

Doctrine of Human Behavior and Consequence

Lesson 10 – Behavior in the Body of Christ

1 Corinthians 12:27 – Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.

INTRODUCTION

Building on the apostolic teachings in Lesson 9, where Paul and others grounded commands for individual conduct in our secure position in Christ, we now turn to how that identity plays out in community. The Epistles do not envision isolated believers but a collective body, where behavior impacts the whole. Just as a hand cannot function apart from the arm, our actions within the church reflect and affect the unity Christ purchased. The focus here shifts from personal choices to corporate ones, exploring how Scripture addresses group dynamics, mutual responsibilities, and the consequences that arise when communities honor or ignore God's design for fellowship. This era, marked by the early church's growth amid persecution, shows behavior not as solo endeavors but as shared expressions of faith, hope, and love.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Unity in Diversity – Paul uses the body metaphor extensively to describe the church's corporate nature. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, he explains, "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ." The Greek term for *body*, σῶμα (sōma), emphasizes organic interconnectedness.

Each member functions within the body to help edify, whether teaching, shepherding, showing mercy, serving, evangelizing, and others, yet all serve the whole. Diversity is God's design, not a source of division.

It is important to notice that the diversity is not in nationality, ethnicity, or even gender (there is only one gender specific role), rather it is in functions and roles. And there is not one role that is elevated above the other. Behavior that elevates one function or role over another, as seen in Corinth's favoritism toward some is evil with evil motives. It is honorable to desire to take on greater responsibility, but there is majesty in the menial service; it all does not need to be in the spotlight.

In Ephesians 4:11-16, the purpose emerges: "And He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints **for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ**; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." Corporate behavior involves leaders equipping believers for service, fostering maturity. Every saint is to get equipped and then is to serve to help one another reach maturity.

The result? A body that grows in love, speaking truth to one another (Ephesians 4:15), knit together by what every joint supplies (Ephesians 4:16). Neglecting this leads to immaturity, being tossed by doctrinal winds (Ephesians 4:14).

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MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The "One Another" Commands – The Epistles abound with instructions for how believers interact, emphasizing volitional choices that build community. These instructions are designed to be motivated by grace, exemplified by Jesus Christ. Galatians 5:13 states, "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." The verb δουλεύω (douleuō) for *serve* implies humble bondage, echoing Christ's foot-washing.

Key commands include:

- Love one another (John 13:34; Romans 12:10), the hallmark of Christlikeness.
- Be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10), prioritizing others.
- Build up one another (Romans 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:11), pursuing peace.
- Bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), fulfilling Christ's law.
- Be in agreement with one another about sin and pray for one another (James 5:16), promoting relational healing.
- Be hospitable to one another without complaint (1 Peter 4:9), sharing resources.
- Be gracious to one another despite offenses (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13), as the Lord was gracious.

These behaviors counteract the flesh's pull toward selfishness, as seen in Philippians 2:3-4: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." Corporate sin, like divisions (1 Corinthians 1:10-13) or favoritism (James 2:1-9), weakens testimony and causes weakening of the body.

Leadership and Accountability in Community – Corporate behavior extends to how communities handle leadership and discipline. Elders are to shepherd willingly, not lording over the flock (1 Peter 5:2-3), modeling humility. The body honors them (1 Timothy 5:17) yet holds them accountable (1 Timothy 5:19-20). In cases of persistent sin, they are to be confronted and/or removed from service (1 Corinthians 5:1-5, 11-13). This protects the body's purity and witness for the Gospel (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

Consequences of Corporate Behavior – Scripture ties community conduct to outcomes. Unity brings joy and contentment among the body: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1). Division, however, hinders spiritual growth and members suffer in loss of love.

In Revelation 2-3, Christ evaluates churches corporately: Ephesus lost its first love (Revelation 2:4), facing lampstand removal; Sardis was dead despite reputation

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(Revelation 3:1) and called to wake up; Laodicea was lukewarm (Revelation 3:15-16), risking rejection. Yet reconsideration and reestablishment of doctrine and behavior restores fellowship with fellow believers.

TIMELESS PRINCIPLES

Several truths apply across eras. First, community reflects God, His truth, His character and attributes. Individual behavior serves the collective good. Isolation contradicts design; Hebrews 10:24-25 commands, "...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

Second, mutual edification requires humility and truth-speaking, countering pride.

Third, discipline preserves holiness, not as punishment but restoration.

Fourth, consequences teach: harmony advances the gospel; discord dims it.

The Epistles portray community as the arena where individual identity in Christ finds corporate expression. Through unity, service, and accountability, believers display God's character to the world. Failures bring instructive consequences, but grace motivates restoration.

Practical Applications

Many people get intimidated or are unsure when trying to find a place to serve. It does not need to be big; it does not need to be an actual role. What each person should do is fill the need. Do you see a need? Provide solutions.

This may be as simple as calling someone who is need, giving a card, participating with a luncheon, or doing some needed service. It does not need to be formal; if you would like it to be formal, then we have a process for that too.