

STUDY UNIT 6

John 13:34 / 1 John 2:7-8, 3:2-3 / 1 Pet. 4:10

LOVING MY CHURCH FAMILY

Do you love the members of your church? Are you living your life for them rather than for yourself? Unless you are, you are not obeying your Lord and are not pleasing Him.

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you **love one another**, even as I have loved you, that you also **love one another**. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have **love for one another**.”*
John 13:34-35

- **The PRIORITY of this command to love your church family in self-denial**

Many seemingly mature Christians are self-oriented when it comes to church activities. They come, in some degree, to get. They are living, to some degree, for themselves, and not for their church family. Or, they may be standing against the humanism of our day and immaturity or compromises in the church, but not as much for the other members. They may love the Lord and His Word, but have little for the other members.

To dwell above with saints we love,
Oh that will be glory.
But to live below with saints we know,
Well, that’s another story

So, Church “hoppers” are not really rare. They come and stay, and often participate and help, but when they aren’t getting what they want and feel they need, they leave for better pastures. Their “I’ll scratch your back if you scratch mine” ways were addressed by our Lord.

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.”
Luke 6:32-33

Let us take note that the FIRST SUBJECT addressed in Romans 12-16, the application section of the epistle, involves **our membership in the church** God is building and our thinking about it. It is the first thing God addresses to us regarding what He wants us to do for Him.

*“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship... For 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**; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.*

*For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so **we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.**”* Rom. 12:1-5

In other words, think of yourself as a dependent and needed member of the church that God is building. This FIRST PRIORITY is an exhortation to think of ourselves AS A MEMBER, and not just as being an individual Christian serving Christ. Without this understanding and commitment to it, without being a solid member, we miss our greatest usefulness and our own necessary help in serving Christ that comes from the other members in the church.

*“But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. **And 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."**”* 1 Cor. 12:18-21

- **The PRINCIPLES of being a self-denying, others oriented, member**

The following principles are all found in the New Testament instructions for us regarding being a useful and mature member. Only one passage is quoted, but there are other commands and illustrations that can be found for each.

1. Accepting the church God desires you to be in with a “whole heart”.

“But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.” 1 Cor 12:18

2. Having right attitudes and responses to the church leadership.

“Obey 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

3. Employing your God given gift to serve the other members and church leaders.

“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” 1 Pet 4:10

4. Not forsaking your assembling together to fellowship and worship.

“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.” Heb 10:24-25

5. Growing in the faith to make you useful as a member.

“Applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
2 Pet. 1:5-8

6. Assuming responsibility for those “others” that God has chosen for you.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
Matt. 28:19-20

- **The BATTLES we face together, as members, “in the midst”**

1. **There is a unity to be preserved, a working together that is necessary for building Christ’s church.**

*“Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to **walk in a manner worthy** of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, **being diligent to preserve the unity** of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*
Eph 4:1-3

How can there be unity with such different viewpoints, personalities, gifts, maturity, backgrounds, experiences, opinions, life struggles, languages, and status? We are incapable of producing this unity that is essential to the life of the church. But notice the “of the Spirit” in the above verse. Only the Spirit of God can do this. But we are given the responsibility, by His enabling grace, to preserve and maintain it by our self-denying love of the brethren.

*“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 4:16

*“Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to **excel still more.**”*
1 Thess 4:9-10

2. There is a gospel to be contended for, together.

*“Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you (plural) that you are standing firm in one spirit, **with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel**; in no way alarmed by your opponents.”*
Phil 1:27-28

3. There are many “one anothers” to be attained, by the Spirit’s work in us and through us.

Actually, there are 248 occurrences of “one another” in Scripture. Here are only a few:

*“Be kind to **one another**, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”*
Eph 4:32

*“Be devoted to **one another**.”*
Rom 12:10

*“Accept **one another**, just as Christ also accepted us.”*
Rom 15:7

*“So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of **one another**.”*
Rom 14:19

And 244 more.

4. There are challenges that require that we “take up our cross” and follow our Lord’s calling to love some that are almost always in our church. Enabling grace is required—and given, to respond in love to these challenging people.

1. To love weak, immature members by His grace.

“Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.... But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.... Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.... So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.”

