

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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“One-anothering”: Interactive Body-life in Operation

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"but 'truthing' in love, we might grow all things into Him who is the Source, Christ, out from whom all the Body ...performs the growth of the Body toward the building-up of itself in love."

Ephesians 4:15,16

We have been talking about **the dynamics of the early New Testament church** (Acts 2:42-47). It was an interactive community, one where **the first Christians were devoted in two primary directions: (a.) Vertically** -- radically committing time, attention, and energy toward developing their understanding of their relationship with God, and their intimacy with Him; **and (b.) Horizontally** -- radically committing themselves to intimately share with one another in small gatherings of “table fellowship”, and to care for the needs that surfaced in their inter-communication, as God directed and enabled them. **This was not something that required great amounts of training to be able to do, rather it was what new believers “cut their teeth” on in the early church.** Love for God, and a humble love for one another smoothed out the bumps and wrinkles of their immaturity, and they grew in grace, knowledge and in their skill at serving one another.

You can be sure there were mistakes, people stepping on one another's toes at times, as is evidenced by the places in Paul's letters which address the need to correct and heal such relational rifts. **Nevertheless, in spite of the messiness of human interaction, the apostles consistently set believers to work at supporting and building one another up.** Once you begin to recognize that *this* was the core of what was happening in the early church meetings, **it is amazing to note how much of the practical sections of the apostolic letters pertain to the relationships between members.** This is because the church meetings *were* so intimate and interactive. **Learning the apostolic doctrine was not done primarily in a sterile classroom setting. It took place around a living room, with the application-oriented laboratory of real peoples' actual needs, hurts, questions and struggles as the backdrop for the teaching and discussion.**

The apostles knew that people who believed in Jesus were indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who could enable them to minister to one another. In his letter to Rome, written some 25 years after the events in Acts 2, Paul wrote to this church *he had never visited* and said, “I, myself, have been persuaded, my brothers and sisters, that also you yourselves are full of goodness, being able also to admonish (remind) one another” (Rom 15:14). This is one small example of the entire culture and methodology that was characteristic of the Christian community of those days. **Everyone was expected to have something to offer to one another. The Holy Spirit could speak through the novice as effectively as through the mature elder, if that person was yielded to and led by Him. The apostles understood this, and put the people in interactive groups where they would learn to be effective at discerning the leading of the Spirit, and responding to Him.** This was *not* just a temporary phenomenon, limited to the Jerusalem church of Acts 2-6. Passages like I Cor. 12, 14; Rom. 12; and Eph. 4 all describe the early church's ongoing expectation that *every believer had a significant role* in effective ministry one to another. **Interactive meetings were the norm, and interpersonal ministry was encouraged.** While leaders were respected and esteemed for their role in Body-life, they did not dominate or monopolize “ministry”. In fact, as we saw in Eph. 4:11, the leadership gifts described there were given to equip the *others* to do the work of ministry, i.e., the interactive ministry of Body-life, where *each member* does its work in service to one another.

One of the Greek words that clearly illustrates the expectation that all believers were to be “ministers” building up the lives of fellow believers is *allēlōn* (pronounced “all-lay-lone”), usually translated as “one another”. *Allēlōn* is what grammarians call a reciprocal pronoun. That means that **the action goes both directions.** It is expressed by one person to another, and also reciprocated back to the original person. God's grace, and the life-flow of His Spirit in the Body of Christ, definitely does *not* go from the “top” down, as some church systems may advocate. The movement of grace and power is *back and forth* among members of the group, with *all* members giving and receiving at different times. **The frequency that the word itself occurs in the text, and the multitude of different Body-building actions which are identified with it, shows once again the incredibly interactive nature of the NT church culture.** I have made a list of over 21 examples of “one-another” actions which we are exhorted to do. In reality, **there are at least 24 different “one-another” actions described in the NT, and over 45 Scripture references cited,** which are by no means an exhaustive list. *These* are the things we ought to begin to do toward each other, when we come together, and we ought to also expect our brothers and sisters to do the same for us.

