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In Christ

Steve Flatt

One Another In Christ

Introduction

Those saved by obedience to Christ's Gospel

- a. Heard that Jesus was God born of woman by the Holy Spirit, lived among man being tempted in all aspects as man but without sinning, gave His fleshly body as the atoning sacrifice for man's sins, rose from death and the grave, was seen by many including those closest to Him, and then returned to his abode prior to coming to Earth.
- b. Understood and put their trust in what they heard was true.
- c. Changed from a sinful life of self to a life of obedience.
- d. Not being ashamed, acknowledged their belief that Jesus is God, the Christ, who is the only way unto salvation.
- e. Died by putting to death their worldly life of sin as Christ died for our sins.
- f. Sought God to have mercy and forgive them of all their sins.
- g. Were buried by immersion in the grave of water, representing the burial of Christ.
- h. Rose from the water grave as Christ rose from His grave.
- i. Received the Holy Spirit as a guarantee, a deposit.
- j. Added by God to Christ's Body becoming a new Christian
- k. Continue to live in Jesus' and the apostle's teaching

All those added to Christ's Church are to be one and to function as a body united in Christ and His teachings.

Lessons:

- Accept One Another**
- Encourage One Another**
- Bear One Another's Burdens**
- Admonish One Another**
- Members of One Another**

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Accept One Another

It's a Saturday night; the church building is all decorated. The flowers are out. The groom and the preacher are down front. The bridesmaids come in one at a time, beautifully dressed. Then after the chimes are offered, in comes the bride. She's limping, her dress is muddy and torn, her nose is bleeding, and her hair is totally out of place. As she comes down the aisle, somebody whispers where you can overhear: "Can you believe it? She's been fighting again. Surely, he deserves better than this."

That story is a parable of too many local churches. There is nothing uglier than a brawling bride. Jesus Christ deserves better than that, particularly from His bride. Family feud is no game when it comes to the bride or the Body of Christ.

"Accept one another." (Romans 15:7) If your congregation is going to be a healthy and growing body of believers, you've got to learn how to accept one another. That concept is rooted deeply in the very mind of our Lord.

If you knew you were going to die, this time tomorrow, what would you do today? There might be all kinds of answers, but wouldn't you focus on priorities? Don't you think you would spend your time doing the most important things?

On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus' priority was to spend time in prayer and to pray for the unity of His believers. "'That all of them may be one. Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me.'" Listen, "'May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.'" (John 17:21-23)

In the last part of that statement Jesus prayed; I want those who believe in me to be one so that the world may know that you sent me. Unity is the key element in Jesus' master plan for world evangelism. Mankind lives in such disharmony that Jesus knew that the visible oneness of His church would be a convicting testimony that God was in the world, and that He was reconciling the world to Himself through Jesus Christ. Unity is the foundation to world evangelism. You know as the early church got started, that's exactly the way it worked. "All the believers were together and had everything in common." (Acts 2:44) "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts." (Acts 2:46) "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions were his own, but they shared everything they had." (Acts 4:32) The result of that unity was the answer to Jesus' prayer, "Father, if you'll let them be one in me, then the world will know that you sent me."

The early Christians were "praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:47) The principle is clear. Where you have real unity, you have growth. That is why Jesus prayed for it so hard, and that's why the devil fights it so fiercely.

The first century church in Rome was not like the Jerusalem church. The church in Rome was not as homogenous as the one in Jerusalem. No, this church in Rome was a hybrid fellowship of Gentiles and Jews which led to problems.

1. Tension over different ideas people of different cultures brought to the Body. Any time you have a diverse group of people, you're going to have diverse opinions, and that will create tension. Most of the time throughout history, just as was the case of Rome, it's not so much matters of doctrine as it usually is matters of opinion.

The root of the problem was that the majority of the Christians were Gentiles, and as the majority, they wanted to do things their way. On the flip side the Jews were saying "But we've been God's covenant people for a long time; we should do things our way." Have you ever heard anybody talk like that? Or say "I've been at this church for years. If you don't like the way we do this or that, go somewhere else." That mindset is a prescription for a very, very small church. Now that's what is going on in Rome. It's not a tension over major doctrine.

They're not arguing about the divinity of Christ like they were in Colosse. They're not talking about the sufficiency of atonement. They're not arguing about the authority of apostles like they were in Galatia. They're not arguing about the role of baptism. They're not talking about the abuses or neglect of the Lord's Supper like in Corinth. There is just tension over different ideas that different cultures have.

The following shows how trivial some of these ideas were. "Accept him whose faith is weak without passing judgment on disputable matters.

- a. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn

the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

- b. One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God." (Romans 14:1-6)

Do you see the two issues they're disagreeing about?

- a. Should we eat meat? Apparently, the context indicates the meat might have been sacrificed to idols. Should we just not touch any meat then and go ahead and eat vegetables?
- b. Can we observe certain days as special days that we just want to celebrate as holidays as holy days? They argue and tension builds over, "I think I can eat this." "No, I don't think you can eat that." "I think we can observe this day." "No, I don't think you can do that."

The issues are not very important. **What is important is the unity that Jesus prayed** for could be destroyed by the Roman Christians if they don't learn to live together in peace. So after they understand the problem Paul gives them the principles to live by. These are the same principles he wants us to live by. "Therefore **let us stop passing judgment on one another**. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way." (Romans 14:13) "Let us therefore make every effort" (I've underlined that in my Bible) "make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification." (Romans 14:19)

That's easier said than done because the devil is going to keep things stirred up. He'll use weapons like competition, jealousy, suspicion, and distrust. He's going to make it awfully difficult, not just for the church in Rome, but for any church to keep from judging one another and sniping at one another. How on earth are we going to live by those principles? How are we going to quit casting judgments on one another about petty things, about things going beyond the Word of God, simply my opinion verses your opinion? How on earth are we going to make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification?

2. Be of the same mind or heart. The only way that we are going to maintain unity among Christians is to be of the same mind or heart. "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus." (Romans 15:5) "So that with one heart (the New American Standard says "with one mind" which is the same difference) "with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (v. 6) "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." (v. 7)

Paul told the Corinthians the same thing "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be" (look at this) "perfectly united in mind and thought." (1 Corinthians 1:10)

Can you imagine the chaos if your body had more than one mind? Can you imagine having two brains up there, one saying "I think I want to eat?" The other one saying, "No, I don't want to eat." One says, "I think I want to get up and exercise." The other one says, "No, I'm tired. I think I'm just going to sit here for a little while." Can you imagine? The question is how can we have one mind? How can we be "perfectly united in mind," when we know that we've got different opinions, judgments, preferences, and even different personal convictions?

The one mind has to be the mind of Christ. "Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Do you remember? You say, "Well, what mind was that?" (Philippians 2:5) He went on to tell us, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped (held on to), but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:6-8) That's the mind.

But, what does it mean to be of the same mind with one another? It means to have the same selfless sacrificing mind of Christ that puts others ahead of self even to the point of death. That's the command.

How many things would we argue about if the very foremost part of our mindset was: I love you so much that I will gladly die for you? Do you suppose that might dilute trivial arguments? I love you so much I'd die for you. Unity is not the result of total agreement on every opinion. They never arrived at that in Rome, some of them still celebrated those days and some didn't. Some of them still ate vegetables and others ate meat. It's not the result of total agreement on every opinion. **Unity is the result of two people putting each other's interest ahead of their own**, and that's the only way it will ever happen.

“You be of the same mind” doesn't mean you have to be of my mind or that I have to be of your mind. It means that together we share the very mind of Christ. Our convictions on the side issues will not always agree, but the Christ who unites us is bigger than the opinions that divide us. The convicting testimony of Christian unity is not that we are all alike but that we are one even though we are not all alike.

