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FELLOW-FEELING

The apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, *"But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it"* (1 Corinthians 12:24-26).

We can draw several lessons from this passage, but the overriding one is that Christians ought to care for one another. We need to develop and

encourage empathy — what the dictionary describes as *"the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another."*

There's an old English expression that summarizes this same action: **"fellow-feeling."** That's a great word, one that deserves resurrecting in today's vernacular, especially in the vernacular of today's Christians. We should be a fellow-feeling people, with the capacity to feel joy with others when they have occasion for joy,

sorrow in times of sorrow, and compassion in times of need.

Our brothers and sisters in the first century of the modern age were fellow-feeling folks. They maintained an atmosphere of sharing and mutual concern, providing for one another's needs (Acts 2:44-46). Luke, our inspired historian, tells us, "*Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul*" (Acts 4:32), and that none among them lacked anything, because the others all gave of what they had (Acts 4:34).

This principle applied not only to their material needs, but to their spiritual needs as well. A Cypriot Levite named Joseph not only contributed his wealth, selling a piece of property and giving the proceeds to the apostles to distribute, but was also called Barnabas — "*son of*

encouragement" — for his efforts to edify the saints (Acts 4:36).

The fact that many early Christians actively demonstrated their empathy for others did not exempt them all from being reminded repeatedly how important it was that they continue in this behavior. Paul admonished the church in Rome, "*Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality*" (Romans 12:10-13). Since the Holy Spirit is not in the habit of wasting words, we can be certain that those Roman saints needed that instructional reminder, even as we do.

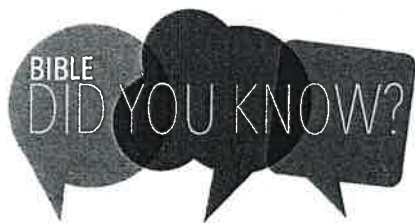
It's also no accident that when the apostle described genuine love to the Christians in Corinth, he did so using actions that define empathy: longsuffering, kindness, and unselfishness (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). If we truly love one another, we will exhibit the patience necessary to seek out each other's needs, and minister to them kindly and sacrificially (James 1:27).

Part of fostering fellow-feeling among Christians is recognizing that every saint has value. We are each different from the others, but we all have qualities and talents that are essential to the life of the body (1 Corinthians 12:20-23). In the physical world, a chain is only as strong as its weakest link; a wall is only as sturdy as its weakest brick. Therefore, for the entire church to be sound and whole, we each need to shore one another up, so that even the weakest

among us is made strong.

The Bible assures us that our God cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). That being true, we should care deeply for all those who are His — and show it!

— Michael D. Rankins



Letters Paul wrote to churches were intended to be read by the entire congregation. "Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea."
Col. 4:15-16



MONTHLY CHALLENGE

DIRECTIONS: Each first Sunday of the month, we will have challenges that you should attempt to complete by the end of the month. If we all, as members, complete these challenges, our church will grow in spirit and in number.

1) Go Into Your World With The Gospel

Mark 16:15-16 *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."*

Every time I read this passage about bringing the gospel into the whole world I usually begin to feel overwhelmed by the enormity of this goal. What helps me is within the instructions of how to make converts of those in the world. It's a process that begins with believing the message of the gospel and then obeying. Every big goal has a first step, and every big goal is reached by taking further steps, one step at a time. In spiritual conversion that first step is finding out what an individual believes. In preaching the gospel to all creation that first step is initiating conversation about belief within the community of friends, neighbors and acquaintances I typically interact with. Let's set a goal this month for each one of us to initiate a conversation with 5 people we know about their spiritual beliefs. That one step has the potential to reach the whole world!

2) USING YOUR BIBLE IN THE WORLD

Share the following verses with someone who does not attend this congregation at least twice this month:

Colossians 3:5-15

"Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him – a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful."