

DISCIPLESHIP PRINCIPLE #11

Rom. 12:3-18, 1 Thess. 4:9-10, Eph. 4:11-16, 1 Cor. 12:11-27

THINKING AND WALKING AS A MEMBER OF MY CHURCH

We have been studying the principles of living our new life in Christ. They all require some changes and adjustments to living life for God rather than for myself. The principle that we now consider requires perhaps the MOST RADICAL changes that God requires for His disciples. Perhaps the greatest weakness of the evangelical churches in America today is the lack of maturity in this area and its increasing failure to hear and heed the instructions that we shall now consider.

What is it? What is this tremendous change in life that must come when we decide to deny ourselves, be a disciple of Christ, and live as He asks? It is to be a MEMBER in the church He is building, serving where He places us, not primarily for our benefit, but for giving our life for the other members there.

³For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think... ⁴For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵**so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.**
— Rom. 12:3-5

¹²For even as our human 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. ¹³For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴**For the body is not one member, but many.**

¹⁵If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.... ¹⁸But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, **just as He desired.**

¹⁹And if they were all one member, where would the body be? ²⁰But now there are many members, but one body. ²¹And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you"...

²⁴But God has so composed the body,... ²⁵that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another...

²⁷**Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.**

— 1 Cor. 12:12-27

¹⁵ *Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ,* ¹⁶ *from whom **the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*** — Eph. 4:15-16

WHY CHRISTIANS WITHOUT A CHURCH FAMILY HAVE LESS FRUIT

1. They Are Trying To Operate Outside Of God's Design (1 Cor. 12:14, 21-22, 27)

The compromises with our humanistic culture both among church members and leaders is indeed a challenge, and it has led many to be estranged from their church or to give up trying to do their part as a member. However, if this continues for some time there are often severe consequences that begin to be evident in their lives and their family.

2. They Do Not Have All They Need To Be "Successful" (1 Cor. 12:26-27)

No individual person or family has all the gifts, strengths, or resources to accomplish what God has planned for them. God does not supply what is needed the way we want Him to. He supplies what is needed for His purposes according to His design for the church He is building.

3. They Are Exposed To Strong Deceptions (Eph. 4:11, Heb. 13:17, 1 Sam. 15:23)

Church leaders provide God-given protection when they are properly honored as part of God's design, just as fathers and mothers do for children. When this protection is missing or rejected it exposes families to Satan's deception and power.

4. They Find Themselves Resisted By God (1 Pet. 5:5)

An independent spirit is often found in strong individuals and families. It is not easy to stand alone in our day. Many believers have to serve the Lord even against strong opposition from friends and family. However, we must be careful that this does not lead to independent and prideful attitudes toward the church and church leaders, effecting our calling as a member.

When we are led to serve Christ in a local church where leaders and/or other members are not strong in their biblical convictions (*see 1 Cor. 12:18*) we need to cry out for the grace and power God has promised us to stand, not only for truth, but also with the attitudes He wants.

²⁴ And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, ²⁵ with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

— 2 Tim 2:24-26

THINKING OF YOURSELF AS A MEMBER OF A CHURCH

There are a number of common misconceptions about being a member that rob us of our usefulness and fruitfulness as a disciple:

- “I get to choose my church and my shepherds”

This is not true. (see 1 Cor. 12:18 and Eph. 4:11) God has a plan and we are to be yielded to it. Our thinking about church should not be “this is where I go to get what I need”, but “this is where God has told me to go to serve others”.

- “I really don’t need a radical change in lifestyle, to give my life to the other members, to live for them, with them, and by them. I really don’t need them, to be where God wants me, and to do what He wants me to.” But...

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ²² On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.— 1Cor. 12:21-22

- “My family is a higher priority and ranks ahead of my membership.”

The family has no such exalted priority in the New Testament instructions on living for Christ. This is a surprise to many, but a careful comparative study of both membership and family leaves no doubt for New Testament disciples of Christ.

