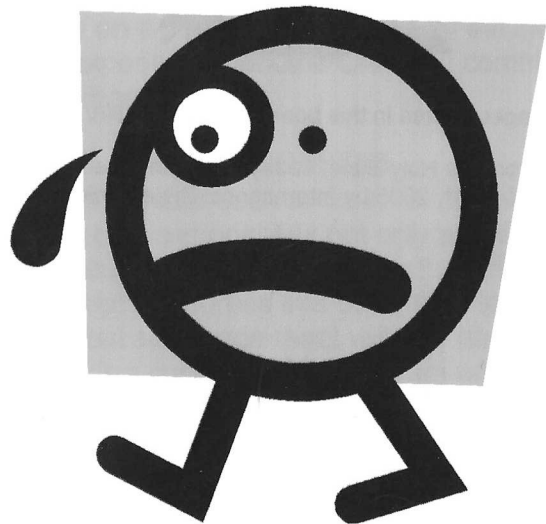


Community, Is it Possible?



by:

Frederick L. Pattison,
a concerned Christian

"Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." (1 Peter 1:22-23)



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Community or Individuality?

The Christianity that most American and Western Christians are familiar with has placed its **emphasis on individuality rather than upon community**. In fact, if the truth be known the community aspect is **largely missing** with few exceptions. Though there is a great deal of 'talk' about community seldom is Christian community **experienced** or fully understood by most Christians. Some of the Anabaptist¹ Christians are the exception to this.

It appears to me that the biblical, and especially the New Testament **formula** for Christian community, has long ago been **forsaken** in our Western culture and in our churches.

To understand Christian community, in a society and culture such as ours, takes some doing. I would be a **hypocrite** if I were to tell you that I fully understand it myself. I am continuing to learn. I **am on a journey** and hopefully will increasingly understand and experience genuine Christian community until the Lord calls me home.

Individualism

Creator-God has made each of us in his image. Unlike our animal friends we humans possess not only a body but also a soul and spirit. **Do animals go to heaven?** In this booklet I will not even attempt to address this other than to state that I really don't know but sure hope that I will one day see my pets who have died during my lifetime. What I am addressing at this point is that each of us is unique. God has not made us clones. **No two human beings** are 100% the same. Each of us is unique and somewhat different, hence we are individuals. However, this **does not** eradicate the need for us to relate to each other as the **Psalmist** exhorted that the people of God **"live together in unity."**² If and when we Christians can ever comprehend and begin living out the concept of Christian community I believe **Christianity will explode** and take on aspects of the early Church as it overwhelmed the pagan world.

¹ The Anabaptists of the Reformation have given rise to such groups as the Mennonites, Brethren, Dunkards and kindred companies of Christians.

² Psalm 133:1 reads, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity."

YOU are Important, now believe it!

I am continually amazed even after having been a Christian since my mid-teen years that we Christians so easily and quickly **cast one another out of the Body of Christ**. Contrary to what authentic Christian faith is we too often act as if we were 'god' and deal with one another in inappropriate unseemly ways that causes the world to laugh at **our antics**. We appear to say **"either agree with us one hundred percent or get lost!"**

The New Covenant³ teaches that **all believers** are **vital, important and necessary** for the **Body of Christ**⁴ to be healthy. We dare not cast each other off so easily and quickly without regard to our shared faith in Christ.

We are taught in the New Testament that **all believers** are important,

*"For by the grace given me [Paul] I say to every one of you [believers]: **Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.**"*
(Romans 12:3)

As disciples of Christ each of us must be willing to take the above exhortation seriously. **Judging begins with one's own self**. The apostle Paul instructed the Christians at Corinth to judge and examine self especially whenever coming to the Table of the Lord. **See – 1 Corinthians 11:28.**

In writing to the Christians who were part of that assembly the apostle Paul taught **"body life"**. Note his exhortation to these believers and to us as well,

*"Just as a body, though one, has **many parts**, but all its **many parts form one body**, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form **one body** – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the **one***

³ The New Covenant is aka 'the New Testament.'

⁴ The Body of Christ is the spiritual entity made up of all authentic believers.

Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but many.