Rom. 14:1-19

2. To love poor church leaders by His grace.

“But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.”
1 Thess 5:12-13

The CONSEQUENCES of not being a mature self-denying member

1. We become “an eye without hands”.

“But now there are many members, but one body. And 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.” On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; *1 Cor 12:20-22*

2. We lack adequate protection from our Adversary.

“Obey 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*

3. The church we should be helping is weakened by our inaction or absence.

*“Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, 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*

4. We are rather useless and unfruitful, blind and shortsighted.

*“Add to your faith...brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, **love**. For **if** these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted.”* *2 Pet 1:7-9*

*“You are the light of the world...Let your light shine before men **in such a way** (especially as a mature, self-denying member) that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”* *Matt 5:14-16*

UNIT 6 STUDY SESSION #1:

In preparation for the group meeting read and study the preceding material and then complete the following self - evaluation.

Evaluating My Selfless Love For My Church Family

1. Living My Life for the Members of My Church Is My Highest Priority in Serving God

_____ Yes
_____ No
_____ My Family Comes First

2. I focus a lot on maintaining the unity amongst us at church. I work hard at it.

_____ Certainly. I lead in this matter.
_____ I am not a problem, but trying to fix damaged relationships is not what I do.
_____ I am a cause of disunity in some manner.

3. In looking at the section on the principles of being a self-denying, others oriented member, I would say regarding my maturity in the principles identified is:

_____ Good
_____ Could be better
_____ Could be much better
_____ Poor

4. Considering the 4 CONSEQUENCES identified when we are not mature as a self-denying member, I would rate myself or my church in this area as:

	#1.	#2.	#3.	#4.
Not a problem:	_____	_____	_____	_____
A minor problem:	_____	_____	_____	_____
A growing issue:	_____	_____	_____	_____
A major problem:	_____	_____	_____	_____

5. When I face something that is wrong, very hurtful, and even shocking that God would allow it to happen, I remember Romans 8:28 and thank Him that He will use it for my good:

_____ Always
_____ Eventually
_____ Weakly
_____ I don't, I am bitter

Discussion Questions For Study Session #1

1. How do Ephesians 2:10 and John 15:16 help me answer the question of how I know WHO to invest my life in at my church. What else helps?
2. How much of my time and life does God expect me to give to my church family? I work and have family responsibilities. What is expected? How can I know?
3. There seems to be a lot of “ups and downs” to church fellowship and unity, with the “downs” being significant both in occurrences and extent. Is this normal for “good” churches? How does this square with “I will build My church and the gates of hell will not prevail over it.”
4. Acts 2:42 says that the early church did 4 things. They continued 1) in the apostles doctrine, 2) in fellowship, 3) communion (breaking of bread), and 4) prayer. Fellowship is the greek word koinonia and it means “sharers in common experiences together.” They shared life with one another, far beyond just going to a church service at the same time. Do we, as a church, really do this? Do I?
5. New folks to town, or new Christians who have a lot to learn, and people with a lot of needs relationally, emotionally, and maturity wise – if they come to church, they will be more of a drain of time and energy than we will get back as a church. Some of them will cause energy and time-consuming problems because of their immaturity and lack of love for others. Why would we want these people?

Prayer Together

UNIT 6 STUDY SESSION #2:

In preparation for Session #2 consider pursuing one of the following projects and be prepared to share about it.

Preparation For Session #2: Application Project

1. Apply the four “alls” in Ephesians 6:18 to the “saints” at your church this week. Be sure to get enough sleep.
2. Initiate getting together this week for “fellowship” with at least one other church member (or couple, or family) who is not part of this study group.
3. Read Ray Stedman’s book, *Body Life*.
4. Calculate and compare the hours you invest in the people at your church with the hours you watch media or television every day. Then, increase your hours loving the brethren to exceed the other this week.
5. Perhaps you are worn out trying to live life without much help from the body. Nobody is really giving much to you. Apply the principle below, asking God to demonstrate Himself strong to you, and see what happens.

"Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."
Luke 6:38

Discussion Questions

If you were able to pursue one of the projects can you share with us how it went?

Prayer Together