



Introduction

Looking Ahead

Please read this opening section carefully and prayerfully. If you do not, you'll miss a very important overview of Scripture that is absolutely essential in understanding and effectively applying the "one another" exhortations outlined in the chapters to follow. Furthermore, you'll miss a very challenging testimony from the author regarding the way this study has impacted his own life and ministry. Note too that this introduction offers suggestions for launching a small group study.

The Editors

Several years ago, I made a wonderful discovery. It happened when I was a full-time professor interacting with my students at Dallas Theological Seminary about God's plan for the church. Their questions were penetrating and challenging! What is a healthy church? What does God expect from all believers? What makes a church a dynamic witness in the world?

All of these questions motivated me to investigate more deeply what is recorded in the letters written to the various New Testament churches. As I pursued this journey through the New Testament epistles, one major concept kept jumping off the pages of Scripture. Again and again I noticed exhortations regarding what believers are to do *for one another*. Paul, particularly, used the Greek word *allelon*

nearly forty times to instruct Christians regarding their mutual responsibilities to their fellow believers.

Recently, I took a fresh look at this concept in the New Testament letters. As always happens, I uncovered some new insights that I missed the first time around. I'm anxious to share these discoveries with you. But first, let me share what happened as a result of my first journey.

More than I realized, my initial discovery of these "one another" exhortations was destined to impact my life dramatically for years to come—and the lives of many others. First, it became a key in unlocking the process Paul described in his Letter to the Ephesians. This great first-century church planter made it crystal clear that the "body of Christ" will never become a growing and dynamic community reflecting Christ's love unless "each part does its work." God's plan is that "the whole body" is to be "joined and held together by every supporting ligament" (Eph. 4:16). Total body function is absolutely essential if a local church is to become all God intended it to be!

A CHURCH I NEVER PLANNED TO START

During my initial interaction with my students at the seminary, several of them challenged me to start a church and to apply these "one another" injunctions at the grassroots level. At first, I was hesitant. After all, I had been a professor for nearly twenty years. But, I took this challenge seriously and helped several families start the first Fellowship Bible Church in Dallas. I served as pastor. Attendance exploded and I knew rather quickly I'd have to make a vocational decision. After a lot of reflection and prayer, I decided to give up my full-time professorship and become a full-time church planting pastor.

Since starting the first Fellowship Bible Church in 1972, it has multiplied into over a dozen churches in the Dallas metroplex and several hundred throughout the United States and even into foreign countries—such as Fellowship Bible Church in Warsaw, Poland.

Currently, I pastor Fellowship Bible Church North in Plano, Texas—which we launched in 1981—a church that has become a

rapidly growing megachurch. Then in 1997, we launched Fellowship Bible Church of McKinney, Texas—another great mission field in the far north Dallas metroplex.

During these years of church planting experience, I’ve discovered that no emphasis is more important than to teach Christians what the Bible says about these “one another” injunctions. When I began to emphasize these great biblical truths in my pulpit ministry, in our orientation classes, in our leadership training sessions, and in our small group ministry (which we call minichurches), I’ve never seen more “body function” and “personal participation” take place among Christians. Furthermore, I’ve never observed more spiritual growth. This should not be surprising since this is why the Holy Spirit inspired the New Testament writers to record these wonderful exhortations. Over the years, pastors have shared with me again and again—face-to-face and by letter—that using these “one another” passages for sermons and group Bible study has totally changed the dynamics of their churches.

NEW INSIGHTS

As I recently revisited these “one anothers” in Scripture, I noticed something I’d missed—which is a marvelous reality regarding Scripture. There’s always more to learn—no matter how carefully we’ve read and studied the Word of God. In what was probably Paul’s first letter—the Epistle to the Galatians, he contrasted “the acts of the sinful nature” with “the fruit of the Spirit.” Paul wrote:

For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other [*allelon*] (Gal. 5:17).

