

The Benefits and Duties of Body Life

Joshua 10:6-8

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, July 30th 2023

I. Introduction

Before I dive into these verses, let me give a bit of review. In the last verses of chapter 8 we saw that God renewed covenant with Israel *and with the Gentiles strangers who were in their midst*. He mentions those believing Gentile strangers two times. These believing strangers had abandoned their nations, rejected their gods, and had embraced the God of Israel by faith. And we saw evidence that God's arms were always open to anyone who repented, whether Jew or Gentile. That's chapter 8, verses 30-35.

Well, that means the Gibeonites really didn't need to go through the extravagant play-acting and deception that they went through in chapter 9 in order to be saved. No. All they had to do was leave their nation, repent of their sins, put their faith in God, and come into covenant with God. But they wanted to have their cake and eat it too. They wanted to be saved, but also to retain their independent status as an independent nation. You can't do that. True salvation comes with unconditional surrender. God declares war on the world and on those who identify with the world.

So the people were rightly upset with Joshua and the leaders for letting the Gibeonites live. But we saw all the reasons why God wanted them to honor the covenant. And it was a good thing because God used those strange circumstances to take the Gibeonites from fake faith to genuine faith. I am not going to revisit all the evidence we went through that these Gibeonites now had genuine faith - a faith that shone brightly for hundreds of years - all the way up to the time of Nehemiah - so much so, that God changed their names from Gibeonites to Nethinim, or devoted ones. I never cease to marvel at how God uses even people's messed up actions to lead them to salvation - sometimes in very roundabout ways. I'm currently reading a book on how God led a Mormon to Christ in some rather unusual ways even while he was still in that cult.

But we saw last time that the moment people change sides from the devil to the Lord, all kinds of new things begin to happen to them. They immediately receive opposition from Satan and the world. And we looked at the nature of that opposition in verses 1-5 last time. 1 John says that we shouldn't marvel when the world hates us. Jesus said that it is guaranteed that the world will hate Christians who stand strong for Christ. And that's what these Gibeonites did. They had a chance to rejoin ranks with Adoni-Zedek. That would have been the easy thing to do - to cave in out of fear. But they didn't. Instead, they chose to fight *with Israel against* the Canaanites. It's just one of many evidences that they had faith.

Anyway, the rest of this chapter shows other new things that happen to new believers. It shows the benefits of the body standing up for each other, miracles from the hands of God, hosts of angels guarding their way, the joy of God's powerful presence, increasing victories,

and other benefits. And today we are going to only look at one of those things that new believers have - the benefits and responsibilities of body life. Some commentators have pointed out that the change from being outside of Israel four or five days earlier to now being deeply united with Israel in their war with Canaanites is not only a remarkable reconciliation in its own right, but also shows the beauty of body life at work within the church. And unlike those commentators who make a comment in passing without developing it, we are going to dig deeper and tease apart each phrase.

II. Heads of households took responsibility - body life does not evaporate the family (v. 6 “The men”)

The first phrase is “The men.” It was the “*men* of Gibeon” who sent messengers to Joshua. Why does he say that? The word “men” here is not a slam on women. It’s just acknowledging that the men were still the leaders. It is indicating that each part of the body plays its unique role, with women being honored with their own roles. And it also hints at the solidarity of the family. Their entrance into body life did not evaporate their leadership.

Not all churches emphasize these kinds of distinctions, but I am encouraged that there is a revival of this old fashioned covenantalism in many denominations. Even many Baptists are embracing the family integrated church concept - that the church does not dissolve the family units by treating each individual the same. Sadly, many churches take actions that do undermine the family. I had one pastor tell me (probably in reaction against the family integrated movement), “When a family comes through the doors of this church, they cease to be a family within the church. We have direct authority over each individual.” Well, that’s a radical individualism, and it is not Biblical. We believe that the heads of the households have a primary responsibility to disciple the members of their household. That’s not the elder’s primary responsibility. It doesn’t mean we elders can’t speak to each and every person and give occasional counsel as John did in 2 John, but we seek to push men into their roles as leaders in the home and leaders in society. So we disciple the men, and they in turn disciple their families. It’s God’s division of labor.

And by the way, this doesn’t do away with individual responsibility. The Bible does talk about that. Vishal Mangalwadi has a great article on the difference between *Biblical* individualism that benefits family, church, and society and secular individualism that undermines the other three governments. Biblical individualism is where every person takes personal responsibility for his or her own actions and embraces his or her role within the body of Christ. *Secular* individualism is where everything revolves around me. The individual becomes the center of the universe, whether it comes into conflict with other individuals or not. He ended his essay by saying, “This secularized individualism destroys not just family, church, and community, it hurts the individualist the most.” And I agree. And I’m not going to get into that topic any more here. The main point is that the men are mentioned because they are the leaders; they are accountable; they are the ones who will fight and defend their homes. And body life does not dissolve the family or remove the authority of the heads of households.

