

Principle #6

Body Life 1: Belonging *life together in God's family*



Principles of Discipleship

If you had to tell someone what a whole church of people was like, how would you describe it? Paul used the idea of a human body again and again because it communicates the idea of a complete collection of people who, together, can do something. Just as your hand can't do much without an arm, so the body of Christ is handicapped if some of the parts are missing. So, what's in a body?

1CO 12:12 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

1CO 12:14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

1CO 12:21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Main Passage: 1 Corinthians 12

1. In this passage Paul compares the church to a human body. How is this a helpful metaphor?
2. How do we each become a part of the body? (see 1 Cor 12:13)
3. How is the problem of a "superiority complex" dealt with here?
4. How is the problem of an "inferiority complex" dealt with here?
5. How do spiritual gifts relate to all of this?
6. When was the first time you really felt your were part of the Body of Christ?
7. How does your degree of involvement in the church Body affect your spiritual growth or spiritual health?



Another Important Passage:

◆ Read Romans 12:3-8

What does this passage reaffirm when compared to the 1 Corinthians passage?

What does it add?

When Paul talks about the church as the body of Christ, what other idea is always in the context?

"In the early church all Christians were intimately and actively involved in the vibrant life of the body. Their witness to unbelievers coupled with their deep love for each other rocked the Roman world. And it must be so again."

Ray Stedman,
Body Life

◆ Read the following quotes and summarize what they seem to be saying:



The whole emphasis of Scripture is that Christians need the Body, need each other, and cannot really exist as healthy, balanced Christians except as members of one body. To be an "independent operator"; a kind of freelance Christian, is not only to be missing the blessing you should derive from others, but also to be depriving them of your own contribution. It is not enough to say that you are a member of the universal church. You are properly required to be a member of that church in its local setting."

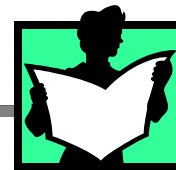
- Michael Griffiths

Salvation is individual but not individualistic. People cannot become Christians except one at a time, and yet our salvation is not solitary. God's people are called together in community."

- Francis Schaeffer

Yes, the Cross must do its work here, reminding me that in Christ I have died to that old life of independence which I inherited from Adam, and that in resurrection I have become not just an individual believer in Christ but a member of His Body... Alone in isolation man can never fulfill God's purpose. It requires a complete Body to attain to the stature of Christ and to display His glory."

- Watchman Nee



So between the death of Christ and the Last Day it is only by a gracious anticipation of the last things that Christians are privileged to live in visible fellowship with other Christians. It is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly in this world to share God's Word and sacrament. Not all Christians receive this blessing. The imprisoned, the sick, the scattered lonely, the proclaimers of the Gospel in heathen lands stand alone. They know that visible fellowship is a blessing. They remember, as the Psalmist did, how they went "*with the multitude... to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday*" (Psalm 42:4).

The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer. Longingly, the imprisoned apostle Paul calls his "*dearly beloved son in the faith,*" Timothy, to come to him in prison in the last days of his life; he would see him again and have him near. Paul has not forgotten the tears Timothy shed when last they parted (2 Tim 1:4). Remembering the congregation in Thessalonica, Paul prays "*night and day... exceedingly that we might see your face*" (1 Thess. 3:10). The aged John knows that his joy will not be full until he can come to his own people and speak face to face instead of writing with ink (2 John 12).

The believer feels no shame when he yearns for the physical presence of other Christians. Man was created a body, the Son of God appeared on earth in the body, he was raised in the body, in the sacrament the believer receives the Lord Christ in the body, and the resurrection of the dead will bring about the perfected fellowship of God's spiritual-physical creatures. The believer therefore lauds the Creator, the Redeemer, God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for the bodily presence of a brother. The prisoner, the sick person, the Christian in exile sees in the companionship of a fellow Christian a physical sign of the gracious presence of the triune God. Visitor and visited in loneliness recognize in each other the Christ who is present in

the body; they receive and meet each other as one meets the Lord, in reverence, humility, and joy. They receive each other's benedictions as the benediction of the Lord Jesus Christ. But if there is so much blessing and joy even in a single encounter of brother with brother, how inexhaustible are the riches that open up for those who by God's will are privileged to live in the daily fellowship of life with other Christians!

It is true, of course, that what is an unspeakable gift of God for the lonely individual is easily disregarded and trodden under foot by those who have the gift every day. It is easily forgotten that the fellowship of Christian brethren is a gift of grace, a gift of the Kingdom of God that any day may be taken from us, that the time that still separates us from utter loneliness may be brief indeed. Therefore, let him who until now has had the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare: It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren.

A German pastor and theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed on April 8, 1945 in Flossenbug concentration camp by special order of Heinrich Himmler, shortly before the arrival of liberating allied forces. That Easter morning he preached his last sermon, and was then instructed by the Nazi guards to "get ready and come with us." As he left the building, Bonhoeffer pulled one man aside and whispered, "This is the end, but for me it is the beginning of life."

SCRIPTURE

Which verses significantly impacted you and why?



ARTICLE

What did you personally glean from this article?



PRINCIPLE

Summarize the truth you've learned in a concise statement:



LIFE APPLICATION

1. *While growing up, did you adopt any attitudes (self-reliance, isolation, superficial relationships, etc.) that run contrary to the truths in these passages? Have you changed, or is that still your mode of operating? If you have changed, how did that happen?*



2. *How does it affect your spiritual life if you are unconnected to a local church body?*