(Note: We can get out of balance here and over-neglect family for church, but the vast majority of believers are not out of balance in this way, but the other.)

WALKING AS A MEMBER OF A CHURCH

1. Loving One Another

Self-denying love is the consummate characteristic of a mature disciple. If we are to love the other members of our church, it means we are to give our life to them. We are to live for them, not for ourselves!

Notice from the following list of the “**one anothers**” how important this is to our Lord. Our attitudes and responses to our brothers and sisters in Christ are addressed

105 times in the New Testament. The members of our church are nearly always the object. Here are a few.

- Give preference to one another in honor. Rom. 12:10
- Be devoted to one another. Rom. 12:10
- Care for one another. 1 Cor. 12:25
- Teach and admonish one another. Col. 3:16
- Confess your sins to one another James 5:15
- Love one another. John 13:34
- Carry one another's burdens. Gal. 6:2
- Encourage one another. 1 Thess. 5:11
- Pray for one another. James 5:15
- 97 more

2. Using Your Gift To Serve The Body

⁴For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

⁶And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if **prophecy**, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷if **service**, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his **teaching**; ⁸or he who exhorts, in his **exhortation**; he who **gives**, with liberality; he who **leads**, with diligence; he who shows **mercy**, with cheerfulness. — Rom. 12:4-8

We are told to “employ our God given gifts to serve one another”. (1 Pet. 4:10) You must know these spiritual abilities and motivations that God has given you if you are to actively employ them for your church. See Study #16 for a study of these gifts.

3. Responding With Right Attitudes To Church Authority

This important element of being a disciple of Christ is addressed in Study Unit #4. So many believers miss opportunities because they openly reject the clear instructions regarding our attitudes and responses to the pastors and elders that He has appointed for us, and suffer the consequences that are noted in this Study Unit. Beyond this, the rest of the church suffers because of their absence, inefficiency, and all too often, their prideful, selfish opposition.

¹⁷Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. — Heb 13:17

UNIT 11 STUDY SESSION #1

In preparation for the group session, read the study material and complete the following self evaluation.

Evaluating My Thinking And Walking As A Member Of A Church

1. I rate my commitment and investment in a local church to be:
Very good _____. Good _____. Ok _____. Poor _____. Not at all _____.
2. I know I am using my gifts in serving the members of my church:
Yes I am _____. Some _____. Not at all _____.

I do not know for sure what my gifts are _____.
3. The leaders of my church would say this, if asked if I was doing well as a member:

4. The following take priority over my involvement with the people, activities, and ministries of my church:
Family _____ Work _____ Hobbies _____

Entertainment _____ Projects _____
5. As far as helping me grow in Christ and ministering to me and my needs, my church family is:
Very good. _____ Good. _____. Ok. _____. Poor. _____ Very poor. _____

Discussion Questions for Unit 11 Study Session #1

1. How has your thinking been as a Christian regarding being a member?
2. Do individuals and families, even ones with strong commitments to the Lord, really have less fruit if they are not active members in a church?
3. What do we say to this increasingly common statement? "I can't find a church that I like and is really a good church."
4. How can we serve and use our gifts in church?

Prayer Together

UNIT 11 STUDY SESSION #2

In preparation for the second group session, choose one of the following projects and be prepared to share about it.

Preparation For Session #2: Application Project

1. Write notes or letters of thanks to all your church leaders for their work.
2. Contact 5 members, couples, or families with needs, to encourage and bless them.
3. Start a month-long prayer project to invest time interceding for your church.
Keep a journal.

Discussion Questions for Unit 11 Study Session #2

1. If you were able to pursue one of the projects can you share with us how it went?
2. Mt. 18:15-17 tells us about dealing with “sin” in the church. Am I as an individual member to apply this? How often? How important is this? Isn't it risky?
3. When and how should I leave a church?
4. Why is it important to remember Mt. 16:18?

Prayer Together