The reason that the church grew so well in the first century is not by making all the Gentiles become Jews so that everybody would be alike. What was incredible about the church, particularly churches like the one in Rome is that the Jews stayed Jews by culture, the Gentiles stayed Gentiles, but for the first time in history, they treated each other not just with civility. They treated each other like family. That caused the whole world to stand up and say, "What on earth is going on with those folks?" The answer was: Jesus came from heaven and changed their lives. What Jesus prayed for is right. Real unity is the greatest testimony for Him and the very basis for evangelism. God's church so desperately needs to learn that principle and that power source.

Most of us grew up hearing, if you ever had a matter of disagreement, that really there are just three possible scenarios. You can either both be wrong, that's possible, or one of you can be right, and the other one wrong. But if you're disagreeing, then the two of you can't possibly both be right. After all, you're disagreeing. Paul said, "Hear me church, if it does not violate God's Word, let both be all right." He asked the Romans, "Do you want to observe this special day? That's all right. You don't want to observe that other day? That's all right, too. Do you want to eat meat?" That's all right. You don't care about eating meat? That's all right, too." He concluded by stating "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." (Romans 15:7)

There are a lot of things, not everything, but a lot of things in this world where you can be different and you can be all wrong. That's important to learn. Romans 15:7 says, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you."

Three practices:

1. Use God's standards to bind the body.

I want to be clear on this because I know I've emphasized the acceptance because that's the nature of our command. Someone might incorrectly assume that I'm promoting kind of a laissez-faire (deliberate abstention from direction), a let everything go attitude that never challenges sin, never challenges false teaching—WRONG! ABSOLUTELY, UNEQUIVOCALLY WRONG! A major function of God's Word is to protect us by letting us know those things are neither opinions or optional. There's never been a time when God doesn't expect obedience from His people. But, let's be careful not to bind on others what's beyond the teaching of God's Word. That's exactly what the Pharisees did. If you haven't read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John lately, go back and read them because Jesus' most scathing remarks were for the judgmental, hypocritical, narrow-minded legalism that went beyond God's Word. Jesus said on more than one occasion, "You're making a mockery of God's Word."

The great danger facing God's people in any generation is gradually accumulating a system of "dos and don'ts" that often times goes beyond God's Word. It is more cultural than Biblical. For example, before the days of air conditioning the windows were open to help cool the building. This allowed flies to enter. A cover, a big white cloth cover, was placed over the bread and fruit of the vine to keep the flies off. As time passed the building was air conditioned, the windows were closed and flies ceased to be a problem. Someone asked "How come we've still have that tablecloth over the table?" Someone replied "I don't know. Why don't we take it off?" There wasn't any argument about the elements of the bread or the fruit of the vine, or about how often it was to be taken. But great concern about the tablecloth with some contending it was not scriptural to not have the bread and the fruit of the vine covered while others contended that the cover was totally insignificant. The disagreement became so great they could no longer meet together. They ceased to have the mind of Christ. They were no longer united in the mind of Christ.

The same thing could be said about dress styles, hair lengths, types of songs to sing, and a hundred other things. You're allowed to have your convictions on those things. But if they are beyond God's standards, then bind them only on yourself. That's exactly what Paul said, "Whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves." (Romans 14:22)

2. Your greatest right is your right to forego your rights. Jesus Christ called us to be free. "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32) But if you have opinions and they're distinctly opinions that you can't allow any room on without being miserable, you're not free but a slave to your opinion. Romans 14 teaches that a mature Christian will give on an opinion, a practice, or a conviction not designated or bound by God for the sake of harmony for the body. The refusal to do this is a catalyst for disharmony.

"We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves." (Romans 15:1) The number one thing that brings disunity in any church is selfishness. I want it my way no matter what! Paul says, "Don't let that characterize you." The truly mature Christian realizes he or she has the option, in fact the privilege, of giving up his rights, for the rights of others.

3. The key to unity is discipleship.

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves" (notice) "as you follow Christ Jesus." (Romans 15:5) Jesus said, "Take up your cross and come and follow me." People who carry crosses don't fight. They don't fight because they've got something far more important on their minds.

If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, you're daily dying to self, and if self is dying, then you do not quibble over petty issues. "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you." It would amaze us just how united we could be if our focus was on Christ and sharing Him with the world that doesn't know Him. Dying to self daily will let Him live in us more each day. Discipleship really is the key to unity.

If you're not united with Jesus, you can't be united with everybody else. But if you are in Christ, then you can have the mind of Christ, and that will allow you to be of one mind then with all the other believers in God's church, wherever it may assemble. There is only one way to be united with Christ, you must die to sinful self and be buried with Him for Him to raise you to the new life and add you to His Body, His church. *Amazing Grace #1309, Steve Flatt, April 13, 1997*

Encouraging One Another

Encouraging one another is so important whether you're talking about a family, a person, a ministry or a church. The real question is what role are we playing, building up or tearing down?

Our launching pad today is 1 Thessalonians 5:11. It's a launching pad because it's just one of several verses in the New Testament where we're commanded to encourage one another. Paul wrote to that church stating, "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are now doing."

Biblical encouragement can be examined by five questions.

1. What are we talking about when we talk about encouragement?

Most people associate encouragement with flattery or compliments or trite little expressions like: "Oh you look nice today" or "Have a nice day," or "Take care." That's not what encouragement is. Those expressions are fine, nothing wrong with them, but they are not Biblical encouragement.

Encouragement means to put courage in. Isn't that a great concept? I encourage a fellow human being when I instill in his or her heart courage to face the world, that's encouragement. The Greek root word translated encourage in our New Testament is *paracollatos*, the verb form of the noun, *paraclete*. *Paraclete* which means to lay alongside. Jesus said there will be a comforter. Some translations use the word "encourager" who will come alongside you for the purpose of building up your life. (John 14) He was referring, of course, to the coming of the Holy Spirit, and that is exactly what the Spirit does. His Spirit lays alongside our Spirit to encourage us.

Paracollatos is used 109 times in the New Testament. Most of the time it's translated encourage, sometimes exhort, sometimes comfort, but put all together you get the biblical idea of encouragement. One man's definition says, "Encouragement is the expression to help someone become a better Christian when life is rough." That's what encouragement is; that's putting courage in the heart.

Focus more on affirmation than appreciation. That may seem like a subtle difference to you, but it's really pretty major. Appreciation is usually for what somebody has done, it's performance based. I appreciate you for what you did, your accomplishments. There's nothing wrong with appreciation, but affirmation is more valuable. I appreciate you rather than something you've done for me. When we affirm, we encourage.

2. Who is responsible for the ministry of encouragement?

- a. Preachers—"We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in the faith." (1 Thessalonians 3:2)

- b. Teachers—Those who were teaching went everywhere encouraging the brethren. (Acts 15) You see encouragement is a vital part of preaching and teaching. I try never to construct a lesson by God's guidance without including in it elements of encouragement even if it's a lesson that may sting because it may rebuke us for our sin. But at the same time, we need to be built up to have the courage to live the way God wants us to live.
- c. Elders, pastors, overseers and bishops—Titus 1 is a chapter that lists a criteria for elders, the kind of people they need to be. "He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." (Titus 1:9) Elders are to be men who know the truth, and who handle the truth rightly so that people are built up. That is extremely important. I have found invariably that churches that have leaders whose members do not respect them are discouraged churches. The converse of that is true; churches that have leadership they do respect are inevitably encouraged churches. It is incumbent upon elders to be encouragers.
- d. Those who are gifted to encourage. Romans 12:5-8 lists areas of spiritual giftedness. As you go down through the list, one of those gifts is encouragement. Notice the gift of encouragement is listed separately from the gift of teaching. In other words, teachers are encouragers, but you don't have to be a teacher to be an encourager. There are some people who have been gifted and talented by God to be able to share that buoying spirit in the life of another. One Biblical example is Barnabas but that was not his real name. His real name was Joseph of Cyprus, but they named him Barnabas which means son of encouragement.

