

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

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OF THE
BODY LIFE

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Living Stream Ministry

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In this message we shall consider the practice of the Body life as it is presented in the closing chapters of Romans.

SONSHIP FOR THE BODY

We have seen that we are to serve God in the gospel of His Son (1:9). This gospel is a gospel of sonship. Sonship includes designation, resurrection, justification, sanctification, transformation, conformation, glorification, and manifestation. We are presently undergoing the process of designation; that is, we are being designated sons of God by the power of resurrection. Sonship is for the Body. In order to be members of the Body of Christ, we must be sons of God.

In a very real sense, [chapter twelve](#) is the direct continuation of [chapter eight](#), with [chapters nine through eleven](#) as a parenthetical insertion regarding the selection of grace. [Chapter eight](#) reveals that we are being conformed to the image of the Son of God ([v. 29](#)). This conformation qualifies us for the practice of the Body life.

The Body life is not simply a matter of believers coming together. Many groups have been formed for the purpose of having the Body life. The result, however, has been failure. These groups of believers did not realize that the Body life depends on sonship, which comes out of designation. If we are to have the proper practice of the Body life, we must be transformed according to the power of resurrection.

THE BODY PRESENTED, THE SOUL TRANSFORMED, AND THE SPIRIT BURNING

In [chapter twelve](#) Paul mentions the body, the soul, and the spirit. In [verse 1](#) he says, “I beg you therefore, brothers, through the compassions of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, well-pleasing to God, which is your most reasonable service.” Our physical bodies must be presented to the Lord for His purpose of having the Body. Someone may have a heart for the Body life, but if he does not present his body, he is not for the Body life in a practical way. You may care for the meetings, but what does this accomplish if your body remains at home? If we fail to present our bodies to the Lord for the church life, we cannot have a practical meeting life. If you say

that you have a heart for the church meetings, you need to ask yourself if you have presented your body to the Lord for the meetings. Where is your body at meeting time? The body is the container of our being, for the spirit is within the soul and the soul is within the body. We must present this container to the Lord for the sake of His Body.

Verse 2 speaks of the mind, which is the main part of the soul: “And do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind.” When our mind is renewed, our soul will be transformed. Hence, our body needs to be presented, and our soul needs to be transformed.

In this verse Paul beseeches us not to be conformed to this age. The world, Satan’s system, is a cosmos composed of many ages. The nineteenth century was one age, and the twentieth century is another age. Actually, there have been several distinct ages within the twentieth century itself. The present age is a section of Satan’s world system. This age includes not only the secular world, but also the religious world. If we are conformed to today’s religion, we shall be useless as far as the practice of the Body life is concerned.

For Paul in his day to be conformed to the present age was primarily a matter of being conformed

to Judaism. Judaism was a serious hindrance to the practice of the Body life in the first century. Just as Judaism was part of the age in Paul's time, so Christianity as an organized religion is part of today's age. If you are conformed to organized Christianity, you will be conformed to this age. Instead of being conformed to this age, we need to be transformed by the renewing of our mind.

In [12:11](#) Paul speaks of the spirit; he tells us to be "burning in spirit." Our spirit must be fervent, that is, it must be burned and burning. If we have a body presented, a soul in the process of being transformed, and a spirit burning, we shall be able to practice the Body life in a proper way.

TALK AND PRACTICE

Many talk about the Body life in [Romans 12](#) without the actual practice of the Body life. For example, some have seen that in the Body of Christ we are "members one of another" ([12:5](#)). However, they cannot name any members to whom they are specifically related. Thus, their word about being members one of another is mere talk. We are not here for talk about the Body life; we are for the practice of the Body life.

The teaching in Romans concerning the Body life is in [chapter twelve](#), but the practice is

in chapters fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen. These chapters deal with practical problems that occur in the church life. As we consider Paul's approach to these problems, we can learn something related to the daily practice of the Body life.