III. Once in the body of Christ, you count, no matter how weak or insignificant (“The men of Gibeon”)

But then it mentions where these men were from - “Gibeon.” Two days earlier, the Israelites were ready to kill these Gibeonites for having deceived them into making a covenant. They were upset. They were angry. *Now* the same Israelites are willing to lay down their lives to defend these Gibeonites. It’s a beautiful picture of what happens when our enemies embrace Christ by faith. They are joined to Christ and thus joined to His body. They become brothers and sisters - overnight. And this means that a former Saul who was the enemy of the church becomes a Paul who is significant to the church.

Now granted, only four or five days have gone by since the deception, and one or two days have gone by since they were confronted over the deception, so these Gibeonites had not had much chance to prove themselves. But they had at least shown that they would trust God and would not trust their own might. Remember that the Scripture says that Gibeon was a royal city, one of the greatest of the cities in Canaan, and its men were mighty men. If any city could have trusted their own might, it would have been Gibeon. (And it was actually a league of cities.) But they didn’t trust their own might. They didn’t trust their walls. They rejected the possibility of realigning with Adoni-Zedek. They were all in, and appealed to the body.

But the main point is, they had come out of bondage to sin, had messed up lives, were spiritually babes. But once saved, it doesn’t matter. 1 Thessalonians admonishes us, “uphold the weak, be patient with all” (5:14). Paul told the elders of the church in Ephesus, “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak” (Acts 20:35).

Let me illustrate how important this is to body life. In March of 1981, President Reagan was shot by John Hinckley, Jr., and was hospitalized for several weeks. And even though Reagan was the nation’s chief executive, his hospitalization had little impact on the nation’s activity. Government continued on. But when the garbage collectors went on strike in Philadelphia it produced chaos. The decaying trash was building up everywhere and made the whole city a stench and a health hazard. A three week strike by garbage collectors could have a huge negative impact upon a city. So who is more important, the president or the garbage collectors? Well, in a sense it’s the wrong question to ask. Paul asks a better question in 1 Corinthians 12:15: “If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body?” Obviously that would be a wrong inference. In verse 22 he said, “those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.” Now that Christ had saved the Gibeonites, *they were necessary to the body as a whole*. And they later proved to be more loyal to God than the Israelites in later history.

IV. New believers have the privilege and the duty of seeking help from the church. Don't assume others will notice; ask. (v. 6a - "The men of Gibeon sent to Joshua")

The next phrase says, "The men of Gibeon sent to Joshua." Joshua was 16.5 miles east of Gibeon and would not have known that they needed help. And so I say on this point, "New believers have the privilege *and the duty* of seeking help from the church. Don't assume others will notice. Ask." Let me make two applications.

First, (as already mentioned) don't assume that the church will automatically know all about your needs. If you have needs that you can't bear on your own, let the church know. The body cannot function without good communication. They were not yet assimilated into Israel and so they lived 16.5 miles away, which was a long way if you were walking. So they sent messengers to ask for help.

Let's apply that concept of communication. If people live far away from the main group of this church, they need to think up creative ways to stay connected and accountable. And with technology like our Discord Channel, emails, cell phones, Covenant Eyes, and other communications options, we have tried to make it easy for each of the members of this church to communicate with each other easily and consistently - even if they are an hour or more away.

Second, new believers should have the security of knowing that in Christ, they are new creatures, and their horrible past is not an obstacle to their being a part of the church's body life. These Gibeonites were one of the groups of whom the Bible says that their cup of iniquity was full. They were up to their necks in sin, yet were marvelously saved out of that sin. It would be easy for them to back away from body life simply because of the shame of their past, but they did not do so. Or just consider how they might have reacted to the sinful attitudes and the judgmentalism of the Israelites one or two days earlier. I've already mentioned that the Israelites were upset with the leaders for sparing these Gibeonites in chapter 9. If it wasn't for the leaders, they Gibeonites would be dead. The Israelites wanted them dead. It would be easy for the Gibeonites to say, "Hey! With attitudes like *that*, maybe we don't *want* your help." But even though only one day (or a maximum of two days) had passed since their last confrontation, the knowledge that these Gibeonites had abandoned their idols and committed themselves to following the Lord made all the difference in the world. All Israel risked their lives to protect the Gibeonites. That's body life. God's grace erases the past when there is true repentance and commits us to each other because we have a common Lord, a common savior, and a common knowledge that none of us deserve this salvation. None of us.