We read about Barnabas first in Acts 4, when he went and sold a field, took all the proceeds, and laid it at the apostles' feet. Don't you know that put courage in the apostles' hearts? Then we read in Acts 9 that a fellow by the name of Saul of Tarsus had been persecuting the church. He had been converted, but no one trusted him early on. A fellow by the name of Bar-na-bas, the son of encouragement, went and stood at his side and put courage in his heart. Next, Barnabas goes to help a fledgling Gentile church in Antioch. (Acts 11) Barnabas appears to have been putting courage in somebody else. He had the gift of encouragement.

- e. The entire body ultimately has the responsibility. Sure, not everyone is as gifted as some, but each of us has the responsibility to encourage. "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up." (1 Thessalonians 5:11) That's not addressed to preachers, that's addressed to the entire body. Some parts are better at it than others. But as with our physical bodies all the members of the body come to help that body part in need. The same thing here—the entire spiritual body encourages those members in need. Frankly, it's not healthy for an entire church to be dependent upon a few members to do all the encouraging. You need many, many, many people building up what a few are constantly trying to tear down. So we're all in this ministry of encouragement.

3. **When do we encourage?**

- a. Encourage when assemblies together. "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:24-25) That says very clearly that the primary reason Christians assemble is to encourage.

All my life I've heard and read Hebrews 10:24-25 from the old King James Bible, "Forsake not the assembly." I've heard it always in the context you come to church meaning assemble together. But I seldom heard the next part which was right there in the same verse "so that you can be encouraged and so you can encourage."

"What is it that you can do when you assemble that you can't do at home?" That's a pretty good question because you can do almost everything at home that you can do here. Can you pray at home? Sure. Can you preach? Yes. Can you sing? Sure, you can sing at home. What about the Lord's Supper? Sure. The Lord's Supper is taken to shut-ins and to people in the hospitals. You can do almost any part of what you do at church—you can give at home. So—what is it that you can do when assembled together that you can't do at home? You can encourage each other. You can't do that at home. You can't do that isolated from other Christians.

Now here is a question: Which would be more wrong? Not to assemble, or not to do what God says to do when you assemble? That's a pretty good question. Some Christians have an idea that you come, sit, listen and leave. "Whew, that's that, I've got that done for a week." They miss the command that we're here to encourage one another. I hope you assemble with a mindset of where's a brother or sister that I can build up today. Yes, we can do that when we sing to each other, and when we pray for each other. But we primarily do it one-on-one when we look at each other, love each other, shake hands, hug one another, and when our conversations go beyond, "Sure is raining outside, isn't it?" We

gather together to build each other up. We encourage at every assembly.

- b. Encourage at every opportunity. It's not just when we assemble. "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." (Hebrews 3:12-13) That clearly says our responsibility to encourage one another is ever present. We are to encourage one another daily. By the way, that word has significant implications of what kind of body relationship we're supposed to have. We're supposed to encourage one another daily, but some of us don't even have contact weekly.

Now don't misunderstand what I'm saying. I'm not suggesting that this week, everybody call everybody else. Let me give you the illustration; take the physical body analogy again. You see, no member of my body is directly connected to every other member of the body. My foot is not touching my hand; at least by the way they are aligned in the body. No cell in my body is touching every other cell. But, every cell in my body is touching at least one other cell. Every member of my body, every appendage, is touching at least one other part of my body, and that's what we need to do. You can't be connected to everybody.

Every Christian cannot be personally connected to every other Christian on a daily basis. That's why it's everybody's responsibility to encourage daily. You need to be connected to somebody, and they need to be connected to you to such a degree that you have virtually daily contact. We need to have brothers and sisters in the Lord who love us and know us, spurring us on every day.

4. Why encourage?

We're talking about really getting into people's lives and building each other up. Why do we do it?

- a. We need to encourage one another because of the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:13) Never underestimate the power of Satan and his determination to discourage us to the point of quitting and turning away from God. Body members severed from the body die. What were to happen if my big toe were cut off from my foot? You know what will happen, it's going to putrefy and decay. The old devil knows that if he can just get a child of God isolated and cut off from circulation, then he will get spiritual gangrene, and he will die.

What temptation is Satan trying to use on you right now? Is he trying to use pride, lust, just old discouragement, fear, uncontrolled anger, doubt, guilt or rebellion? What's he trying to work on you with? Whatever the temptation, his ultimate goal is to pull you away. He is trying to cut you off from Christ's body and the flow of His life-saving blood. The other members of His body are clutching on to you saying, "No, no, don't go. You need to stay, because you've got to be part of the body, and you are important." That's encouragement.

We make a grave mistake when we assume that everybody's spiritual health can be taken for granted. Nobody's spiritual health can be. That's why we need to encourage one another to help overcome the deceitfulness of sin.

- b. The reality of trials and troubles. It's no surprise to you that this world is just filled with suffering, pain, trial and trouble. That's here because we live in a fallen world, but God has allowed it to stay. That gives some people some problems. We can't get off talking about the theology of why there is suffering and pain in our world, but one thing God has made clear. "I've even allowed it to happen so that you will grow through it and understand how badly you need me." But the other part of that is we also learn from our trials and troubles how badly we need each other.

Not very many of us have our lives as neatly ordered as our apparel. There are people who desperately need encouragement. But they'll only take off the veneer, open up and let you know they need encouraging if they really sense that the ministry of encouragement is taken seriously. We need to encourage brothers and sisters because Satan is trying to pick us off one by one.

5. How do we encourage?

It's not simply by little trite expressions or flattery. How do you really encourage one another as long as it's called today?

- a. We remind each other of God's promise. For one example, Paul is writing to a discouraged church. The whole church is worried because they are expecting Jesus to come back any minute. Some of their relatives have already died. They're all sad and saying, "Oh no, they've missed Jesus' coming. They died before He came back." So in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Paul states these magnificent promises about the coming of Jesus. He said, "Don't worry about the dead; they are the ones who will rise first. Therefore, encourage one another with these words." See, whenever we gather, if someone is vulnerable enough to share with you, don't use trite statements or preach to him, but remind him of God's promises. He has promised to always be with us, hear every prayer we utter, take away our sins if we confess them and lay them

before Him, give us strength in time of need, and never allow us to have more put on us than we're able to bear. Those are magnificent promises and when reminded of them you will have the courage to go on.

- b. Granting genuine forgiveness. Paul, when writing to the church in Corinth, said there was a brother who was in some really deliberate and awful sin but he repented and some of them were holding him at arm's length. "Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow." (2 Corinthians 2:7) The word comfort is that same Greek word, *paracollatos* that could just as easily be rendered encourage. See, forgiveness has to be visibly extended in order to be received.

I love the story of the fellow who went to the counselor because his marriage was having trouble. The counselor said, "What's the problem?" He said, "Every time we have a fight, my wife gets hysterical." The counselor said, "You mean hysterical." He said, "No, I mean historical. She brings up every bad thing I've ever done." Now I hope you can't relate to that in your marriage, but some people can. You must forgive to be forgiven.

Clara Barton, the founder of the American Red Cross, was a gracious lady, and on one occasion was reminded by a friend of hers of what someone had said about her that was so awful, so slanderous. Miss Barton said, "I don't know what you're talking about." The friend said, "Oh come on, the papers covered it, and everybody was talking about it." She went on three or four minutes. Finally, Clara Barton interrupted and said, "Oh, oh, oh that. I distinctly remember forgetting that." You know we don't really forget, but we can make a conscious choice to not let it affect the way we treat that person or anyone related to it.

Sometimes and in some places, people repent of their sins, but they're made to feel like second-class Christians. You know that's not right. If you do that to someone else, you're not only not encouraging them, you're discouraging them.

Immediately following a list of people of great faith the Hebrews writer states "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." (Hebrews 12:1) That great cloud of witnesses includes Abel, Noah, David, Jephthah, and many others, but it includes all those that are living, too. Let's cheer one another on in that rank.