RECEIVING THE BELIEVERS

Chapter twelve is important concerning the doctrine of the Body life, whereas chapter fourteen is important concerning the practice of the Body life. In chapter fourteen Paul addresses the problem of receiving believers whose opinions and practices differ from ours. In 14:1 Paul says, "Now him who is weak in faith receive, not with a view to passing judgment on reasonings." Then Paul proceeds to give two examples of matters about which believers may have different views. The first example concerns eating: "One believes that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables" (v. 2). The second concerns observing days: "One judges one day above another, another judges every day alike" (v. 5). These two matters are illustrations of the many things which have divided Christians. Take the example of baptism. Some insist on immersion, whereas others insist on sprinkling. If we have the proper practice of the Body life, we shall receive all true

believers in Christ, whether they practice immersion or sprinkling.

Some say that we in the Lord's recovery are narrow. However, we are willing to receive all kinds of Christians. We receive those who practice immersion and those who practice sprinkling. Who then are the narrow ones—those in the Lord's recovery or those who accept into their fellowship only those who meet special requirements related to doctrine or practice?

The divisions among Christians come from differences over doctrine or practice. For example, believers have been divided over such things as head covering, foot-washing, and the observance of the Lord's day or the Sabbath day. This fact should turn us afresh to [Romans 14](#), where Paul instructs us to receive those who have the faith in Christ and not to judge them concerning secondary matters. If someone comes to us with a different opinion regarding a particular matter, we must still receive him as a brother in the Lord. As Paul says in [15:7](#), "Wherefore receive one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God."

The importance of receiving the believers is illustrated by an experience we had during the early days of the church in Los Angeles. Three

other Christian groups desired to come together with us for the church life. One group had a background of Pentecostalism, and another group had a background of fundamental Bible teaching. When I learned of their desire and excitement over the prospect of meeting together, I reminded them that throughout the centuries Christians have been divided by their opinions about doctrines and practices. Furthermore, I told them that if they would come together for the church life according to [Romans 14](#), they would have to drop their opinions and receive all genuine believers in Christ, no matter how different they were in either doctrine or practice. They agreed to set aside their differences and meet together in oneness for the church life. In the meeting place we hung some banners. One read, "Variety versus Uniformity"; another, "Unity in Variety"; and another, "All One in Christ." After a very short period of time, however, those from a Pentecostal background began to insist on the practices of speaking in tongues and of playing tambourines in the meetings. Those from a Bible-teaching background could not tolerate this and refused to go along with it. I asked those who opposed speaking in tongues and playing tambourines to bear with those who favored these things.

However, they declined to do so. Then I asked those who advocated these practices to care for the feeling of the others. They also refused, insisting that there was nothing wrong with what they were doing. Eventually, due to the inability on both sides to accept believers with different doctrines and practices, these groups were not able to meet together in oneness for the practice of the church life.

A GENERAL ATTITUDE

The Lord can testify on our behalf that in our practice of the church life we have been general, receiving all different kinds of believers. For instance, we do not stop the saints from speaking in tongues, but neither do we insist on tongues-speaking. Nevertheless, we have been accused of narrowness. Actually it is those in the denominations who are narrow, for they do not receive all different kinds of Christians. Throughout the years we have been in Los Angeles, we have never rejected any genuine believer in Christ. Furthermore, we have not adjusted others. On the contrary, we have been learning simply to minister life to all who come.

In [Romans 14](#) Paul's attitude was very general. Doctrinally speaking, Paul knew that the

believers were free to eat meat as well as vegetables. But he did not approach the question of eating in a doctrinal way. Instead, he expressed a general attitude toward all believers; he despised neither those who ate only vegetables nor those who ate everything. His attitude was the same with respect to observing days.

In order to have the proper practice of the Body life, we must have such a general attitude. We should neither impose a particular practice on others nor should we oppose a certain practice. Take the example of praising the Lord by shouting. Some may oppose this and condemn it as being disorderly, whereas those who favor it may seek to impose it on others. Both attitudes are wrong. If we prefer silence in the meetings, we should not impose our view on others. Likewise, if we prefer shouting, we should not impose this on anyone. The same is true regarding pray-reading. If some want to practice pray-reading, they should be free to do so. But if others do not care for this practice, it should not be forced upon them.