*"Now 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 placed 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 foot, '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 not special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving 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)

For Thought & Discussion

- *How do you view body life in the church?*
- *What are you doing or can do to better promote this biblical principle in your congregation or group?*

The New Testament teaches that it is the Holy Spirit who **adds** believers to the Body of Christ. This happens upon the individual's regeneration. **See – Acts 2:41, 47.** If this is true, and I believe that it is, then **we cannot and dare not** dismember any part of the Body of Christ, even those parts of the Body that we may have problems relating to. We, believers in Christ, are all one as members of **the same spiritual body**. When we

dismember a part of the Body we are saying, **“Holy Spirit you made a mistake in adding this person to the Body!”**

As Christ is **the head of the Body, the Church**, each believer is **vital** to this Body. Note how the apostle Paul put it when writing to the believers at Ephesus,

“From him [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Ephesians 4:16)

In the above passage we learn of **the emphasis** on the importance of each part of this spiritual entity that we call the church. We are **joined and held together** by Christ who **alone** is its head. This body is to grow and build itself up in love. **Each part or member of the body of Christ has work**, we usually call it ministry, to do.

Encouraging One Another

I fear that the greater part of the Body of Christ has yet to learn the need that believers have in encouraging one another. Rather, then **spending our time and effort** criticizing and tearing each other down, **we need to give ourselves over to encouraging one another**. Note Paul’s exhortation,

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else. (1 Thessalonians 5:11-15)

I am convinced that **encouraging one another** in the local community of believers would drastically **change** the entire complexion of our churches. I’m often exasperated with the **pettiness, bickering, and gossip** so rampant in churches. I also believe that **the endless cycle** of meetings, committees,

boards, and church busyness that abounds in most churches is consuming needless time and effort giving **little time and effort to encouraging** one another. When a sister or brother in Christ is tempted or falls into sin, **what do we Christians do?** **Too often** we condemn, judge and/or **turn our backs** on that brother or sister. **Shame on us**. The writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews gave the following exhortation that we need to heed in our gatherings as believers,

“See to it, brothers and sisters, 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)

Observe how the writer of Hebrews admonished the readers to **“encourage one another daily. . .”** Later in the same letter we read the following admonition,

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:24-25)

As believers we are challenged to become involved in **equipping, admonishing, comforting, and encouraging one another**. Entailed in this process is the need to **“spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”**

For Thought & Discussion

- *What does it mean to encourage one another?*
- *What does it mean to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds?”*
- *How does the gathering⁵ you are part of measure up?*

Every believer is needed in the church. . . **no exceptions!** It appears that in the early New Testament churches the be-

⁵ I use ‘gathering’ periodically in place of church, ekklesia, assembly, or congregation however I am simply referring to a local company of believers.

lievers were involved in their assembly in some way or other. If one was missing it adversely affected the entire body. Each congregation has a gift-mix sovereignly bestowed upon it by the Holy Spirit. See – 1 Corinthians chapters 12, 13 & 14. In nearly all of our modern day churches one person, usually called "the pastor," is viewed as the one who has all the gifts necessary for the congregation to function properly, hence the members sit back on "their blessed assurances" and passively listen to the pastor while "paying" him/her to do the work of God. This is not biblical. It is a violation of New Testament Christianity.

For Thought & Discussion

- *How is the mutual edification of "one another" (Hebrews 10:24-25) occurring in your experience?*
- *How can all believers function within the body if only one person is allowed to use his or her gifts?*

Fellowship: Coffee or More?

*How often do we read in a church bulletin "Join us for coffee and fellowship after the service?" But is this really fellowship in the biblical sense? Personally, I think not! What passes for fellowship or community in most churches is a thin veneer of the reality. It quickly disappears when differences arise. We are able to disown one another with the greatest of ease. What we label as Christian fellowship is an impostor. It's not fellowship rather it's tolerating one another just so long as we are on the same wave link. Woe to that Christian who disagrees, who rocks the boat, who disturbs the status quo, or who takes stands that are not in accord with the majority. Christians are often expected to say, do and believe what the majority opinion demands. *Why?**

I'm not a bar person but it appears to me that the bar crowd may be offering that which our churches appear to be sadly missing out on. I read the following item dealing with this concept that I found interesting and challenging:

"The neighborhood bar is possibly the best counterfeit there is to the fellowship Christ wants to give his Church. It's an imitation dispensing liquor instead of grace, escape rather

than reality. But it is . . . an accepting. . . inclusive fellowship. . . You can tell people secrets and they. . . don't tell others. . . The bar flourishes not because most people alcoholics, but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, (the desire) to love and be loved. And so many seek the counterfeit (of God's fellowship) at the price of a few beers."⁶

Isn't it ironic that it is the bar to which many people must flock to in order to have fellowship when bona fide fellowship should be found in Jesus Christ. The church should be the center of true and lasting fellowship but sadly it is too often missing. People deep down inside want and need fellowship. However the church simply doesn't offer what they want and need. Christian community is desperately needed in this world where loneliness abounds and where honesty is lacking.

