Caring for One Another
Rev. Ernie Baker

Within my circle of knowledge and responsibility I am aware of two Christian marriages that are in need of emergency room treatment. There is also a family that is dealing with the revelation that the father sexually abused his step-daughter during his pre-salvation days, and two families dealing with the death or impending death of a loved one.

If you compound this by what you know is happening in the lives of Christians in the Christian community all across the country, you will understand the necessity for this article. It is our Lord's plan that believers care for one another in the context of the local church.

The phrase in Scripture that dynamically portrays what life in the church is to look like is "one another." The Greek word for "one another" is used 100 times. Not all of these refer to life in a local church. For example, it is also used of conversations between people standing in the marketplace. This usage gives us insight into how personal the "one anothers" are. There are 27 "one anothers" that a church is to be practicing and 8 that indicate relationships that should not characterize life in the church.

We get a sense of what God thinks is important when we understand this phrase. This is helpful in evaluating our priorities so that we are living by His and not our own. For example, "loving one another" is repeated 19 times. All the other "one anothers" flow out of this one.

So we must ask ourselves, "Can a church really function as "The Church" if this command is not being practiced? It is obvious from Scripture that a church is not just a center for a weekend Bible conference where truth is dispensed and programs function. An internal dynamic is also to be taking place. The public proclamation of the Word makes a church strong externally and the ministering of this Word to one another makes a church strong internally.

The book of Romans vividly describes these in-depth relationships. Paul longed to see these believers so that they would be encouraged by one another's faith (1:12). In chapter 12 we are told to "give preference to one another in honor" (verse 10) and to "be of the same mind toward one another"(verse 16). In 14:19 we are told to "pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." "Accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God" is the admonition of 15:7. A few verses later Paul writes that he is convinced that they were "able to admonish one another" (verse 14). All of us have experienced the blessing of these "one anothers" being practiced in a church.

Unfortunately, most of us know how nasty life can get in a church when "one anothers" are being practiced that shouldn't characterize Christ's Church. In Galatians 5:15 Paul writes, "But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another."

At the end of the chapter he writes, "Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another"(verse 26).

We could take a long time to explore why the Lord emphasizes these so much but let me just briefly mention two. When we practice the "one anothers" we are functioning as the family God intended and the body God intended. We are called "brothers" in Christ for a reason.

We truly are blood relatives because of the blood of our precious Savior! There is to be unity and oneness based upon our common heritage in Christ. Much of the New Testament reflects this closeness of relationship through the "one anothers." So I will ask again, can a church really be The Church if it is not practicing the "one anothers"?
The Lord also emphasizes caring for one another because we are one body in Christ. I Corinthians 12:25 states this clearly. "That there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another." [emphasis mine].

Just recently I was doing some construction work around my home and injured my back--my whole body sympathized! It was reflecting what was happening to one part. Galatians 6:2 states that we are to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. The law of Christ is to love one another! The principle is this, "your pain in my heart." Is your church body doing this? Bearing one another's burdens as part of the same body involves more than just ministering in crisis. Some churches are excellent in crisis but the day-to-day caring for one another is missing.

In the context of Galatians 6 it's the loving, humble counsel of a brother who is overtaken in a fault because you want to see him restored. The word "restore" is used of the disciples mending their nets. This implies time and effort. This is not just "the hired holy man's" job or the elder's responsibility. It's too much for them to carry alone! Every believer should be involved in this type of personal ministry. Could it be that our churches are weak spiritually because the whole body is not practicing this "one another"? Many will think that they are "too busy" to get involved in others' lives in this way.

The appropriate question is, "Aren't we too busy if we cannot take the time to personally minister to others?" It would be helpful for our churches and our own spiritual lives to really explore what is behind the phrase "too busy" if it is keeping us from fulfilling a command of Scripture. What does the word "busy" represent in your life?

Hebrews emphasizes the whole body being involved in the "one anothers." It says, "Encourage one another day after day [not just in crisis], as long as it is still called today, lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13). Could it be that this "one another" is not being practiced daily because we have a superficial view of sin and it's deceitfulness. The majority of grievous circumstances that our people face are because of sin's deceitfulness?

Part of the remedy to our deficiency with the "one anothers" is to emphasize that God graciously gives us to each other to help one another in our common fight against sin. We are to help each other grow.

There are some strong advantages to practicing these "one anothers." Our worship will be better because we will enjoy being together as a church family worshiping our common Lord. Our impact on the world will be enhanced--"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). There will also be a strengthening of our membership as we truly minister to one another.

Our churches will be stronger spiritually because we will be dealing with the net mending that is necessary instead of ignoring the holes. Lastly, the church discipline process will make more sense to our church families and be more meaningful to those being disciplined.

Often individuals will leave a church and go to a church down the street rather than deal with their problems. If the "one anothers" are practiced then individuals will be more inclined to deal with the problem because their relationships in the church are significant.

I would like to close by giving you a few ideas on how to implement the "one another" concept in your church. This year the theme for our church is, "Caring for One Another." To see where we were I took a list of all the "one anothers" and wrote an evaluation based on each one. I also wrote ideas for what we could do to improve. This was an enlightening and challenging evaluation for me. Then, to implement this theme I handed out a list with a majority of the "one another" verses printed out on it and encouraged our church family to read through it and evaluate where we are and where they are in relation to living out these verses. We also are having a monthly "one another" night on a Sunday
evening that we set aside for fellowship, study of the "one anothers" and prayer for one another. I am also giving our church family practical suggestions each month on how to minister to one another and challenging them to do so. For the month of February we emphasized picking out someone in the Body to do something loving for in fulfillment of the most mentioned one another. One month I will encourage each to show hospitality to others in the church family in fulfillment of I Peter 4:9. Another month I will emphasize everyone praying for each in the church directory in fulfillment of "praying for one another" (James 5:16). I am also involved in encouraging biblical counseling training so that the inevitable counseling/advise giving that takes place among members is truly Scriptural. We will then be more equipped to fulfill the principle of mending lives and helping others stay focused for the Lord daily.

Think of the dynamic impact IFCA International churches could have if we became known as this type of local churches. Churches that are not only strong because we emphasize the absolute truth of God's Word but also dynamically practice this truth and care for "one another."

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