Several years ago, Peter Uberoth was in town. Do you remember the name, Peter Uberoth? He was major league's baseball commissioner for a while, and he also headed up the 1984 Olympics that were held in Los Angeles. When he was speaking in Nashville, Uberoth asked, "Do you want me to tell you about the greatest athlete I've ever seen?" Now when you think about a man who has had as much exposure in sports as Uberoth, and he says that, every ear perked up. He said in the '84 Olympics, they had a 20,000 kilometers torch run serpentine all the way through the country. And each participant, if he met the criteria, would run for one kilometer. He would light his little torch from the previous runner, go one kilometer and light the next one. He had to pay \$3,000 for the privilege of doing that. Every bit of the \$3,000 went to charity.

Uberoth said, near the end, everybody was getting discouraged. It looked like costs might go over, you know the deadlines. He said, to motivate their forces in Los Angeles, what they would do is gather all their workers early in the morning and show news clips of the torch run the day before. It was just encouraging to see everybody cheering. Uberoth said we were in the office about 10:00 o'clock, late one night, and in comes a volunteer holding a videotape. He said there were only a handful of us there, ready to go home, beat to death, just tired. The volunteer said, "You've got to see this." He said, "Well, what is it?" "It's a videotape of the torch run." He said, "We'll see it in the morning." The volunteer said, "No, you've got to see it now." When they stuck it in, it was a little piece of amateur video.

It showed a narrow little road in New Mexico, and there were people lining each side about five deep. Along comes a runner running with a torch. Then as the runner stops and leans over to light the torch, you can't see the next recipient, it's obviously somebody short. A big burly policeman on a motorcycle is blocking the view. It takes a couple of minutes because apparently the torch is having a hard time being lit and the policeman is looking at his watch and he's obviously frustrated because they're running behind schedule. Finally, the torch is lit and then you see the top of a little blond head starting to move forward.

It's a little girl who is nine and suddenly the video catches her face and there's this bright, beaming, beautiful smile. But a second later, you notice one other thing, she is severely crippled. She can barely put one foot in front of the other. She is barely going. The crowds are beginning to cheer. Uberoth found out later her name was Amy and she had been practicing for one solid year, and the best she had ever gone was half a kilometer. The plan was for her to hand the torch off to an alternate at the half kilometer mark. It had to be a slight uphill grade. If it was level, she would have fallen

over. They picked a special part of the road. She had worked a year with bake sales, raising the \$3,000 for her half kilometer. When she got to the half-kilometer mark suddenly there was rolled out a huge banner a block long with little pictures all over it and in gigantic letters, "RUN AMY RUN!" Her whole elementary school class was holding the banner and her whole school filled the entire block.

At that moment, she had already transferred the torch to the alternate; she saw that banner and she took it back. She edged forward again until she got to the end of the block and now absolutely exhausted, she started to turn it again and to turn it over, and at that point the whole school dropped the banner and ran out behind her swelling the street like a scene from "Rocky." They began to chant, "Run Amy Run." And she made it to the end of that kilometer and handed the torch. And the next fellow was off like a shot.

The closing scene of that amateur video showed her mother holding up little Amy. But then it turned to that burly policeman, who moments before had been looking at his watch, and his visor was up and with a handkerchief he was wiping the tears off his face.

See that's really what life is all about. We run as hard as we can carrying the torch of Jesus Christ. Sometimes we want to quit and drop it; sometimes we don't want to go on. But we're here to say to one another, run Steve run. Run Mary run. Don't give up. Amazing Grace #1310, Steve Flatt, April 27, 1997

Bear One Another's Burdens

Years ago there was German soldier who was slightly wounded in a battle, and he went home to his mother. Mom said, "You need to go to the hospital. They have set one up down the street." So, he went to the hospital. When he walked in, he saw two doors. One said, "Seriously Wounded," the other one said, "Slightly Wounded." As he wasn't hurt badly, he went through the second door. He walked all the way down a long hall. Again there were two doors. One said, "Officers," and the other one said, "Non-Officers." Being an enlisted man, he took the non-officers door. Again, there was a long hall. He walked all the way to the end where he came to two more doors. The left one said, "Party Members," and the right one said, "Non-Party Members." Not being a party member he walked through the right-hand door and found himself back out on the street. Upon returning home his mother asked, "Well son, did they help you?" He said, "To tell you the truth mom, they didn't do a thing for me, but you ought to see the tremendous organization they have."

That little story reminds us again of the difference between an organization and an organism. An organization can be well-structured, but the members may not care at all about each other. But an organism, by its very nature, has a concern, a connection, and a togetherness for every part of the body. In a body there is a sharing, a caring, and a bearing of one another's burdens by the very nature of organisms.

"Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." (KJV) "Carry each other's burdens and, in that way, you fulfill the law of Christ." (NIV) (Galatians 6:2)

What are the burdens that we need to bear for one another? The Greek word rendered burden is *bareos* meaning something that makes an overwhelming demand, that which brings sorrow or grief. A burden is anything that oppresses the spiritual development of a brother or a sister. Now mark that well. A burden is anything that oppresses the spiritual development of a brother or a sister.

With that definition, one can see quickly that burdens come in many different forms. For example, some burdens are spiritual. In fact, that is the immediate context of our command in Galatians 6:2. Go back to verse one. "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you may also be tempted." Then our command, "Carry each other's burdens, and, in this way, you fulfill the law of Christ."

In Galatians 6:1, the word that is translated, "caught," those who are caught in a sin was a Greek word that was sometimes used to refer to an animal who found itself in a trap. That's an image, a metaphor, used all the way through Scripture. 2 Timothy 2:26 says, "Beware the snare of the devil." In James 1:14, James says, "But each one is tempted when, by his own desire, he is dragged away and enticed." The term that is used there refers to a fishing lure. You see it's not that we are unaware of what sin is, but we're often unaware, like an animal heading to a trap, of how insidiously we are being drawn in, and we are often unaware of how drastic the consequences are going to be to the point that we become so burdened that we fall underneath the weight.

I read a story this week about the white ants in Africa. It has become one of the major building nemeses on the entire continent. Folks will pick out a spot of ground, and they'll build a nice house. They think everything looks good and one day, maybe months or a couple of years later, the entire house just caves in. It's because the white ant lives underground, and never comes out onto the surface; it never sees the sun. It lives underneath the house and eats away inside the timbers to the point that, when it has done its damage, one can take his finger and poke a hole through the largest beam.

That's the way it is in many lives, including some of you. You look so good on the outside, but one day the whole life, the whole house just collapses because all that decay was on the inside and nobody knew it.

Burdens may be:

1. Sin. The worst burdens are those that are caused by yielding to our desires and sinning.
2. Emotional. This is not when we are a perpetrator of sin, but rather when we are the victim of sin. Maybe we have been mistreated, neglected. Maybe it's the result of fear or a grief. Emotional burdens overwhelm us at times.
3. Physical. These may be caused by illness or accident, impairment, or sometimes just by advancing age.
4. Financial - A financial calamity brought on by a layoff, a medical emergency, a poor investment strategy, or 101 other factors.

We don't have space to list all the ways and shapes that burdens take their form. But a burden is anything that oppresses the spiritual development of a brother or a sister.

Our responsibility to brothers and sisters as they face these burdens.

1. Be humble. You've got to be humble, or you're going to be of no use to anybody. I find it amazing that our command about bearing one another's burdens is couched between two bookend verses that say much the same thing. Galatians 5:26, the last verse of chapter 5 states, "Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other" and Galatians 6:3, "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself." Isn't it interesting that the command to bear one another's burdens is found between two bookends. The reason more people in God's church don't bear more burdens is we think we're too good to get down there and help. "Don't think so much of yourself."

I've always been amused by the story of the lady who is caught in a flash flood underneath an underpass. The water is rising up to the floorboard. A young fellow in a four-wheel drive comes across the bridge up top, stops, opens the door and leans down. He sees that older woman and he yells, "Maam, can I help you?" She looks up and says, "Not from up there!"