What is Fellowship-Community?

I mentioned earlier that Christian fellowship is more than coffee hour after a service. It seems to me that the majority of Christians think that fellowship is merely putting on a smiley face before others at church gatherings. However, authentic Christian fellowship is far deeper than merely saying "hello" or "Good Morning" or putting on the smiley face before or following a service. This adds nothing to Christian community.

The high priestly prayer of our Lord we hear him praying,

*"My prayer is not for them [his immediate disciples] alone. I pray also for those [you and me] who will believe in me through their message, 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)*

This prayer indicates that the followers of Christ can enjoy the same kind of fellowship that he has with the Father. *But why don't we?* Our Lord was open with his disciples. As Christ's disciples, we, too, need to be open first of all with

⁶ Quote from the book "Dare to Live Now" by Bruce Larson published by Zondervan, 1972 of Grand Rapids.

God and **secondly with one another** in community. It is in and through Jesus Christ that **we have found new life**. The Bible declares that **once we are 'in' Christ we have become new creations**. We *have been* reconciled to God. We have also been ordained to be **ambassadors of reconciliation** to a lost and blemished world. **See – 2 Corinthians 5:17-20**.

Immediately **following the conferral of the Holy Spirit** upon those who believed on the **Day of Pentecost** the church was **birthed**. In the second chapter of the Book of Acts we are told that these new believers,

“Devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching [doctrine] and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. . . Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:42, 46-47)

History reveals that the world was **amazed** by these new disciples of Messiah. The Roman Empire was largely barbarous with its crowds cheering in the Roman arenas as slaves and Christians were murdered. The ‘cultured’ Roman society delighted to no end as they viewed wild beasts tearing human bodies into sheds. The crowds often cried for more and more blood. It was into this heathen, vicious, violent world that our Savior came and walked and lived. . . and died. What a stark contrast to that evil society was the new body that we call the church. In many respects **the early churches were far different** from what has since developed into Christendom. In the early New Testament assemblies it appears that **the majority of believers were accepted by one another**. They **cared, comforted, served** and yes, **loved one another**. Sadly these ingredients are **missing** when there is a lack of genuine Christian community. You will note that I have used ‘**fellowship**’ and ‘**community**’ interchangeably.

For Thought & Discussion

- *Do you agree with the thoughts shared earlier contrasting what happens in the bar with what happens in many of today’s churches? Why or why not?*

- *Would you say that authentic fellowship [community] is a part of your assembly or home group or is it largely missing? Explain.*

Koinonia

This Greek word is usually **translated** as “**fellowship**” or similar terms in our English language Bibles. It may be defined simply as: “**communion or the sharing of a common experience**.” In our case as Christians it is **the common experience of sharing in God’s grace**. **Koinonia** was intended by our Lord to be **the very essence** of his newly found spiritual body, the church. It was **through Koinonia** that the followers of Christ got to know each other, personality clashes and all, as they took the teachings of Christ to heart. These early disciples were not about “**playing**” church rather they sought **to be “the church.”**

As believers we have been called into fellowship or Koinonia with our Lord as well as with each other. Paul wrote,

“God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:9)

I don’t know about you but the above statement boggles my mind. We have been **literally called** into fellowship with our Lord. Wow!!

It is only **when we are in fellowship** with our Lord and with each other in the Body of Christ that we can indeed experience Christian community. We are **not** islands unto ourselves. Rather, **we are a community** of men and women **bonded together** in and through Jesus Christ. A Gospel song declares, “**We are one in the bond of love**.” Intertwined with this love is that **Koinonia** we experience as we walk together in Christ. I like what Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians,

*“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 Lord’s people** 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.” (Ephesians 3:16-19)

It is **only** when we are rightly walking with Christ, living in his will, and in fellowship with our Christian brothers and sisters that we will truly experience the fullness of what God intends for us. **Someone has said**, and I buy into it,

“that we may pray, study the Bible constantly, serve in the church, and be the most active church members possible, but that our experience with God will be incomplete unless we experience God’s Son in the lives of brothers and sisters in Christ.”