Of course, none of this means that Joshua and the leaders were naive about the need for caution. Until the Gibeonites were counseled out of their sexual addictions, their habits of lying, drug addictions, and other habitual character issues, there would likely be some accountability lines drawn, and some cautions, and some counseling that would need to take place. Acceptance doesn't mean naivete about the possibility of relapses. If a former pedophile comes to Christ in the future, for his own protection and for the protection of the

church there will be open communication and boundaries that will be set. But it is still acceptance in the Lord. So to reiterate this point, “New believers have the privilege and the duty of seeking help from the church.” And by the way, accountability is one of the helps you get when you join the body.

V. New believers should not isolate themselves from the body (v. 6b - “at the camp at Gilgal”)

And the next phrase hints at this connection to the *whole* body of Israel. It’s not just the leaders who will help. It says, “at the camp at Gilgal.” As I’ve already mentioned, Gilgal was 16.5 miles east of Gibeon and it was the home base for Israel during this whole Southern Campaign. It was where the tabernacle had been set up. It was the place of worship. It was where the ark of the covenant was carried, and we know that the ark of the covenant was called the throne of God. So Gilgal was where the worship of God took place.

So the application in the outline is, “New believers should not isolate themselves from the body.” The Gibeonites were soon to be assimilated into Israel and would rub shoulders with Israelites a lot, and would actually be serving at the tabernacle, but that transition had not yet been made. They were 16.5 miles away - probably packing their bags, so to speak. So they send for help by going to the home base. But they would soon be assimilated into Israel.

And in much the same way, it is important that new believers spend time with other believers, seek their advice and help, and connect with other believers. And let me tell you - that can initially be awkward and we need to relieve that sense of awkwardness. It is such a new experience for new believers, and the Christian culture is so different, that connecting may initially be awkward. Some might be reticent to do so. But it is critical for spiritual safety that new believers not isolate themselves from the church. And by the way, it’s not just new believers. Some of you tend to be loners, and that’s not a good thing. Let me assure you that *all* isolated believers are vulnerable to the attacks of Satan and the world, but how much more so new believers.

VI. The strong should not leave new believers, the weak, or the vulnerable to fend for themselves (v. 6c - “Do not forsake your servants”)

The next phrase gives the first part of their message, “Do not forsake your servants...” Don’t forsake us. The strong should not leave new believers to fend for themselves. And this is true of even the broader church. When churches in other countries face persecution, loss of property, medical needs, tsunamis, and other disasters, it is good for us to help as we are able. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to help the church in Jerusalem that was experiencing a massive famine. And they did help. They joyfully helped. They sent a lot of money with Titus to help with the relief work. Well, that’s an example of connecting with the broader body.

VII. The needy should not have a user attitude (v. 6d - “your servants”)

But though these Gibeonites were asking for help, they had not forgotten that they were committed by the covenant to serve others also. It was a situation of *mutual* service. So they call themselves “your servants.”

Why is this attitude important? Because some people love to receive the service of others without ever lifting a finger to serve others themselves. That is called a user mentality. God is not in favor of a user mentality, and eventually users become losers. Every citizen of the kingdom is called serve - period. Even if you are an invalid you can pray and witness. Galatians 5:13 says, “do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Mutual service is what God’s grace produces. Healthy body life occurs when every member, including children, look for ways to be of service. I am so grateful to see the many ways that some of the children in this congregation try to serve. That’s wonderful. You parents are obviously discipling children out of selfish habits and into the humble habits of service. That’s great.

VIII. The whole body should be willing to make sacrifices of time, energy, and convenience (v. 6e,f,g)

What *kind* of service did Israel engage in on behalf of these new believers? It was hard work that involved sacrifices of time, sleep, energy, and convenience. Verse 6 goes on to say, “come up to us quickly, save us and help us.”

Next week we will see what “quickly” means and what that help actually involved. They left immediately as soon as they heard the news and traveled during the night, arriving at dawn the next morning, totally surprising the coalition under Adoni-Zedek. That meant that they had been up all the previous day, all night, and now were now about to fight an extra long day - and I say “extra long” because God stopped the sun from going down for about a whole day, which I take to mean that He added an extra 12 hours to the day so that none of this coalition could escape. Add it up and you have approximately 48 hours without sleep and with extra heavy activity. Have you ever tried working for 48 hours straight? I have. It’s exhausting. This was an enormous sacrifice of sleep, time, and energy. Yet they engaged in it because true body life needed it. Without those sacrifices a major portion of the body would have died. It was an emergency, and they took on that emergency wholeheartedly.