He is of no use from up there. Humility is to see ourselves and be down there. Humility is the foundation of the command in Galatians 6:1, "...you who are spiritual should restore a brother." You see spiritual doesn't mean you're perfect. Spiritual doesn't necessarily mean you act any differently, or much better than your brother. Spiritual certainly doesn't mean having a self-righteous haughtiness. Being spiritual means being full of the spirit.

In the same context as our passage, Galatians 5:22-23, we know what being full of the Spirit means, don't we? It means having love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, gentleness, kindness, faithfulness, and self-control. Wrap all those up and you have a spirit of humility, don't you?

Too many times, we're like the people in a little town in Connecticut. It was a suburb of one of the major cities. Some of the people began to be a little incensed because there were reckless drivers running through their little suburb. So 53 of them put their names on a petition, took it to the sheriff and said, "Stop this in our town." The sheriff said, "I'll see what I can do." A few nights later, he put out a watch. Sure enough, he arrested five people for reckless driving through the town. All five of them had their names on the petition.

Sometimes we can proudly find faults in others that are also our own faults. If I am going to bear another's burden, whether that burden be spiritual, emotional, physical, or whatever, it starts by being humble, by being full of the spirit.

Many of you know the name Elza Huffard who wrote something that I'll never forget. "There was one who thought himself above me, and he was above me, until he had that thought." Isn't that good? It surely is right. Spiritual men and women are so cognizant of the need of God's grace in their own lives that they could never approach a brother in the spirit of arrogance.

So what do I do when I bear a burden? I examine my own humility. Am I being humble? Am I spiritual?

2. Be gentle - Galatians 6:1 says, "Be gentle, restore that brother with a spirit of gentleness." That's especially pertinent when the burden that we help bear is related to sin.
3. Bear the burden. That bearing will take on different forms depending upon what the burden is. The sentence construction says, "Carry and keep on carrying the burden." It's the present/perfect tense, it's not just a "give it a lick and a promise". Hit it once and move on your way. The way the sentence is structured says, "You do it and do it for as long as it takes." If the burden is the result of a person's sin, Galatians 6:1 says, "Restore the brother or sister gently." Restore was the word used by ancient Greek doctors to refer to the setting of a broken bone. If you've ever had a bone set, you know you want it done carefully, you want it done gently. Most importantly it's done for healing, not for punishment.

If the burden is emotional, you bear it through counsel, hugs, listening and prayers. You may do that day after day after day, as long as that brother or sister carries the burden. If the burden is financial, the burden is borne by giving your money or other assistance. If it's a physical burden, you bear it through your time, effort, compassion, and energy. Whatever the cause, bearing the burden means carrying the load until the brother or the sister can walk unburdened on his own again. I love the old proverb that says, "A joy shared is a double joy. A burden shared is half a burden."

What does that demand?

1. Real dedication to fellowship

In a Peanuts cartoon some time ago, Lucy looked at Charlie Brown and said, "Why are we here on earth?" Old compassionate Charlie Brown looked at cynical Lucy and said, "We're here to help other people." Lucy thought a second and put a scowl back on her face and said, "Then why are other people on earth?" That's a question the world asks? Why is everybody else here to mess me up? I don't want anything to do with them as long as they don't bother me, "Live and let live, stay out of my business. Look out for number one and let everything else go." Let me tell you something, Christ challenges that. If we fall victim to that, then we're not God's church. We may be an organization, but we're not an organism. We're certainly not the Body of Christ. Fellowship means more than a handshake on Sunday morning. It means an integration of life.

We need to be like the two dogs I heard about in Barnsley, England. There was a little dog named Nick, a terrier, and another little dog named Percy, a Chihuahua. One day Percy was hit by a car. Percy's owner thought that poor Percy was dead. So that owner, Christine Harrison, took that little Chihuahua body and put it in a plastic bag, went out back and buried it in the back yard. Nick, the terrier, was heartbroken. He went over and dug up the plastic sack. With his teeth he drug it over by the house. When Christine came out and picked up that sack, the heart was beating. Percy, the Chihuahua not only lived, he totally recovered.

When I heard that story it reminded me that God is in the resurrection business. Christians are raised to a newness of life when baptized into that Christ. They are resurrected from their death to sin and given a new life pure and free from sin.

We're committed by the same spirit that brought Jesus back to life, just pulling people from the clutches of death as we bear their burdens. Folks, the church is a hospital, but it doesn't matter how organized we are if nobody gets cured. If we're going to bear one another's burdens, there's got to be a real dedication to fellowship.

2. A new definition of membership in the body.

We are members of the Body of Christ. (Romans 12:4-5 and 1 Corinthians 12) "Therefore we are members of one another." That's what being a body is all about. I think we need to be more like mountain climbers.

In 1953, you might remember the name Sir Edmund Hillary. He led the first team to go all the way to the zenith of Mount Everest. He had a guide with him, a Sherpa guide, whose name was Penzick Norgay. It's a good thing Norgay was with Sir Edmund Hillary because as they began their descent, Edmund Hillary's foot slipped and he so lost his balance that he fell completely, but Norgay had taken his pick and jammed it into the ice and because of the rope holding them together was able to keep hold of him until he was able to make his way over and grab hold of the mountain again. Otherwise, he would have fallen over a thousand feet. When they got down to the bottom, everybody was ready to make Penzick Norgay a hero, and he responded to the press, "No, no, no, I'm not a hero." He said, "Mountain climbers are tied to one another to help each other. That's just who we are."

He didn't want praise for that which was natural. He didn't want a claim for that which was expected. Our nature as a body demands that we be committed to mutual help.

The questions are.

1. Who is your line tied to? You can't all be tied to every member; that's just not possible, but your line had better be tied to some Christian brother or sister.
2. Who is going to hold you up when you slip and who will help bear your burdens?

Why bear the burden?

The answer is simple. It's right there in Galatians 6:2, "because it fulfills the law of Christ." "Well, what is the law of Christ?" I've looked all the way through the Bible and, in my opinion, Jesus gave that law when said to his apostles before a hostile group "A new command I give you, love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another." (John 13:34)

Now when Jesus gave that command, it really was a bit of a paradox to his listeners because he wasn't giving a new command to love one another. Leviticus 19:18 commands, "Love one another." That one was a thousand years before Jesus. But the new command was to "Love one another as I have loved you." That's how much I want you to love one another.

Did he bear our burdens? He surely did. He bore every burden that we have, and every burden that we will have on that cross on a hill called, "Calvary." Because of that, Christians know a newness of life now, and an eternal life in a perfect place called "Heaven." Jesus has given us the ultimate model of what it means to bear one another's burdens—that's the new command. Do it as long as it takes, as deep as it takes, as much as it takes. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. Amazing Grace #1313, Steve Flatt, May 25, 1997

Admonish One Another

There are many times where the Bible tells us to do certain things to one another. The reason for that is: We are the Body of Jesus Christ. We are members connected to one another, like a hand is connected to wrist, or a foot is connected to an ankle. Because we're connected, there are certain things we have to do for one another and to one another.

For example, the umbrella command is to "love one another." Right? Then we look at things like "accept one another," "encourage one another," and "forgive one another." This lesson may be the most difficult one to apply. How do you really love those members of the body who are not living as they should? What do we do for those kinds of folks?

A lot of times we do what the little girl said when she misquoted the great commission by just one word. She said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gossip." That's close, but that's still very far away. I've searched the Bible on these one another passages, and I can't find a single command in the New Testament where it says, "Talk about one another."

"I myself am also persuaded of you my brethren that you also are full of goodness, filled with knowledge, able also to admonish one another." (Romans 15:14–KJV) Now admonish is not a word we use everyday. One of the most common synonyms for admonishing one another is instructing one another. That's the way it's rendered in the NIV.

The New International Dictionary of New Testament theology defines admonish; "It seeks to correct the mind, to put right what is wrong in order to improve the spiritual attitude." In other words, admonishment implies a re-direction of thinking. It is an instruction, but it's in the context of righting a wrong.