For Thought & Discussion

- *What does Koinonia mean to you? To your group?*
- *Does the statement that is quoted above make sense to you? Why or why not?*

Christian(?) hypocrisy

How often we hear people declare that they do not attend any company of Christians because of **the hypocrisy**. Unfortunately this is all too often true. **Churches are often filled** with hypocrisy of all kinds. It has been said that **the greatest hindrance** to authentic Christian fellowship is the widespread practice of **Christians pretending** not to have any problems and purporting to be something or someone that they are not. That’s hypocrisy. We attend Christian gatherings, put on **our everything-is-all-right masks**, and **play-act**. I think that **charismatic Christians** excel in this area by acting as if all is right and that they have no problems. When the truth is known and revealed this attitude proves to be untrue.

Remember the account recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures of **Moses coming down from the Mount**? At first he did not know why the people were **unable to look upon him** but had to **shield their eyes**. **His face was aglow with the glory of God** that he had encountered when he was in God’s presence upon the Mount. We are told that **Moses covered his face with a veil** so that the people would be able to communicate with him. **As time passed, the brightness faded**; but Moses wore his veil anyway. **Why?** Because he was afraid – afraid

that the people would interpret **the fading glory** as a sign that God was no longer with him. Paul wrote of this thusly,

“We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away.” (2 Corinthians 3:13)

Recall when you first came to know Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? **Remember** the joy that filled your heart and life to overflowing? But somewhere along the line **it has faded** just as Moses experienced. Too often we have allowed the glory of God to diminish from our lives. We continue **the pretense** but **lack** the reality.

Today in our churches **we continue** to hide behind a veil. We do not want others to see just **who we are** and **what we are about**. We do not want other Christians to see **the fading glory**. We seek to **project an everything-is-fine image**. Too often we say, *I’m having victory in my life, I’m Spirit-filled*. Unless and until we can **remove that veil** we shall **continue** to be defeated. Hypocrisy and genuine Christlike living **cannot coexist**. James exhorted,

*“Therefore **confess** your sins to each other and **pray** for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” (James 5:16)*

The veil of pride is hiding the fact that we do need the prayers of our Christian brothers and sisters, that we do sin, that we are not perfect, that not everything is ok, and that we need God’s healing for wholeness.

For Thought & Discussion

- *Do you agree or disagree with the above premise? Why or why not?*

Accepting One Another

Why are we so fearful of accepting one another in Christ? This is difficult for me to fully understand. How often I hear Christians declare of another sister or brother *“I love him or her in the Lord but I do not like that person.”* It behooves each of us to accept Paul’s admonition which implores,

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” (Romans 15:7)

That’s powerful! **We are to accept each other to the degree that Christ has accepted us. And this accepting of one another brings praise to God.** Again, that’s awesome!

In accepting fellow believers there is **the blessing of knowing** that we are in God’s will. There are hordes of people, Christians in that number, **who do not feel** that anyone accepts them for the person they are. Many people are literally **shunned, left out and/or ignored** by others. This takes an immense toll on people suffering from such rejection. **Within nearly every circle of Christians** there will be some who **appear to be un-loveable**, yet as believers **our love** is to extend to these folk as well as to those who are easy to love.

To love and accept one another *does not* necessarily mean that we will always **agree** with each other. **Disagreeing** is a part of the human experience. It is **not necessarily wrong to disagree** with a brother or sister in Christ. In fact, **there are times when it may be necessary to disagree** with a fellow believer for some reason or other. **However**, we are to work on not being disagreeable with each other.

In the **Romans 15:7** passage we are **exhorted to accept one another just as our Lord has accepted each of us.** *And how has our Lord accepted us?* He has accepted us personally flaws and all. **Too many Christians** accept only those people to whom they are already attracted to: people of the same race, those having similar likes and dislikes, those who hold the same political views, are of the same sexual orientation, similar status in society, etc. This is how the world accepts people. But **you and I** are children of God. **As fellow believers** we are called to be different from the world. **We are to accept each other on the basis of grace; God’s grace!**

Let’s face it, some Christians can be exasperating. Their personalities are wholly different from what appeals to us. We have **little in common: socially** or in other respects, yet we **accept, love and worship the same Lord.** We have been added, by the Spirit of God, to the same company of believers.

