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We were reminded in our previous Reflection of two important “home truths”: first, we are all being watched all of the time, by the Lord God Himself and by those among whom we live; and second, a time will come when everything we have assumed is private or secret, including our very thoughts, will be “made manifest” and shall “be known and come abroad” (from Luke 8.17, KJV).

Arising from these home truths is the core responsibility we all share to get along with our fellow Christians as well as we are able. This getting-on is right and proper in itself under the Lord; it serves as a daily practice ground for expressing our Christian discipleship together; and it is a vital witness to others concerning the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (eg., John 17.21,23).

But it isn't always easy. We often see in the Gospels for instance the frictions among Jesus' twelve central disciples: Who is the greatest? Who will get the best seats in heaven? Who is closest to Jesus? – and so on. Jesus' response to such jostling is quietly consistent in both His words and example: humility is the key. He speaks of the poor in spirit and the meek; the little child; the Father's truth “revealed unto babes”; the widow and her two mites; the repentant publican; the lowest seat at the feast. And then Jesus Himself washes His disciples' feet, and undergoes the horrors of Golgotha in loving obedience to His Father.

The early days of the Church saw Jewish believers in Jesus as Messiah having fierce disagreements over how Jewish should be this new “Gospel of grace”; then Gentiles joined the mix – ignorant of Jewish ways yet far from ignorant of idolatrous, promiscuous lifestyles (eg., Acts 15.1-5 / Galatians 2 / Acts 15.22-31 / I Corinthians 6.9-12 / Ephesians 2.1-3). No wonder there were problems wherever Paul looked, and no wonder the Holy Spirit gave through Paul and the other apostles serious instruction about our getting on together to these young, excited, but often clueless, churches.

The essence of that instruction involves our duty always to honour our “oneness in Christ” (eg., Galatians 3.26-29 / Ephesians 2.4-22 / Philipians 3.8-9). Wherever there is a group of Christ-believers holding a shared faith in Christ, the distinctions and differences present among them - such as age, race, gender, background, character, wealth, social standing, spiritual gifting and so on - take a very definite second-place.

This fundamental “oneness in Christ” is further taught in the “body of Christ” passages, notably I Corinthians 12. Our oneness in Christ is as it were at the heart of the body (12.12-13), on which all other parts of the body depend under the Head of the body who is Christ Himself (Ephesians 1.22-23 and 4.15).

This picture of the church functioning like a human body thus upholds the twin truths of oneness yet diversity within the oneness, and clearly our upholding each of these truths is necessary for Christians to treat each other properly.

Sometimes in local church fellowships today, in a worthy desire to emphasise the oneness on the basis of Galatians 3.28 for example, the in-built distinctions and

differences within the local body are overruled, being seen, mistakenly, as redundant under the new Covenant. We see this for instance in the assumption that male and female roles in the church these days are entirely interchangeable. But the oneness teaching of Galatians 3.28 is about there being no distinction regarding salvation, praise God, and has nothing to do with the God-implanted, still-existing, distinct roles within the body which are explained to us in the body-of-Christ passages such as I Corinthians 12.

In other fellowships it is the distinctions and differences which come to dominate, led perhaps by a few powerful characters with contrary views, so that the primary, central oneness of the body becomes slowly lost under disagreements over doctrine and practice. In such an atmosphere unhappiness, cliques and splintering can soon follow.

The New Testament body-of-Christ teaching thus sets forth the right balance between the oneness of the body, and the distinct, different roles and gifts within the oneness of the body. Too much emphasis on oneness can crush the God-implanted distinctiveness; and too much distinctiveness can shatter the God-implanted oneness.

Therein lie the principles concerning Christians getting along together in the local fellowship, the practical outworkings of which are taught so clearly within the Epistles. We are one, but different. We accept the place, gifts and roles of each other and of ourselves. We rub along together, practising “the fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5.22-23), rejoicing, supporting and loving, and praying, caring and forgiving.

Our Lord Jesus Christ sums it up simply - “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15.12). The more we Christians can put this commandment into practice together then the better for one and all – including for those watching us, who will see Christian lives being lived out as Christ Himself always intended.

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