And the question we need to ask ourselves is this: To what degree do I expend myself for the body of Christ? Or do I let someone else do all the heavy lifting? How much do I practice for the music team? What kind of excellence do I put into cleaning or setup and take down when it is my turn? Do I excel in hospitality? In what ways do I reach out to the body? God sees those sacrifices as gifts of love to Him.

IX. When the enemy attacks one part of the body, it is attacking the whole body (v. 6h)

But there is one more thought in the last part of verse 6. It says, “for all the kings of the Amorites who dwell in the mountains have gathered together against us.” I spent an entire sermon going through all the reasons why we should not be surprised by persecution or other kinds of opposition from the world. In John 15 Jesus said this:

John 15:18-19 “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

But this clause also adds one more thought. The way Joshua acted was to treat an attack against Gibeon as an attack against God and God’s covenant, and therefore an attack upon the whole body. We can’t just be preoccupied with our little church. We need to engage in spiritual battle on behalf of the body of Christ around the world. And that’s the next point.

X. Body life involves battle (v. 7)

Body life involves battle. And though it is rare to have to engage people in physical fights today (and there is a place for that - even Jesus acknowledged that), we can apply verse 7 in other ways as well. Verse 7 says, “So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor.” Joshua was always prepared for war, and so were his people of war. Interestingly, Peter and one of the other disciples were prepared with swords to defend themselves, right? And according to the book of Hebrews, Israel fought their battles in this book by faith. But Hebrews also indicates that their battles were symbolic of our spiritual battles with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

God calls us to war. It is a spiritual battle that involves taking on the principalities, powers, and dominions of the invisible world as well as protecting the sheep from the attacks of the physical agents of demons.

And you might wonder, “Well, why does God allow the church to be attacked in the first place?” There can be many reasons. Discipline for sin is one reason. Opportunities for growth is another. But there are other reasons too. I’ll just mention one. God sometimes allows these attacks to test our faith. The Gibeonite’s faith was tested by this coalition of opponents. If they had caved in and sued for peace with Adoni-Zedek, it would have proved that they had a false faith. But they passed this test with flying colors, fighting side-by-side with Israel and proving their faith. So sometimes the difficulties God brings into your life are tests of your attitude (do you become grumpy?), your faith (do you give up), your willingness to obey, your faithfulness, and other character issues. We need to make sure that we pass those tests.

But there are typological lessons as well. Hebrews says that Joshua was a type of Jesus, and Jesus is the Greek form of the name Joshua. If Jesus is leading us into battle, and if we follow closely behind Him, and pay close heed to his instructions given in the Word, we too can

have victory. And we will look at the incredible battle that they engaged in next week - a battle that included hailstones being accurately targeted against only the enemy, with no hailstones hitting any Israelites, yet hailstones killing more Canaanites than the Israelites' swords killed.

But the main application that I would make of this phrase is that if we are *not* engaged in spiritual warfare on behalf of our family, our church, and the whole body of Christ, we are to some degree absent without leave - AWOL. God calls us to lift up the persecuted in other countries as well as our own. Warfare is not an option.

XI. Body life revolves around the Head - God (v. 8a)

Verse 8 shows that body life must revolve around the head - God and His Word. It says, "And the LORD [That's Yehowah - which many people believe was the pre-incarnate Son of God] said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have delivered them into your hand; not a man of them shall stand before you."" It was *God* who would lead them into battle and their battle was *on behalf of* God. They didn't engage in body life because they wanted to or liked to. They first and foremost engaged in body life because God is the head of the body, and how we treat or fail to treat His body is considered by God as how we treat Him or fail to treat Him.

At a meeting of the American Psychological Association, two men (Jack Lipton and R. Scott Builione) presented their findings on a study done of 11 major symphonies. They analyzed the huge differences in personality between the players of various instruments: the percussionists, string players, woodwind players, etc. And then they studied how each these members of the symphony perceived the other players. And some of the perceptions were way off, but they had pretty bad opinions about the arrogance, hot headedness, and other characteristics of players in the symphony. They were preset prejudices. In fact, there were so many differences that the researchers were astonished that most of these people could even be civil with each other, let alone play beautifully together. But the report said, "...regardless of how those musicians view each other, they subordinate their feelings and biases to the leadership of the conductor. Under his guidance, they play beautiful music."¹

And I thought that was such a beautiful picture of how the body functions. We are able to put our differences behind us because of our love for Jesus, submission to Jesus, and our willingness to follow the instructions of Jesus, who is the head conductor. As Paul worded it in Colossians:

Col. 1:18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. Col. 2:19 ...holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.