Twenty-one Positive Ways of “One-anothering”

1. Love (*agapē*) one another -- Jn. 13:34,35; 15:12, 17; Rom. 13:8; I Thess. 3:12; 4:9; II Thess. 1:3; I Pet. 1:22; I Jn. 3:11,23; 4:7,11,12; II Jn. 5.
2. Be(ing) devoted to one another in brotherly love -- Rom. 12:10.
3. Give (giving) preference to one another in honor -- Rom. 12:10.
4. Be(ing) of the same mind toward one another -- Rom. 12:16; cf. 15:5,6.
5. Accept one another, just as Christ also accepted you to the glory of God -- Rom. 15:7.
6. Being able also to admonish (lit. – “place in the mind of”) one another -- Rom. 15:14.
7. Greet one another with a holy kiss -- Rom. 16:16; I Cor. 16:20; II Cor. 13:12; I Pet. 5:14.
8. Have the same care/concern on behalf of one another - I Cor. 12:25.
9. Through love, serve one another -- Gal. 5:13; cf. Jn. 13:14.
10. Bear one another's burdens -- Gal. 6:2.
11. With all humility and meekness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love -- Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13.
12. Be unto one another kind, tender-hearted, forgiving yourselves, according as God in Christ has forgiven you -- Eph. 4:32; cf. Col. 3:13.
13. Being subject to one another -- Eph. 5:21.
14. With humility of mind consider one another as more important than yourselves -- Phil. 2:3.
15. Encourage and build up one another -- I Thess. 5:11; cf. I Thess. 4:18; Heb. 3:13 (lit. - yourselves).
16. Always pursue the good toward one another -- I Thess. 5:15.
17. We might think about one another for the purpose of growth and ministry -- Heb. 10:24,25 (lit. – “we might consider/think/notice/observe/be aware of one another unto a sharpening/agitation/stimulation/encouragement of love and of good deeds.”).
18. Confess your faults (“mark-missings”) to/with one another -- James 5:16.
19. Pray on behalf of one another -- James 5:16.
20. Be hospitable toward one another without grumbling -- I Pet. 4:9.
21. Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another -- I Pet. 5:5.

Seven “One-anotherings” to Avoid

1. Judging one another -- Rom. 14:13.
2. Biting and devouring one another -- Gal. 5:15.
3. Challenging (provoking) one another -- Gal. 5:26.
4. Envyng one another -- Gal. 5:26.
5. Lying to one another -- Col. 3:9.
6. Speaking against (lit. “talking down”) one another -- James 4:11.
7. Complaining against one another -- James 5:9.

As you can see, the use of *allēlōn* is quite extensive. The spectrum of interactive verbs advocated by this word is broad, and far-reaching as well. **Most of the verbs have to do with our attitude toward each other.** The implication is that our attitude will be expressed in our treatment of each other. **However, there are other specific verbs which unquestionably describe outward actions toward each other,** such as greeting one another, encouraging one another, admonishing one another, building up one another, serving one another, and being hospitable to one another. We are to ponder how to stir one another up to love and good deeds. And, we are to humble ourselves, and “get real” enough to confess our faults with each other. When you consider these, you can begin to appreciate how responsible we are for the health and growth of one another’s walk of faith. **God intended that we be actively involved in one another’s lives, and that we experience Him in our Spirit-led interchanges with one another.** God intended to partner *with us* to build up the Body. **Our input, or lack of it, can have huge impact in the lives of one another, for good or ill.** *Our culture has not prepared us to be involved in the lives of other people at this level. There is little in the lives of most Americans that prepares us for such a role.* The same was true for the first century Jews who were called into the interactive community of believers in Jerusalem. **In order to be effective in Body-life, we as a group must work hard at pushing beyond our comfort levels to have the maximal positive impact that God desires us to have in one another’s lives.** They had to cross barriers of comfort, tradition, worldly wisdom and social propriety in order to be effective as a community. We must push ourselves to do the same.