

Our Treatment of One Another

By Brian R. Kenyon

Part I

Members of the church of Christ are family (Ephesians 3:14-15). Sometimes, we may treat others better than our own flesh and blood. For example, a man may leave his office and open the door for others and show extraordinary politeness, yet when he comes home, he slams down his stuff, grumbles at his wife and demands, “Where’s my supper?” Unfortunately, some members of the church are the same toward their own spiritual family. There are several New Testament verses that contain the term “one another.” When we consider them, a pattern emerges on how we should and should not treat one another.

Must Be Governed by Love

The primary factor in our treatment of one another is biblical love. Paul wrote, “Owe no one anything except to love one another” (Romans 13:8). He further stated, “But concerning brotherly love...you yourselves are taught by God to love one another” (1 Thessalonians 4:9). John likewise wrote, “For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another...that we should...love one another, as He gave us commandment” (1 John 3:11, 23). The reason why we must love one another is clear: “If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11). We must seek the highest good for our brothers and sisters in Christ!

There is tremendous significance in treating one another in love. First, “everyone who loves is born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7). Since being “born of God” and “knowing” God require obedience to the Gospel (John 3:3-5; 1 John 2:3), loving one another is used representatively (a synecdoche) for obedience to the entire Gospel. Thus, if love is not governing our treatment of one another, we are not obeying the Gospel! Second, “If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us” (1 John 4:12). God will dwell in us because, again, loving one another is used representatively for obedience, and obedience to the Gospel results in God’s indwelling (John 14:23). The idea of “perfected” in “His love...perfected in us” is maturity. When love governs our treatment of one another, we grow and develop in our love for God (1 John 4:20-21). Given love’s importance, then, how should we treat each other?

How to Treat One Another

Be Like Minded. “Be of the same mind toward one another” (Romans 12:16). This is to “live in harmony” (ESV), to be united in the same spiritual interests, which requires adherence to God’s Word (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Edify. “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another” (1 Thessalonians 5:11). “Comfort [encourage, NAS]” and “edify [build up, NAS]” means to help one another be stronger in the faith. This requires that we do our best through words and actions to give each other encouragement and strength in the Lord.

Accept. “Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God” (Romans 15:7). The word “receive” [accept, NAS] means to welcome or accept. Obviously, this does not mean that we endorse church members living in sin (1 Corinthians 5:1-5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15), but it does mean we should realize that Christ accepted us as we were as long as we gave (and continue to give) our lives to Him (Matthew 11:28-30), regardless of our race, nationality, character imperfections, etc. We should also do the same.

Exhort. We are to “exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today’” (Hebrews 3:13) “and let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as

you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25). To exhort means to call upon one another for the purpose of encouraging one another to overcome the obstacles in living faithful lives. Since this “one another” exhorting takes place when each “one another” comes together in the “assembling of ourselves together,” it is very important that we attend church services!

Forebear. “Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called...bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:1-2). “Bearing” [forbearing, KJV; showing tolerance, NAS] means to endure, be patient with or give patient attention to. Family members in Christ may disappoint us (intentionally or not), but we must continue to work with them, showing love (1 Corinthians 13:4), extending kindness (Ephesians 4:32) and practicing the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12).

Forgive. “Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another...even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do” (Colossians 3:13). The Lord forgives us when we repent (Acts 2:38), no matter how badly we sin against Him (1 Timothy 1:12-14). One of the conditions of our being forgiven is that we forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15). How forgiving are we to one another?

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Part II

How Not to Treat One Another

Do Not Speak Evil. “Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law” (James 4:11). To “speak evil” is to say bad things against someone or to slander. Peter used the same word (in the original language) with reference to those of the world who persecute Christians (2 Peter 2:12; 3:16). We would expect the enemies of Christ to say bad things about Christians, but such evil speaking should not be done against our own family in Christ! When we do engage in this evil speaking, not only are we condemning our family in Christ, but we are also showing no regard for God’s law because that law says we should love one another (1 John 2:10-11; 4:20)!

Do Not Lie. “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds” (Colossians 3:9). Putting off “the old man” [old self, NAS] is done at baptism (Colossians 2:12; 3:1; Romans 6:3-6), the very same act that results in our being added to Christ’s church (Acts 2:47). Lying, perhaps more than any other sin, shows ill-will toward our brothers and sisters in Christ. We must not lie to one another (Revelation 21:8)!

Do Not Show Prejudice. “I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality” (1 Timothy 5:21). Two words in this verse are of note: “prejudice” [preferring one before another, KJV; bias, NAS], which means to judge beforehand without the facts and “partiality,” which means to show favoritism. This does not mean we are forbidden to have friends in the church that are closer than others (e.g., Jesus and Peter, James and John, Matthew 17:1; 26:37), but it does mean that we are not to form cliques and be prejudiced toward those who are not part of our clique!

Do Not Irritate or Envy. “Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another” (Galatians 5:26). This verse comes after listing the “fruit of the spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23). The word “provoking [challenging, NAS]” means to irritate or make angry. Immature children do this to one another, but how sad it is when grown people, especially Christians, do this to one another! “Envy” means to be jealous. It is one of the “works of the flesh” (Galatians 5:21), and it was one reason Jesus was crucified (Matthew 27:18). We must be content with what God has given us (1 Timothy 6:6) and not envy our own family in Christ!

Do Not Judge or Condemn. “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way” (Romans 14:13). In the context of Romans 14, Paul was dealing with matters of personal conscience, particularly the eating of meats (Romans 14:1-3). While some could eat meat, others could not conscientiously eat it due to former associations with idolatry. The point is that it does not matter to God whether we eat meat (1 Corinthians 8:8), but we should not “judge” those who take a different view on a matter of indifference. “Judge” [pass judgment, ESV] in this context means to condemn (Matthew 7:1-5). Rather than condemning a family member in Christ because he holds a different view on a matter of indifference, Paul said we should resolve not to be a hindrance toward the conscience, and thus the faith, of our brother or sister in Christ!

Do Not Complain. “Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!” (James 5:9). Although the term “grumble” [grudge, KJV; complain, NAS; murmur, ASV] can simply refer to sighing or groaning (Romans 8:23; 2 Corinthians 5:2, 4), in this context, it refers to complaining that results when we are under severe stress due to difficulties in life, even the trials of our faith (Hebrews 13:17, “grief”). Some may take out their frustrations by kicking the garbage can (which is immature enough), but how often do we take our frustrations out on family members by complaining or ‘chewing them out’ for insignificant things just because we are frustrated? Even worse is when we do this with our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Israelites of old were often characterized by their complaining, and they suffered because of it (Deuteronomy 1:27-28; 1 Corinthians 10:10). Let us not complain against one another, lest we, like the Israelites be “condemned” by the Judge, Jesus Christ!

Conclusion

Our relationship to one another is an important part of being the properly functioning spiritual body that the Lord desires (1 Corinthians 12:12-26). If we cannot get along with one another and treat one another scripturally, how can we expect to influence the world to be a part of Christ’s body? Success in evangelism, in large part, rests on our treating one another as God desires. Let us make sure that love governs our relationships with one another. Only then, “all will know that you are My [Jesus’] disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Only by treating one another in love will we “be made perfect in one...that the world may know that You [Father] have sent Me [Jesus], and have loved them as You have loved Me” (John 17:23).