...so there we are – together, members of the same family, i.e., *the family of God.* Note what the apostle pleaded in this matter,

“May God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 15:5-6)

The apostle Paul indicated that **God is able to give us the same attitude** of mind toward others that our Lord possessed. If this is so, then there is little reason for us to break fellowship with one another. We should persistently keep in mind that **not one of us**, while living in the flesh, is perfect. **See – Romans 7. The old nature continues to exist** and often manifests itself. It pops its ugly head out and makes itself known as we display our irritations, grouchiness, and temper tantrums. God knows that **we all** have this struggle. God also knows that some believers continue to be entrenched in their old ways. These Christians present special challenges giving hard times to others in the Christian family, yet they are part of the same family. Endurance is much more than simply putting up with someone. **Its goal is to be “a spirit of unity” (Rom.15:5).** Regardless of **how exasperating another Christian** may be, we are neither to **retaliate nor give up** on loving that individual. In fact, we should go out of our way to be a blessing to such folk. This is not necessarily easy, but it is Christlike.

At this point you are probably saying to yourself, **“But I’m only human.”** This is true, but you also have God if you have Christ in your life. **God is able** to aid you in enduring in the most difficult of situations and difficult people you may need to deal with. **Remember**, we are called by God to **accept** and fellowship with one another in Christian community.

Why? Take into account the biblical passage that was quoted earlier that declared that this **brings praise to God.** **Do you want to praise God?** One of the very best ways to do this is to **“accept one another!”**

For Thought & Discussion

- *What are your thoughts regarding these matters that we have been discussing?*
- *Are there areas in which you need to work on? What are they?*
- *How is what we have been considering thus far part of Christian community?*

That “One Another” Concept

The “**one another**” concept taught throughout the New Testament is vital to developing and maintaining Christian community. *How many people attend church services, sit in the pews as strangers to one another, and leave feeling frustrated, lonely and not knowing whether this thing we call “Christian” faith is actually real?* How sad and tragic. Community is **an innate part** of the human psyche. It is the underpinning to our faith as Christian believers. **Without community** churches flounder wandering about without direction, purpose and/or reason for existing. The church is more than a mutual admiration society. It is more than a political or social activist group. **Authentic New Testament churches** are to be churches of the living God; part and parcel of the Body of Christ.

The New Testament **emphasizes** the importance of community. I believe that **one of the best ways** to developing Christian community amongst us is **to take a look** at the two biblical phrases:

“one another”
“each other”

These phrases speak directly to the interpersonal relationships that we have with one another **within the community of believers**. Someone has written that these teachings or concepts can be divided into four categories:

1. **Unity,**
2. **Hospitality,**
3. **Devotion, and**
4. **Edification.**

From this point on we will be **taking a look** at a number of these “**one another**” and “**each other**” exhortations. You are **encouraged** to take time to **think through and discuss** each of the following in order to grasp their intent as we develop Christian community. So here we go:

“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, **you also should wash one another’s feet**. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” (John 13:13-15)

- *What is our Lord teaching us in the above passage?*
- *How should we ‘wash’ one another’s feet and why?*

“A new command I give you: Love **one another**. As I have loved you, so you must love **one another**. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, **if you love one another**.” (John 13:34-35)

“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for **each other**, love **one another** deeply from the heart.” (1 Peter 1:22)

“For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love **one another**.” (1 John 3:11)

The above passages are **a sampling** of the many biblical exhortations that we followers of Christ are to **love one another**. But how seldom we appear to display such love to the world. The world is yet to see companies of disciples of Christ in fact loving one another.

- *What do the above passages mean to you? To the company of Christians you associate with?*
- *How can this love for one another become more than a Christian phrase but become reality?*
- *How is this love different from that kind of love displayed by the world?*

"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves." (Romans 12:9-10)

- *What is this passage saying to each of us? What can or should we do to implement it into our personal lives as Christians? Into our groups?*

"Live in harmony with one another." (Romans 12:16a)

- *Is it possible to put this into practice – this living in harmony with fellow believers? If it is, how do we go about it?*

"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law." (Romans 13:8)

- *The above passage informs us that as we demonstrate our love to one another we have fulfilled the commands of the law. As a Christian what do you see in this?*

"Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister." (Romans 14:13)

- *Why are we so quick to judge one another? How can we begin refraining from this practice that destroys others in the Body of Christ rather than building them up in the Lord?*

"Greet one another with a holy kiss." (Romans 16:16a)

"All the brothers and sisters here [at Corinth] send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss." (1 Corinthians 16:20).