In this instance, Paul used the “one another” or “each other” concept to show the marked difference between people who follow the “sinful nature” in their relationships with “one another” and those who “live by the Spirit” and “keep in step with the Spirit” (5:25). Throughout this entire passage, Paul was speaking “relationally”—not just regarding personal attitudes and actions. This is

why he used plural pronouns to describe the way that the “acts of the sinful nature” are manifested among non-Christians and conversely, the way the “fruit of the Spirit” is reflected in the lives of Christians as they relate to one another.

This introduces us to a very fascinating dichotomy regarding the way the “one anothers” are outlined in the New Testament. They can actually be grouped under “the acts of the sinful nature” and “the fruit of the Spirit.” When they are, we can see immediately what Paul had in mind when he stated that these two manifestations conflict with one another (5:17).

“THE ACTS OF THE SINFUL NATURE”

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like (Gal. 5:19-21).

Following is a list of negative “one another” statements that appear in several New Testament letters. Generally, these statements appear as they are translated in the *New International Version*. However, they are at times paraphrased in this list to demonstrate consistency and clarity, but without changing the specific meaning in the original text. These statements are as follows:

- lusting for one another (Rom. 1:27)
- judging one another (Rom. 14:13)
- depriving one another (1 Cor. 7:5)
- biting one another (Gal. 5:15a)
- devouring one another (Gal. 5:15b)
- destroying one another (Gal. 5:15c)
- provoking one another (Gal. 5:26a)
- envying one another (Gal. 5:26b)
- lying to one another (Col. 3:9)
- hating one another (Titus 3:3)
- slandering one another (James 4:11)
- grumbling against one another (James 5:9)

“THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT”

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22).

The following statements are *positive* “one another” exhortations. Again, they are at times paraphrased to demonstrate consistency and clarity, but in each instance reflect what the New Testament authors meant. Notice how these exhortations reflect the fruit of the Spirit:

members of one another (Rom. 12:5)
 being devoted to another (Rom. 12:10a)
 honoring one another (Rom. 12:10b)
 being of the same mind toward one another (Rom. 12:16; 15:5)
 loving one another (Rom. 13:8; 1 Thes. 3:12; 4:9; 2 Thes. 1:3; Heb. 10:24; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5)
 edifying one another (Rom. 14:19)
 accepting one another (Rom. 15:7)
 instructing one another (Rom. 15:14)
 greeting one another (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thes. 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14)
 waiting for one another (1 Cor. 11:33)
 caring for one another (1 Cor. 12:25)
 serving one another (Gal. 5:13)
 carrying one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2)
 bearing with one another (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13)
 being kind to one another (Eph. 4:32)
 submitting to one another (Eph. 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5)
 esteeming one another (Phil. 2:3)
 encouraging one another (1 Thes. 4:18; 5:11, 14)
 confessing sins to one another (James 5:16a)
 praying for one another (James 5:16b)
 offering hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9)
 fellowshiping with one another (1 John 1:7)

One thing is very clear from these two lists of biblical statements. A church that is manifesting “the fruit of the Spirit” is practicing the “one another” injunctions that build up the body of Christ and lead to one-mindedness and unity. A church that is reflecting the “acts of the sinful nature” is carnal and is practicing the “one anothers” that keep the church worldly and in a state of disunity. Drawing on a New Testament example, this kind of church can be called a “Corinthian church” (1 Cor. 3:1-4). To quote Paul, the believers in Corinth were acting more like non-Christians than Christians. This is what Paul meant when he asked the question—“Are you not acting like mere men?” (1 Cor. 3:3).

OUR PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

How can your church—and mine—become a mature body of believers, reflecting “the fruit of the Spirit”? The answer is clear in Scripture. All believers must “live by the Spirit” and “keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25). To do this, we must practice the “one another” exhortations that *build up* the body of Christ (Eph. 4:16) rather than destroying and dismantling it (Gal. 5:15). We must obey God’s Word. In no instance are these exhortations qualified, such as “if you feel like it,” “if it’s convenient,” “if it fits your personality,” etc. These exhortations form a profile for *doing* the will of God! *All* Christians are to be involved. We must be committed to looking for opportunities to carry out these positive “one another” injunctions in our personal lives. At the same time we must avoid practicing the *negative* “one anothers.” This is the essence of love!

EMPOWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

It’s true that all believers have a responsibility to practice the positive “one anothers” outlined in Scripture. If we love Jesus Christ and “one another,” we will obey the Word of God (John 15:10; 1 John 5:3). However, this is far more than a human process that is based on an act of the will. It’s a divine function where believers draw on the supernatural power of God.

First of all, Jesus prayed for all of us—which certainly includes our ability to *love one another as He loved us* (John 13:34). Jesus fol-

lowed this “one another” command with that great prayer in John 17, which includes the following request:

My prayer is not for them alone [the apostles]. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message [believers of all time], 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 (John 17:20-21).

Paul also made this supernatural process clear in his prayer for the Ephesian Christians—a prayer that is just as relevant for your church and mine. Note again that this prayer is for the total body—not just for individual members of the body. Again Paul used plural pronouns to make this point:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints [believers of all time], to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:16-19).

The goal of Paul’s prayer was that these believers might “*be filled to the measure of . . . the fullness of God*” (3:19). This is a succinct statement that summarizes the “fruit of the Spirit”—reflections of God’s character—which is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22).

Paul culminated this prayer with a grand doxology—powerful verses that we have inscribed on huge banners that are displayed in the front of our own church. These verses remind all of us at least once a week that we can practice the positive “one anothers” with God’s divine help:

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Eph. 3:20-21).

Against the backdrop of Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3, and his emphasis on the functioning body in chapter 4, we can now understand more fully what he meant in chapter 5 when he encouraged these believers to be "filled with the Spirit." Note once again that this is a corporate concept, directed at the entire church in Ephesus:

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, [as a body of believers] be filled with the Spirit. Speak to *one another*¹ with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:18-20).

My personal prayer for you is that this study will impact your life and the life of your church as it has impacted me personally and the people I've had the privilege of ministering to over the years. If you take God's Word seriously and rely on the Holy Spirit to empower you, I'm confident it will!

SUGGESTIONS FOR GROUP LEADERS

Before you use this book in a small group setting, I would suggest you do several things:

1. Use a handout or overhead transparency to illustrate how the "one another" exhortations in the New Testament can be grouped under what Paul called "the acts of the sinful

¹ The Greek word translated "one another" in this exhortation is *heautou*. When it is, it has the same basic meaning as *allelon*. (See also Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13, 16; Heb. 3:13; 1 Peter 4:8.)

- nature” and the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:19-22). Illustrate how these two categories of “one anothers” are in “conflict with each other.”
2. Show how the “one another” exhortations selected for in-depth study in this book are foundational. For example, the first seven chapters of this book follow the “one anothers” as outlined by Paul in Romans 12–16—a section of this letter that clearly specifies how Christians are to live in view of God’s mercy and grace that has been described in Romans chapters 1–11. This is significant since this letter is the most comprehensive and generic letter Paul ever wrote. In essence, Romans includes everything a church really needs to know to become mature. Following are the seven “one anothers” which appear sequentially in this letter:
 - We are to be “members one of another” (Rom. 12:5, NASB).
 - We are to be “devoted to one another” (Rom. 12:10a).
 - We are to “honor one another” (Rom. 12:10b).
 - We are to “be of the same mind with one another” (Rom. 15:5, NASB).
 - We are to “accept one another” (Rom. 15:7).
 - We are to “admonish one another” (Rom. 15:14, NASB).
 - We are to “greet one another” (Rom. 16:16).
 3. Spend some time in prayer asking the Holy Spirit to enlighten each participant to understand these exhortations and to empower each one to practice them—beginning in this group process.
 4. Conclude the session by reflecting on Paul’s wonderful doxology in Ephesians 3:20-21.

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