In the church life we must be general, able to receive all genuine believers. However, it is not easy to learn this lesson, because we all want others to be the same as we are. Let us not make

demands of others or require that they change their way for our sake. Rather, let us have unity in variety and variety without conformity. Even though there may be such variety, we still are one in Christ.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHURCHES

There may be differences not only among believers in a local church but also between local churches themselves. For example, the church in one locality may practice pray-reading, but the church in another locality may not practice it. If you visit a church that differs in practice from the church in your locality, do not try to correct it or to change anything. Wherever you are, you should simply be one with the church in that place. As long as it is a local church, you need to go along with it without imposing or opposing. I admit that it is easy to talk about this but that it is difficult to practice it. Nevertheless, we all must be willing to learn this lesson. Then we shall have not only the doctrine of the Body in [Romans 12](#), but also the practice of the body life in [Romans 14](#).

A MATTER OF THE SPIRIT

[Romans 14:17](#) says, “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and

peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” According to this verse, the kingdom of God is a matter of the Spirit. As long as we have righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, we should not be concerned about differences in doctrine or practice.

THE LOCALITY OF THE CHURCH

[Romans 16:1](#) says, “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deaconess of the church which is at Cenchrea.” This verse discloses a second aspect of the practicality of the Body life: the matter of the local church. If we would have the Body life in a practical way, we must not only receive the believers, but also pay attention to the church in the locality. According to [Romans 16](#), the practicality of the Body life consists in the locality of the church. This chapter speaks not only of the local church, the church at Cenchrea, but also of the churches. In [verse 4](#) Paul makes mention of the churches of the nations and in [verse 16](#), of the churches of Christ.

SHOWING HOSPITALITY TO THE CHURCH

In [verse 23](#) Paul says, “Gaius, my host, and of the whole church, greets you.” Here Paul names a brother who provided hospitality to the whole

church. Obviously, Paul is speaking of the local church, not of the universal church. It is important that Paul points out that Gaius was the host of the whole church, not of all the saints. There is a difference between showing hospitality to the church and showing hospitality to the saints, for we may care for the saints without caring for the church. But Paul's concept in this book is related not mainly to the saints, but to the church. In our giving of hospitality, the church must be in our consciousness and concept. As you extend hospitality to others, what concept do you have? Do you hold the concept that you are providing hospitality to the saints or to the church? If you have the proper concept, you will realize that your hospitality is not simply to certain saints, but to the whole church.

THE CHURCH IN THE HOUSE

In [verse 5](#) Paul sends greetings to the church in the house of Prisca and Aquila. Using this verse as a basis, some say that the church in a house is different from the church in a city. However, if you consider this matter carefully in context, you will see that the church in the house of Prisca and Aquila was actually the church in

the city of Rome. The church in Rome held its meetings in Prisca and Aquila's house.

If we would have the proper practice of the Body life today, we must be general in receiving all kinds of believers. As long as a person genuinely believes in the Lord Jesus, we must receive him, even though his opinion may differ from ours with respect to doctrine or practice. Furthermore, we need to be in a local church and honor the locality of the church. How I thank the Lord for [chapter sixteen](#)! In this chapter the Holy Spirit clearly indicates that for the practice of the Body life, we need to be the local church. Wherever we may be, we must be in the church in that locality.

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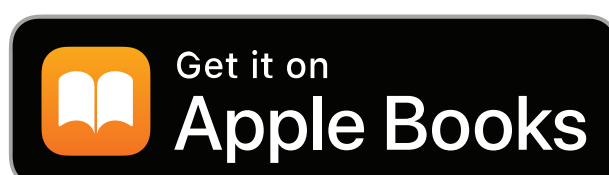
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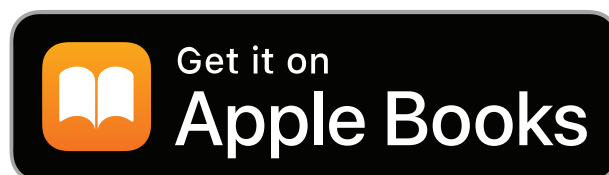
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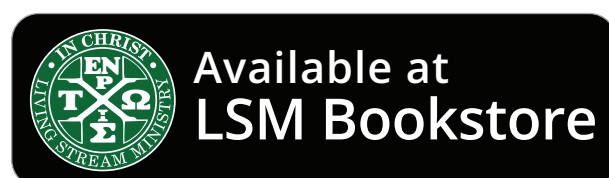
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