now to evaluate your own life. If there are any relationships that are broken, take steps now to seek reconciliation. Be prepared to share a positive change in your life (either within your own character or within a relationship) that is a result of your desire for reconciliation.

Resolving conflict is important; preventing it is imperative. Here are a few principles for reducing the number of conflicts. First, be secure in your relationship with Christ. The more secure we are in Him and grow toward spiritual maturity, the easier it is for us to deal with the inevitable differences among people. Second, develop as an encourager. The more we encourage others, the more they will mature. As the body as a whole matures, unity will grow. Finally, refuse to gossip or listen to gossip. Gossip is the sharing of derogatory information about another person. We must control our tongues and learn to suppress our natural curiosity when others want to share gossip with us. By adopting these simple principles, we will become instruments of unity in our fellowships.



Exercise 9

Think through conflict prevention. Only three principles for reducing conflicts in the church have been listed. Write those down in your notebook and then add others that you feel are Scriptural principles to bring unity and avoid conflict. Be prepared to contribute these to discussion at your group meeting.

C. Accountability

Before closing this lesson, we want to address one final issue related to practicing our fellowship. While the joy of collective worship and sharing is a vital part of church life, we cannot realistically be close to everyone. All of us, however, need that intimate level of communication with one or two brothers or sisters. To have someone to whom we can pour out our hearts, with whom we can pray, and with whom we have the freedom to admonish and exhort each other when needed is a positive healthy aid to our spiritual growth.

In establishing this kind of special relationship, a few guidelines are helpful:

1. Choose someone who knows you well enough to understand your strengths and your weaknesses.
2. While these same sorts of things can and should be done with your spouse, you should seek someone else of your own sex with whom you can share those things that are unique to us as men or women.
3. Commit yourselves to regular times of prayer, sharing, and evaluation.



PROJECT: Accountability

In order for you to experience the benefits of an accountability relationship, choose a person who meets the guidelines listed above with whom you can meet for a regular time of fellowship. Be prepared to share an area in which you are growing or developing, or something you learn about yourself in this process. As you meet, do the following:

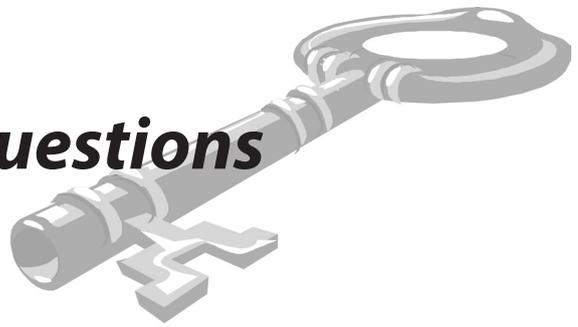
1. Review your notes from your self-evaluation in Exercise 6.
2. Spend some time sharing with each other some goals and needs in your spiritual life.
3. After sharing these goals, pray together about them.
4. If your partner is not studying these lessons, share with him the main points of this lesson; give particular emphasis to the ideas of being an encourager and a promoter of unity.
5. Have your partner give you an honest evaluation of how he sees you in these roles; have him share what your strengths and weaknesses are in these areas.
6. Pray over any needs or actions (i.e., a need to restore a relationship with someone) that have come to light from these discussions.
7. Agree on one project related to these discussions that you will do in the next week.
8. Set a time to meet again to have your partner evaluate your performance of this project.
9. Write out a brief description of each of the above items. Be prepared to show this to your group leader.

Conclusion

One of the most powerful witnesses of the grace of God to a world torn by selfishness, strife, and loneliness is the loving unity of the family of God. The purpose of the church is that the world might believe. The church must exemplify unity to achieve this purpose. You must continually consider what action you can take to promote unity in the body. Unfortunately, too often the church has failed to display this love. In this lesson you have looked at the potential for, and your responsibilities in, the fellowship of the body of Christ. In order for you to meditate on the truths that you have confronted in your study, turn to John 17:20-26. Read and meditate on these words of our Lord. May He strengthen you to be an instrument of unity as a member of the family of God.

