

HABITS (4)

Belonging to God's Body

A. Introduction

1. Two things we are called to do as followers of Jesus are to keep going and to keep growing.

To keep going means that we keep trusting in Jesus and don't give up.

To keep growing means that we become more and more like the Lord Jesus.

The way we keep going is as we keep growing.

"Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever! Amen." (2 Peter 3:17-18)

2. How do we keep going and growing?

Ultimately it is God who keeps His people going and growing.

"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)

However, there are paths through which God works so that we survive, grow, and flourish and we are to walk these paths to keep going and growing.

"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." (Philippians 2:12-13)

These paths are known as 'spiritual disciplines' or 'means of grace' or 'habits'.

"A means of grace is a tool or instrument that God uses to strengthen and nurture us so that we grow in conformity to Christ." (RC Sproul)

3. What are these habits that help us to keep going and keep growing?

"Whilst there's no final and complete list of such practices, the long tally of helpful habits can be clustered underneath three main principles: hearing God's voice, having his ear, and belonging to his body. Or simply: word, prayer, and fellowship." (David Mathis)

"The 'means of grace' are such as Bible reading, private prayer, and regularly worshipping God in Church, wherein one hears the Word taught and participates in the Lord's Supper. I lay it down as a simple matter of fact that no one who is careless about such things must ever expect to make much progress in sanctification. I can find no record of an eminent saint who ever neglected them." (JC Ryle)

4. In addition to hearing God's voice and having God's ear, belonging to God's body helps us to keep going and keep growing.

No wonder the early church devoted themselves to *"the fellowship"*.

It is also no surprise that it was normal for new believers to be added to a local church.

"And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:47)

B. How do we belong to God's body?

1. By gathering for worship.

Gathering for worship is the most important thing we can do to keep going and keep growing.

Why?

Because it brings together all three habits that God has given to us to keep going and keep growing.

When we gather for worship we hear God's voice.

"Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching." (1 Timothy 4:13)

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3:16)

When we gather for worship we have God's ear.

"I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone." (1 Timothy 2:1)

When we gather for worship we are with God's body.

"When you come together... All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church." (1 Corinthians 14:26)

So we are not to neglect gathering regularly to worship God.

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Practical Suggestions:

i) Prioritise.

Commit to gathering for worship, not just this Sunday but every Sunday; not just every Sunday morning but every Sunday evening as well.

ii) Prepare.

Read the Bible passage that will be preached from.

"Then pray for your yourself, and for the minister, that God would give him a mouth to speak, and you a heart to hear, as you both ought to do. All this, before you shall assemble for public worship." (Henry Scudder)

Make sure you arrive on time and don't miss the start of the service.

iii) Participate.

Pray the prayers being prayed publicly.

Sing loudly (even the songs you don't particularly like because you know by doing so you will building others up).

Hear the Word read eagerly.

Follow the sermon, with Bible in hand, receiving the message as God's Word to you/us (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

iv) Process.

Think about what you have heard in the service. Discuss it with others.

Take the points made in the sermon and pray them for each member of the church.

2. By being baptised and then partaking in the Lord's Supper.

"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:18-20)

"For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Baptism and the Lord's Supper both communicate that we belong to the body.

Baptism is the way someone become part of the body as they publicly commit themselves to Christ and His people, and the church affirms their profession of faith.

The Lord's Supper is the way someone renews their commitment to Christ and His people.

But baptism and the Lord's Supper do more than communicate that we belong to the body.

Baptism is a sign pointing to our union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection, along with the benefits of this union (that our sins have been forgiven, of being washed clean, of new life and a new identity). It is also a seal confirming the reality of what Jesus has done for us.

In the Lord's Supper we together remember Jesus' death and its meaning and together experience anew the blessings of salvation that He has won for us.

Practical Suggestions:

i) Be baptised.

If you have repented of your sins and put your faith in Jesus, but have not yet been baptised, Jesus commands you to be.

ii) Improve your baptism.

If you have been baptised, as you watch someone be baptised, think back to the day of your baptism and the reality of which it spoke of – your identity now and your future hope.

iii) Take, Eat! Take, Drink!

Partaking in the Lord's Supper affirms our faith in Jesus.

Partaking in the Lord's Supper spiritually feeds us as we receive the benefits of Christ's death afresh.

Partaking in the Lord's Supper affirms our unity as one body.

3. By submitting to a local church

It is not enough to gather for worship, and be baptised and partake in the Lord's Supper. Belonging to God's body means submitting to a local church.

Unless we formally commit to a local church, we cannot obey the commands Jesus gives to us concerning who we are to love and who we are to obey.

We are commanded to love one another – but who are the people we are specifically to love?

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34)

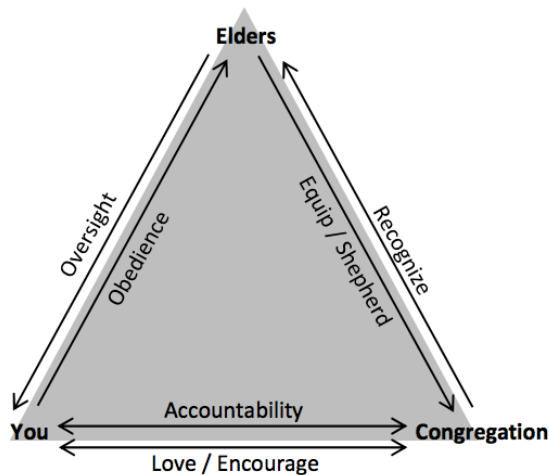
By submitting to a local church, we are communicating to the other members of that local church that we will love and encourage them.

We are commanded to obey our leaders – but who are the leaders we are specifically to obey?

“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.” (Hebrews 13:17)

By submitting to a local church, we are communicating to the elders that we will follow their lead and that we want them to watch over us and hold us accountable.

The Membership Triangle (courtesy of Mark Dever).



Practical Suggestions:

i) Become a member.

Submit to a local church where Jesus is the Head. This local church will want to be ruled by Him so will take the Bible seriously. This local church will be dependent on Him so will take prayer seriously.

ii) Be a member.

Attend, pray, serve, give, submit (to elders; to discipline of the congregation); love (do all the other 'one anothers' in Scripture); commit.

C. How does belonging to God's body help us to keep going and keep growing?

1. We cannot keep going apart from belonging to God's body.

“Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head.” (Colossians 2:18-19)

Not gathering with God's people, partaking in the ordinances, and submitting to a local church is a sign that you might have given up following Christ.

2. We cannot keep growing apart from belonging to God's body.

“He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.” (Colossians 2:19)

Not gathering with God's people, partaking in the ordinances, and submitting to a local church is a sign that you probably have stopped growing to be like Christ.