1. Counsel, to warn, or to correct.

Certainly, there is a place in the body for instruction and teaching. There is also a place in the Body of Christ for correction. That is not the same as negative teaching. There is a place in the body for positive instruction and there is a place in the body for positive correction. Admonishment is not about being negative at all. It's not about condemnation. It's not about judgmentalism; rather, it is a positive warning and guidance that is based on God's truth.

2. Admonishment from love and concern and not haughtiness.

Paul wrote about a brother who had been admonished, corrected and warned "Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn" (there's the same word as admonish) "but warn him as a brother." (2 Thessalonians 3:15) Admonishment isn't what you do to label somebody, it's not what you do to criticize somebody and it's not what you do to be ugly to somebody. It's to help brothers and sisters. It stems out of love and concern.

The classic example of an admonisher is a parent. Now moms and dads, I know you can relate to this. What does Ephesians 6:4 say? We've quoted it all of our lives, "Bring up your children in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord." Do you know what the word admonition is? It is the noun form of the verb, admonish. "Bring up your children in the admonition of the Lord."

Parents, a major part of your job is to teach your children. Can you, over the course of their entire childhood, only teach without correction? No, it just doesn't work that way. You don't want to nag or correct out of anger. You want to always be motivated by love. But a parent abdicates responsibility if he or she never corrects, never warns or never admonishes. I think parents, more than anybody else, know that wouldn't work. Yet, we parents also know that admonishing and re-directing of our children stems out of our great love for them. That's the way it is to be among Christians.

The apostle Paul practiced what he preached, didn't he? If you've read your New Testament at all, you know that Paul was not afraid to confront anybody, anywhere and at any time about sin in their lives. In Galatians 2:11, he confronted the apostle Peter. I had to confront him because he did the wrong thing. Acts 20:31, Paul admonished elders in the church. But I love the way that verse concludes when he says to those elders, "Remember that for three years I never stopped warning" there's the word, "warning each of you night and day with tears." Do you see the compassion and the love? Paul knew that at times admonishment was the right thing to do, but there's a right way to do it.

A. Who is responsible for being an admonisher?

Whose ministry is it? First, it is the responsibility of leaders of the body. "Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord (look at this) and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other." (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)

In those two verses Paul recognizes the great difficulty of shepherding a church. He knows that those men who are going to serve as elders are going to at times need to redirect the thinking of some of the members who are in error. He charges us to support those men whose task it is to do so. Leaders cannot lead a church if they turn their head to sin because it will destroy their credibility. But it's also true that leaders can't lead if they are not supported by and respected by the body when they do admonish. Likewise, members will not be able to support leaders if they are not informed about what the leaders are attempting to correct or accomplish. If a church has leaders who care enough to confront carefully and lovingly, they should be held in the highest esteem by the members of that body.

B. Whose responsibility is it to admonish?

Yes, the leaders, but also the members of the body; "And we urge you, brothers," now Paul is addressing it to the entire church at Thessalonica, "we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone." (1 Thessalonians 5:14) Again, that word, warn, is the Greek word for admonish. So Paul points to a reciprocal, brotherly ministry of Christians administering mutual and caring oversight. He said, "I want you to feel like you've got the responsibility to admonish one another." Why? Because we are members of one another. If you're going to obey the "one another" passages, you must understand what it means to be "members of one another." We're not members of an organization. We're members of an organism. We're members of a body, and we're connected to one another.

Most Christians are very afraid of mutual accountability. Very seldom do you see any admonishment going on between members. I think it's because of the fallacy of the most prevalent concept of what church is all about. That concept is: You assemble as a church, sit down, listen, and leave. I'm in charge of my life. You're in charge of yours. I don't mess with you, and you don't mess with me. That's not what membership in the Body of Christ means. Is that the way your hand relates to your arm? I don't have anything to do with you. You don't bother me. We just do our own thing. We are responsible for one another. The church is Christian people, an organism, not an organization.

C. What does it take to be an admonisher? If it's going to be a ministry that we do—how do we do it?

- a) *Be full of goodness.* "I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness." (Romans 15:14 NIV) See that's what allows them the ability to admonish. He says, you've got Christian character and you've got a level of maturity. Thus, you have the credibility when it comes time to admonish.

I don't know about you, but I don't respond very well when somebody storms in and attempts to set me straight. How about you? But, I listen and respond when someone in humility comes with their eyes filled with tears to talk to me about a misunderstanding, or maybe just an area where I'm wrong.

In his first letter to Corinth, Paul had some hard things to say to that church: "I am not writing this to shame you, brothers, but to warn you, as my dear children." (1 Corinthians 4:14) If you want people to listen to you when you admonish, you'd better walk with integrity and interact with humility. Judgers tend to be full of themselves while admonishers tend to be full of goodness. There's a big, big difference.

b) *Be filled with knowledge.* Again, in Romans 15:14, after he says be full of goodness, he says, "Be complete or be filled with knowledge." Now Paul is not speaking there about random knowledge, just having a lot of facts; he's talking about Christian knowledge. He's talking about knowing Scripture, but he means actually growing in Scripture. Paul compliments the Christians in Rome because they're not just going through Scripture, Scripture is going through them. When that happens, you have the ability to adequately and effectively admonish somebody.

"All Scripture is God-breathed..." (2 Timothy 3:16) is memory work for most of us, it talks about what Scripture is all about. What does the rest of the verse say? "...and is useful for teaching," yes, also for "rebuking, correcting..." See the ability to admonish is found in those who walk with Christ, who are filled with goodness, and the knowledge of Scripture. Admonishment, just like encouragement, forgiveness, acceptance, and just like every one of these "one another" passages in this series are just natural outflows of Jesus into the lives of others. Our Lord did every one of these things at the right time, to the right people and with the right attitude.

Now not everybody in the church can be an admonisher. There are some folks in every church who don't walk with enough credibility to admonish somebody else. I'm not talking about perfection, but I am talking about walking the walk. Then there are other people in the church who are too ignorant of Scripture to be able to adequately admonish somebody else. But every church must have some, hopefully many, members who are mature enough to be admonishers.

D. How do we do it? How should we admonish one another?

a. *Admonish violations of Scripture, and let's let that be the parameter.* Some of you may think this violates the command to "accept one another" because of other passages in Romans. Paul said "therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another" (Romans 14:13); "accept one another, just as Christ accepted you" (Romans 15:7) and "Oh yes, but I do want you to also admonish one another. I want you to correct one another." (Romans 15:14) You may be scratching your head and asking, "Well, what gives? I don't understand."

All we're seeing here again is the need for balance and discernment in the body. If you haven't figured it out, let me make it clear for you. Paul in Romans 14 and 15 argues that there is considerable room in the body for opinion. In fact, there is considerable room for personal conviction. But there is no room in the body for deliberate sin. Paul made it clear that in matters of opinion and personal conviction, there should be acceptance. But admonishment brings a brother or a sister face to face with the teaching of Scripture. We must humbly and lovingly point out these violations. I like what one old preacher said, "If you can't bring God's Word into the matter, then the matter is not worth bringing up." That's the parameter for admonishment.

b. *Be sure to examine your own life.*

A man stepped on one of those old timey scales and put in his nickel. It gave him a little card along with his weight. He nudged his wife and said, "Honey, look it says "You're handsome, witty, and intelligent." She said, "Give me that card." She looked at it and said, "Yes, and it's got your weight wrong, too." Do you know what you need to do before you admonish somebody else? You really do need to weigh your life. Jesus taught that principle in the Sermon on the Mount "Why do you try to get the speck out of your brother's eye before you look at that giant beam sticking out of your own eye." (Matthew 7:3) You cannot be an admonisher until you first examine your own walk with God and be sensitive to it.

Let me give you a little caveat. You're not qualified to be an admonisher until you, yourself, can receive admonishment. If you think there are not areas in your life that occasionally don't need correction, you had better think twice. You better mark that well.

c. *Confront the individual, personally.*

Now this is hard. Confront the individual personally. Public admonition is not to be used to avoid personal confrontation. Neither does sending a letter or e-mail. The Bible teaches that public admonition is the last step in correcting a person.

Jesus says that if you've got something against a brother, he's wronged you, here's how you deal with it a) you go to them to see if you can't just work it out, b) if he won't listen, take two or three witnesses, and try to use group mediation, c) "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church;" (look now) and d) "if he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him like a pagan."(Matthew 18:15-17)

I found in those rare instances where I've ever seen church discipline exerted, that we've skipped step three. When it's ever done, you go to them one on one, you take two or three, then you go tell the Elders and the Elders might get up and say, "Don't have anything to do with them." It says, "Tell it to the church, and if he won't listen to them," see the picture I get from that is, the church (the members, Christians) says, "We've got a brother in trouble. He is deliberately spitting in the face of God. How about every one of you getting in touch with him this week and next week?" You talk about positive peer pressure, you talk about those people saying, "Brothers, we love you, we want you to come back." I've never in all my years been asked to do that, but that's what I read in Matthew 18. If he won't listen to them, then treat him like a pagan. Folks, sometimes in a body, amputation is necessary, but it is always the last resort.

d. Direct him or her to Jesus.

"We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ." (Colossians 1:28) Do you know that the goal of admonition is admonishment? It's not to make somebody tow the line to my expectations. Admonishment is simply encouraging one another to be like Jesus, helping steer us when we begin to get off course, steering us back to that goal of being Christ-like.

e. Encourage the one who responds.

Maybe they respond from you just going one on one or, maybe it's after two or three times. I don't know, but encourage the one. In Corinth a brother was just living in open rebellion. He was in some kind of incestuous union. Paul said, "Don't tolerate that church, that's just dead wrong." (1 Corinthians 5) So, they exercised the spiritual discipline we talked about a moment ago. He responded by repenting. But some of the brothers and sisters were holding it against him, even after he repented. As a result Paul said, "Now about that brother, you ought to forgive and comfort him so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow." (2 Corinthians 2:7) Make sure you understand that nobody's role is to be only an admonisher.

Among the spiritual gifts in Romans 12, it doesn't ever say the gift of admonishment. It's nobody's job just to go around and correct everybody they see. When somebody responds positively to loving correction, then encourage them and embrace them.

The command to admonish one another is the hardest one of all. It's difficult, risky, and costly, but the dividends are eternal. If we don't care enough to admonish, then we don't care enough. Paul said, "And I myself also am persuaded of you my brethren that you are also full of goodness, filled with knowledge, able also to admonish one another."

Perhaps this lesson has touched your heart and rekindled in your mind knowledge of where you need some redirection. It may be that your own conscience has been your admonisher. Your own conscience has said to you even today, "I need to make things right. I need to be restored or reconciled to God. Amazing Grace #1312, Steve Flatt, May 18, 1997

Members of One Another

"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." (Romans 12:4)

All the other world religions will usually talk about an appearance or a vision of their God. But the unique position of Christianity is that the One who existed before time and who created everything became flesh and lived among us as a human being in the form of Jesus of Nazareth. That is fundamental to Christianity, and there's nothing like it anywhere else in the world's religions. That's incarnation.

In one sense, the incarnation of Jesus didn't end with His ascension into heaven in Acts 1. Don't misunderstand, Jesus did ascend to heaven. He is seated at the right-hand of the throne of God, and He will stay there until He comes back again to destroy the world and take home all those who are His.

In another sense Jesus continues. He continues to be lived out in the members of His body, the church. "And He is the head of the body, the church." (Colossians 1:18)

The Bible doesn't say the church is like the body of Christ. It doesn't say the church resembles the body of Christ. It clearly states "the church is the body of Christ." Therefore:

The church is not an organization, it is an organism.

It is essential to understanding who the Church is and what it does. The church is not an organization; it is an organism. Jesus continues to live, work and move through the members of His body. "So we in Christ form one body." (Romans 12:5) We are a contemporary expression of Jesus Christ, Himself.

If New Testament Christianity is to be restored to its original concept, the church must be restored and the institutional concepts eliminated. We need to get rid of the images, and the vocabulary that looks at the church as an organization. The church Christ established is an organism; it is the living and active Body of Christ.

Parts of the Body of Christ not Church Membership

Again, if New Testament Christianity is to be restored, the original concept of what body membership really means must be restored. I'm convinced that their proper understanding is based on an understanding of what it means to be as Paul said, "members of one another." That's exactly what Romans 12:5 says, "So in Christ we who are many form one body."

Now what does that word, "member" mean? We use it all the time, don't we, in connection with church. Have you placed your membership, yet? Are you a member of that church? We grow up hearing that term repeatedly. But let me suggest to you that we have often used it poorly. Most often "member" is used in an organization context and not in an organism context.

Let me illustrate the difference. What does it take to be a good member of an organization, "say the Rotary Club, the Kiwanis Club, or the local garden club?" It usually takes three things:

- a) attend some of the meetings, not all, but most,
- b) keep whatever rules and bylaws the club might have and
- c) pay your dues. That's essential, that's how you become a member of good standing in a local club or organization.

How is one considered a member of good standing in the church? The criteria most often used are:

- a) how often does one attend?
- b) does he live by the standards (keep the rules)
- c) does he contribute (give a check) just about every Sunday. If the answer is yes then they're a good member at the So and So church.

I believe Scripture challenges that idea. See, you can be a good member of the Rotary Club; you can be a good member of the Kiwanis Club or the garden club without being closely and integrally bound to everybody else in the club. You don't have to be dependent upon those folks in order to be a good Kiwanian or Rotarian. Paul says that's not what body membership is. In the Body of Christ each member belongs to the other. Let me suggest that far too many churches around the land practice club membership in their congregations. They don't consider themselves "members of one another."

It's like the difference between a pile of bricks and bricks that are cemented together in a wall. The pile of bricks isn't connected. Which one is useful for the purpose for which the bricks were designed? The pile of bricks, or the bricks that are fashioned into a wall? In which scenario is it easier to steal a brick? In too many churches the preachers and elders are running around trying to get things done by stacking bricks that aren't cemented together and worrying about the devil coming in and stealing one of those bricks when God wants those bricks to be cemented and bonded together. That's the idea of a body.

You don't lose a member of your physical body without knowing it, do you? I know I've got absent-minded children, but I've never looked at one and said, "Where did your hand go?" "I don't know, I had it when I left this morning." But in a body, members are so connected they don't just fall away, they don't just disappear. That's the point. Christians are body members. That's what it takes to make us alive in Christ.

"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. For we are 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.

"Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 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. 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. 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? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

"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!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 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, 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, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

Implications of meaning of body membership.

1. Membership involves dependency.

The concept of body membership helps us understand that no Christian can function effectively by himself. I am very fond of my hand. I use it to touch, point, grasp, write, and for all kinds of things. It is very useful to me as long as it's attached to my body. But the moment it's no longer attached to my body, it is no longer useful to me. In fact, it will begin to putrefy and decay if detached.

In exactly the same way Christians outside the Body will decay. You can assemble every Sunday, sit in a pew, even give your money, but, that alone will not prevent spiritual decay. You must be integrally connected to the Body to prevent decay. You've got to be connected. You need to have some people that are integrally concerned about you, that know you and check on you regularly.

Every member of the body needs a group with whom they pray, share personally one-on-one, listen, and respond in a time of need immediately, people with whom they are directly loving and nurturing. If you think you don't need that, the Apostle Paul disagrees with you for he stated "The eye can't say to the ear, 'I don't need you.' And the head can't say to the foot, 'I don't need you.'" That's not how body membership works.