If you have enjoyed this lesson have a longing to grow more in your spiritual life, there are 12 other lessons available from the course *Committed Christian Life*. Ask your leader about it.

Answers to questions



Question 1

Paul was praying a blessing on the Corinthian church that included the fellowship (*koinonia*) of the Holy Spirit.

Question 2

Your answer. Be creative and imaginative. Make this passage speak to you.

Question 3

Those deeds specifically which show a lack of unity, or cause a lack of unity, are enmities, strife, jealousy, disputes, dissensions and factions.

Question 4

It is the “perfect bond of unity”. In some translations the emphasis seems to be on perfection, however the emphasis is actually on the “bond” which signifies unitedness.

Question 5

Your answer. Do not be selfish and proud, but think of the other person as better than yourself. Be concerned about the other person’s interests, not just your own.

Question 6

According to Hebrews we are (1) to come before God with the assurance of His acceptance, (2) to cling steadfastly to the hope of eternal life, and (3) to give serious thought to how we can encourage other believers to grow in love and obedience.

Question 7

In your own words the following ideas:

- a. Good words bring gladness to someone who is anxious.
- b. Gentle words turn away wrath.
- c. Wise words help people accept the truth.
- d. Soothing words bring life.
- e. Pleasant words bring sweetness and healing.
- f. Words can bring life or death to people.
- g. Timely, appropriate words are precious.
- h. Gossiping hurtful words cause anger.

Question 8

It requires:

1. A commitment to the needs of others
2. Good listening
3. Sensitive speech, made up of thoughtful questions and sensitive sharing of our experience of Christ and His Word
4. Deeds of kindness and help

Answers to exercises



Exercise 1

Your answers might include ideas like the following:

- a. 1 Corinthians 1:9 — We share together a relationship with Jesus Christ.
- b. 2 Corinthians 8:4 — They shared in supporting their needy brothers in Christ.
- c. Galatians 2:9 — The apostles had the shared experience of the grace of God.
- d. Philippians 2:1 — They all had the Spirit in them.
- e. 1 John 1:3-7 — The common relationship of fellowship with the Father is shared by believers based upon their relationship to God.

Exercise 2

Your answer should include the element of shared worship and the sharing of their goods.

Exercise 3

Your answer

Exercise 4

Brief descriptions of these concepts are:

1. Being members of one another refers to the unity and interdependence of the body
2. Devotion to one another has to do with total commitment to our brothers and sisters and to their spiritual prosperity
3. Giving preference to one another means we are committed to the success of our fellow believers
4. Being of the same mind means having unity of purpose and goal
5. Accepting one another means having unconditional love for other Christians, regardless of who or what they are
6. Admonishing one another means to instruct one another in the right path of life, based on the Word
7. Greeting one another means to show genuine joy and delight in being in the company of another believer (This should include appropriate signs of affection.)
8. Serving one another is caring for each other's needs
9. Bearing one another's burdens means being willing to ease each other's difficulties, but should be noted that it includes restoring a brother when he falls into sin
10. Showing forbearance to one another has to do with being patient with the shortcomings we see in others
11. Being subject to one another means not asserting our own will and needs
12. Encouraging one another means to stimulate each other in spiritual growth

Examples of application will be your own answers.

Exercise 5

Your answer. Let this exercise give you new ways to evaluate how much you are growing and what other areas you should work on in your personal life as well as your fellowship in the family of God.

Exercise 6

Your answer.

Exercise 7

The two qualifications are:

- 1) to have your own spiritual life in order, that is to say, make sure there is no sin in your own life.
- 2) to be well acquainted with Biblical teaching in the area being dealt with. Make sure it is a Biblical sin and not man's laws. We often add our own "laws" and place them upon others. And we need to use Scripture in our admonishment, not our opinion. That way the Holy Spirit can bring conviction instead of us trying to.

Your answer for the rest of the exercise. You made need to take time to pray about all of this.

Exercise 8

Your answer.

Exercise 9

The three principles given are:

- 1) Be secure in your relationship with Christ.
- 2) Develop as an encourager.
- 3) Refuse to gossip or listen to gossip.

