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**PROTESTANT REFORMED**  
**Special Education**

## Attitude Toward Other Members

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1 Corinthians 12:12–25

Gracious salvation puts the ones being saved into a relationship—a covenant relationship. This relationship is both with the Savior and with all the others saved by the Savior. Scripture often uses the figure of the human body to describe both the relationship that every saved one has with Jesus and the relationship the saved have with the other saved ones. Jesus is the head of the body (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:22–23; 4:12,15; Col. 1:18,24; 2:19).

A correct understanding of the relationships in the body is very important for the well-being of the body. Each member must first focus on his relationship to the Head. Then each member will have a right understanding of their relationship with the other members. A correct understanding of the relationship with one another is not natural, but a learned understanding. We never stop learning what that proper relationship is and how we are to practice and experience that relationship.

It is my observation that we usually have no problem accepting and being nice to the more severely handicapped members of the body. For example, we think that those with Downs Syndrome are so cute, and we even take pride in talking with them and being helpful to them. However, there are other members that we find it easy to mock, ridicule, bully, and look down on. You cannot easily see these handicaps when you look at them. But they are different and it is hard to be nice to them. They have little or no social skills (their handicap is social). They just don't know how to fit in and get along. We whisper about them with our friends. We rarely make an effort to talk with them or invite them to come along with our group of friends. It is really easy to ignore or mock them. They're different! They're strange!

1 Corinthians 12: 12–25 informs us that God made the church to be like the human body. It

is one body with many different members. The differences that exist between the various members of the body do not put any member out of the body. In the body there are free men, and there are slaves who are property of others. There are the rich and the poor. They are the smart ones and the slow ones. There are the athletic ones and those who stumble over a hair on the floor. There are fat ones and skinny ones. There are black ones and white ones.

God made all these differences. As soon as we say that God made the differences, we immediately realize that the differences do not detract from the body, but enhance it. The differences enhance both the body's abilities and its beauty. It would not be a body if every member was a hand or a heart or a kidney. When God designed the human body he was thinking of the church! In God's mind, his thought of the church as the body of Christ was before ("supra") his thought of the human body. God made the earthly after the figure of the heavenly. Each member of the body of the church (just like every member of the human body) has an important place; each member is necessary for the whole.

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There are two sinful responses that so frequently raise their ugly heads when we are talking about the relationship that the members have with each other. These sinful responses grievously affect how each of the members experience their relationship with the other members. These two sinful responses are attitudes and actions that cause division (schism) in the body (1 Cor. 12:14–25). Both of these two attitudes (and the sinful practices which flow from them) are very self-centered. This is why they are so evil.

The first sinful attitude is the conviction that I must not be in the body because I am not like another member. "If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body." "If the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body." In other words, I'm not good enough to be a part of the body because I'm not as soon as or as important as another member. Paul first gives a simple, practical, and common-sense answer: "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?" Then Paul gives a spiritual answer – one that takes God into consideration. "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one members, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body." The all-wise God wants the body to have a multitude of members, each different from the other, and when put together they make up the marvelous creation of a human body. No believer may say that because he is not like another believer or not as good as another believer, that therefore he is not a member of the body. Stop feeling sorry for yourself! Stop looking horizontally. Every believer has his very important and necessary place in the body.

The second sinful attitude is the declaration of a member of the body that he does not need another member. “The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.” Stop being arrogant! No believer may look down or think less of another believer. Realize that our sinful human natures often think less of those believers who are not like us. The apostle declares that God has a contrary judgment. The body parts that *seem* to be feeble are both necessary and more honorable (1 Cor. 12:22). What a tremendous caution to any arrogant thoughts we might have concerning other members of the body of Christ: those who limp, those who aren’t “normal,” those who have a different skin color, those who have a different language, those who live in a different part of the world, etc.

All the members of the body of Jesus Christ are to see themselves and each other as God does, namely, eternally chosen by God, saved by the blood of the Lord Jesus, indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

This right perspective of the other members of the body begins with each member’s having the right perspective of himself. Each member must know whose he is and whom he serves. This is the beautiful language and powerful confession of the apostle Paul in Acts 27:23, “There stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve.” A frequent lie of Satan is that I am what people (including myself) say about me, when God’s truth is that I am what God says about me. Satan’s lie is that my identity is determined by what I have done (or not done), but God’s truth is that my identity is determined by what God has done for me. It is not about who is cute or athletic. Instead we are to realize that the wise and gracious God sees you as indwelt by Christ’s Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13) and thus are a very necessary and important part of Christ’s body (1 Cor. 12:18,24b). It is all about whose I am! God chose me; I did not choose Him. God gave me to Jesus Christ. I belong to Him! I am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior and Lord Jesus Christ by sovereign, gracious election and redemption. And it was completely undeserved and unearned! That is why every member must put on humbleness of mind and meekness (Col 3:12).

Only when we correctly understand ourselves will we correctly look at the other members of the body. Then we will see them as saints, as beloved of the Lord, as redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus, as God’s children. This is true of them even though they may be slow, homely, clumsy, irritable, and bothersome. That is why every member must put on longsuffering, forbearing one another, forgiving one another (Col. 3:12–13).

Then we will not speak evil of any of the other members just because they look different or because they serve a different purpose in the body. Such speech (and the attitude behind it) causes division in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:25). Then we will be able to suffer with those who suffer and rejoice with those who rejoice (1 Cor. 12:23). Then we will see ourselves in humility as the

chief of sinners saved only by God undeserved love (grace). Then we will not conduct ourselves with haughtiness as if we made ourselves to differ. Then we will see the necessity and wisdom of developing the fruit of the Spirit called meekness. Then we will judge and speak of other members in the most favorable manner; and then we will forgive as we've been forgiven (Col. 3:13; Eph. 4:32).

Remember: every one saved is in a most gracious and most wonderful relationship with Jesus, the head. And every one saved is in a most gracious and most wonderful relationship with all the others who have Jesus as their head.

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