Independence is an American virtue, but it is not a Christian virtue. Sometimes we tend to think in our culture that anything that is a good American value has got to be a good Christian value; often it is, but sometimes it is not. Sometimes as Americans, we boast of our independence. Christians should not boast of scriptural independence, but rather boast of dependence upon God and the body for our spiritual health. The body is not made so that its members can be independent of one another.

Have you ever eaten a piece of food that was bad? The food didn't really go bad; what happened is some bacteria got on that food. One time I ate a piece of chicken. When it got in my stomach the gastric juices met that chicken and the bacteria in the chicken. The bacteria said to the gastric juices in the stomach, "Oh, how do you do? What can we do for you?" The gastric juices said to the bacteria "No, you don't understand, it's what we're going to do for you. We're here to dissolve you and break you down along with this chicken and to gradually just absorb you to where you become a part of this body." The bacteria said, "Oh, no, no, no, I don't want to do that. See I want to retain my identity. I don't want you breaking me down. I want to stay just like I am." The gastric juices said, "No, you don't understand, that's not the way it works around here; we break everything down so that we're a unit, we are part of a body." The bacteria said, "No, you're not breaking me down." The gastric juices said, "Well, if we don't break you down, you leave the body." About midnight we disfellowshipped the bacteria in a very unpleasant way.

Do you see the point? In a body, either you are integrated into the body dependent upon it, or you leave. Our bodies are

not designed to tolerate absolute independence. Do you remember the story of an independent church in the Bible? Its name was Laodicea. They thought they had it altogether, and Jesus said to them in Revelation 3, you say you're rich and you don't need a thing, but let me tell you what you are: "You're wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked." What did He say He was going to do? "I will spew you out of my mouth." Folks, we're not in the body of Christ if we don't need each other. If we don't need each other, we're not in the body.

2. Membership emphasizes equality.

“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” (Romans 12:4-5) The context of that passage is Romans 12:3 "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." Why? Then he goes on to say because we are all just parts of a body.

Have you ever seen a picture of a lung? Have you ever seen a picture of a liver? They're not very pretty, are they? I don't care for them. I'd much rather see a picture of a pretty hand, or a pretty face. But what God has deliberately done is designed the unseen less sightly parts to allow the visible parts to do what they do. You know I'd rather see a face than a lung. But a face can be a pretty ugly thing if the lung is not working.

Some people think the visible parts of Christ's body; i.e., the preachers and teachers, are more important than other people of the Body. Not so, not any more important than the face is any more important than the heart or the lungs. In reality the visible parts can only function because the many invisible parts of the body have all been working together performing their much needed function. See all the members of the body are important; that's why we care about one another.

But clubs and organizations don't operate that way. They have a hierarchy, a pecking order or pyramid. Clubs operate on this principle. Visibility is equated to significance. If you don't believe that, just go to the annual club dinner. Do you want to know who the most important people are in that club? It's easy, just look at who is at the head table. Who's going to stand up at that podium, and who's going to speak over and over again? Those are the chief Kahunas, those are the ones who are more important. In a club and most organizations, visibility is equal to importance, but a body doesn't think that way. If anything, the less visible parts of the body are more important than the visible parts.

Paul said at the end of 1 Corinthians 12, and whenever one part hurts, it doesn't matter if it's big, little, visible, or invisible; every part comes to help it.

I'm not a handyman by any stretch of the imagination. This happened many years ago and is part of the reason I'm not a handyman now. I was out hammering something in the garage, putting up a shelf, and I was sitting there hammering away. I got a little cocky and I hit the nail. It was the wrong nail. It was my thumbnail. Have you ever done that? You burst a thumbnail, blood is coming out and you're wondering if it's broken. You don't think or say, "Why you stupid thing, it's your own fault. I'll just let you dangle there and maybe you'll just rot off." No! Everything hurts the nervous system and sends the alarm all the way through the body, and the saliva glands act like the immediate EMT—the legs are the ambulance, they start running to the bathroom, and the voice is a siren "OWWWWW!" The whole body begins to say, "Help the little thumb, help the little thumb, help the little thumb." Oh when it finally soothes, you say, "Oh, that is so much better, that's the way it works in a body." I count you important because you belong to me. The Christians belong to one another and like it or not, I belong to you. We're a body—hand and arm, leg and foot, eye and brain.

3. Membership demands unity.

In 1 Corinthians 12:12 Paul said, “the body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts.” The American Standard says, "The body is one, though it has many members." God has deliberately designed your body to love harmony and hate discord.

I keep using these physical illustrations, personally, but those are the ones I know best and we're talking about a body. Some time ago I was in a basketball game, likely the last basketball game that I ever will play in. I was going one way, planted the left foot and the whole body was still going left, but from this knee down, decided, no, I'm going to stay right where I am. Then it happened — something snapped. See, a body will not tolerate disharmony. The body hates it when members go against each other and fight against each other.

God wants the incarnation of Jesus to continue in the lives of Christians. He wants the world to see Jesus living in our lives. Nothing will destroy the purpose of the continuing incarnation of Jesus quicker or more completely than division in the body. That's why Paul said "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:3)

Unity takes effort, doesn't it? It takes work and discipline to keep a physical body working well. You can be assured the devil is furiously determined to keep the church from living out the continuing incarnation. Do you know how he's trying to shut us down? Somebody says, "Well, through false doctrine." Yes. He'll use that if he can. But hear me, for every one church you will see fall to false doctrine, you will see 50 ravaged by a split and by a divisive spirit. "We must make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit."

Do you know what that means practically? It means make every effort to stay away from gossip. It means make every effort not to be jealous of somebody else here. It means make every effort not to be suspicious. It means if you don't know something, ask and make every effort to not speculate. Make every effort to stay away from anything that would bring discord in the body. No body stays healthy that fights itself.

Precious few physical bodies are destroyed by something on the outside. There aren't many bodies that are destroyed by a gunshot, a bomb going off, or a car wreck; there are some, but not many. How do most bodies die? Most bodies die from the inside out. They die because of cancer, heart attacks or strokes. Most people die because the body goes to war against itself. That is how most churches are destroyed because the members of the body lose sight of their commitment to unity.

That means occasionally those who would disrupt the unity of the body need to be confronted, gently, lovingly, and in a spirit of peace. But the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace is important enough that Paul said, "You make every effort to keep it."

In summary, we've got to learn to think Biblically about what it means to have membership in a body. How do you do that personally on your level? Look at the conclusion, two thoughts as we close.

1. Assess your own involvement

What kind of membership are you holding? Organization or organism? Body or club? Have you substituted something comfortable for something Biblical? How healthy would a church be if everybody practiced your form of membership?

One of the things I've noted as I looked through Paul's illustration about the church as the body of Christ with hands, feet, a head, ears, and eyes. He even talks about ligaments, but he never says anything about fat. The Holy Spirit wants it strong and lean and not just hanging around. Now I know there are some of you who are hurting, and you desire to be healed. You need to be healed but there comes a time when as you are healed by the body and the blood that flows through it, that you then take your role as a healer. You don't just stay hanging around doing nothing.

2. Assume initiative.

Don't just wait until somebody asks you to do something. Bodies don't just get in shape sitting around, do they? You don't sit on that couch and just suddenly get in shape. It takes discipline; it takes work. It's the same thing in the Body of Christ. It starts with a regular check-up. Examine yourself and ask, "Am I who I need to be? What discipline do I need to apply?" You need to eat spiritual food now, exercise by involving yourself in ministry.

If you are not a Christian, and you want to be a member of that kind of body, then understand what God desires. Put your trust and faith in Him, confess your belief that Jesus is God who came to earth in the flesh to be the atoning sacrifice for your sin, turn from your sinful ways and die to them. Be buried with Him in baptism, allow Him to raise you to a new creation and add you to His Body, His Church. That's the body Christ is going to take with Him to heaven one day.

Maybe you need to come back to the Lord, be restored from spiritual sickness and get His blood pumping through again so you become an active, vital, and dependent part of the body. We want you to be that. *Amazing Grace #1308, Steve Flatt, April 6, 1997*