¹ As reported in *Today in the Word*, June 22, 1992.

If body life is just wrapped around the leaders of the church, it will fall apart. But when each member has a deep loyalty to Christ and His Word, it will flourish, despite differences.

XII. Body life thrives on the Word of God (v. 8b)

Next, body life also involves being subject to the Word of God. But how do we tangibly know what the head of the church has said? With Joshua it was easy. He was a mouthpiece for God. When God said “March!” they marched. When He said, “Don’t fear,” they stuffed their anxieties. When He gave promises, they believed those promises. Verse 8: “And the LORD said to Joshua, “Do not fear them, for I have delivered them into your hand; not a man of them shall stand before you.”” So it was easy for them to hear from God.

But there is a sense in which it is just as easy for us today. We read His marching orders in the Bible. When God commands, we gladly respond. And we have the Holy Spirit to illumine our minds and to apply those Scriptures to our unique situations. And God’s Word commands body life. But look at some of the specifics that God’s Word brought so as to make body life thrive

A. The challenges of God’s Word (“do not fear”)

The command “do not fear” is just as relevant today as it was back then. We might fear that if we forgive someone for the umpteenth time, they will take advantage of us. But God calls us to trust *Him* to change hearts and not to try to take that divine role ourselves. We fear that we won’t know what to say when witnessing, but even a bumbling witness can sometimes be better than no witness. I may have told you this story before, but I’ll risk telling it again.

My dad told the story of a retarded man in Atlanta who really wanted to witness, but was fearful of doing so. But he finally got up the courage to hand a tract from his church to a businessman who was passing him on the sidewalk, and aks he handed him the tract he asked, “Do you want to go to heaven?” The businessman rudely brushed him aside and said “No.” The retarded man without thinking instantly said, “Well, go to hell then.” I don’t recommend that form of evangelism, but God can take even the times we blow it to convert people. And He did in this case. For some reason the man grabbed the tract as he hurried on. But all day long those words haunted him - “Well, go to hell then. Well, go to hell then. Well, go to hell then.” And he knew he was headed to hell. So he read the tract, got converted, and because the address of the Baptist church in Atlanta was on the tract, he started attending that church. He eventually told the pastor what had happened. The point is, God is not limited by our limitations. Just get involved however fearful and bumbling your testimony might be. Heed God’s command to not be fearful. Trust His power to be sufficient for your weaknesses.

B. The promises of God's Word ("for I have delivered them into your hand; not a man of them shall stand before you.")

And trust His promises. This was a phenomenal promise that was given to Joshua and through Joshua to Israel: "for I have delivered them into your hand; not a man of them shall stand before you." And when we look at God's miraculous provision in the future, you will see that it was indeed an amazing promise that was 100% fulfilled.

But *we* have promises in the Bible that are just as amazing. Take God at His Word. When you are going through tough times, cling to God's many promises that He will be with you and strengthen you - promises like Isaiah 43:2. "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you..." When you feel so guilty that you can't forgive yourself, confess your sins and claim Isaiah 1:18. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." When you are sad, go to God with Isaiah 51:11, which says, "I, even I, am He who comforts you." There are hundreds of promises in the Bible that can meet your every need. And there are various books that have collected promises that you can claim. Books like *God's Everyday Promises*,² or Mark Waters' book, *Bible Promises Made Easy*.³

XIII. But God's sovereignty does not do away with human responsibility ("before you")

But I want to end with one more lesson. The phrase, "before *you*" indicates that God wasn't promising victory without human effort. God expected them to fight and *as they fought by faith* He would bless their efforts miraculously. Inaction would indicate lack of faith, and God never blesses lack of faith. So never pit God's divine sovereignty against your own human responsibility. If you are going to gain victories in your life, it will only come through hard work. If something is worth doing, it is worth doing well. And there was sacrifice put into this effort - enormous sacrifice. And yes, God accompanied their sacrifices with amazing miracles that we will look at in the future. But in the process, they would have been dog tired. Yet by the end of that long day they would have had a sense of satisfaction and the delight in knowing that God's power had been made manifest in them. And that's the most important thing that we can learn this morning - to daily experience God's presence and power in our day-to-day lives. May it be so, Lord Jesus. Amen.

² No author. Published by Whitaker House, New Kensington, PA (2018).

³ Mark Water, *Bible Promises Made Easy, The Made Easy Series* (Alresford, Hampshire: John Hunt Publishers Ltd, 2001)