"Greet one another with a kiss of love." (1 Peter 5:14)

- *How is the above practice applicable to our situation today?*

"I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought." (1 Corinthians 1:10)

- *Is the exhortation given in the above passage really possible for us to put into practice today?*
- *How and what can we do as individuals? As companies of believers to see it coming into fruition?*

"You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other." (Galatians 5:13-15)

- *We are called to "serve" one another humbly in love. In your opinion what does this entail as believers and fellows members of the Body of Christ?*

"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." (Ephesians 4:2)

- *How is this possible in our Christian community experience to implement this concept?*

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Ephesians 4:31-5:2)

- How do we go about ridding ourselves of negative personality traits we've grown accustomed to throughout our life time experience?
- What does it mean to be "kind" and "compassionate" to our brothers and sisters in Christ?
- How can we in fact forgive when we've been deeply hurt by another brother or sister in the community of faith?
- Why is such forgiveness vital to our Christian walk and life? To the assembly we associate with?

"Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 5:18b-20)

- What does it mean to be "filled with the Spirit?"
- How is a believer in Christ filled with the Holy Spirit?
- Why is singing and making music from our hearts unto the Lord vital to Christian community?
- Why is thanksgiving important to the child of God? To the assembly?

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Ephesians 5:21)

- What does submitting to each other mean to you?
- How does "reverence for Christ" enter the picture in this concept of mutual submission in the community?

"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." (Colossians 3:13-14)

- What does bearing with each other entail?

- How does one "put on love?"
- Why is love the virtue that produces unity among the people of God?

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up. . ." (1 Thessalonians 4:11)

- Why not share some of what you perceive can be done in the community of believers to both encourage and build each other up in the Lord?

"Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Any-one who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you – who are you to judge your neighbor?" (James 4:11-12)

- Why is slandering one another in the church un-Christlike behavior?
- Is it possible to avoid judging one another in the church? If it is possible, how do we go about accomplishing it?

"Love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." (1 Peter 4:8-9)

- Why do you believe that the writer of the above passage says that "love covers over a multitude of sins?"
- What does offering hospitality mean to you?
- Why is hospitality vital to Christian community?

"In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble and oppressed.' Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift

you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he [God] cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:5-7)

- *What does humility mean to you? How is it different from becoming a ‘doormat’ to others?*
- *Why is it wise to submit to our elders? Do you believe that this referring to the elders is in the church or to the aged in general? Share your thoughts on this matter.*
- *How do we go about clothing ourselves with humility toward each other?*
- *What does God promise to those who are willing to humble themselves?*

“If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship [Koinonia] with one another and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7)

- *How do you define spiritual darkness and spiritual light?*
- *Why is walking in spiritual light necessary for fellowship with one another in Christian community?*
- *How does the blood of Jesus enter the picture here?*

Jesus said, “. . . be at peace with each other.” (Mark 9:50b)

- *Why is this principle vital to Christian community?*

“But God has put the body together, giving 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.” (1 Corinthians 12:24b-25)

- *Why is every part of the body of Christ important to every other part of the body?*
- *Why is division contrary to God’s will among believers?*

- *How can we have “equal concern” for one another in the family of God?*

“Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.” (Galatians 5:26)

- *What are you able to glean from the above passage that will aid in developing Christian community?*

“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2)

- *How does carrying each other’s burdens fulfill Christ’s Royal Law?*

“May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else.” (1 Thessalonians 3:12)

- *How is the above principle possible?*
- *Why is this principle necessary if we are to indeed promote Christian community?*
- *How can we love people out in the world who have little need or time for God?*

“Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.” (Hebrews 13:1)

- *Why does the New Testament refer to believers as brothers and sisters?*
- *When we are able to accept this principle how can it change our personal lives? Our churches?*

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” (James 5:16)

- *Realizing that such confession to others can be misunderstood and misused what are your feelings regarding this matter? How much do we confess to fellow believers? When and why?*

- *What form of healing do you see involved in this matter of confessing to one another our fault, shortcomings and sins?*
- *What precautions should be taken before applying this principle within the community of faith?*

The Love Principle

The primary concern in this booklet has been to deal with our responsibilities toward each other as we develop Christian community. Authentic Christian community can all be summed up with one passage from Scripture which exhorts: ***“Do everything in love.”*** (1 Cor. 16:14)

This Ministry

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HC 1, Box 1529

Strawberry, AZ 85544-9740

Email - strawberryviews@mypavson.com

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