

**Ice Cream is Good for the Soul, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 16050904**  
**Romans 13:8-14 and Matthew 18:15-20**  
**Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 4 September, 2005**

Pray globally, act locally. That is how we respond to a tragedy like hurricane Katrina. The church is the body of Christ. The church is not just a local organism, it is made up of followers of Christ around the world. Many of those suffering from the effects of hurricane Katrina are followers of Christ—they are our brothers and sisters in Christ—they are part of our body. Our love for one another means, obviously, that we will respond to those who have been left without homes, jobs, schools, and families.

The church is the body of Christ at work in the world; we are his hands and his feet. That means we will respond in compassion to those in need. Paul said in Romans, “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, *are one body* in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.”<sup>1</sup>

God gives each of us different skills and talents to use as part of the body. One might sing beautiful songs to inspire the rest of the body. Another might greet worshipers with a smile and hand out bulletins. Another might teach children what God’s love is all about. Another might organize a response to a disaster while another works to get homeless and jobless people a secure start on a new self-sufficient life. What is important is that we work together so we can function as a body.

But, the church is made up of human beings, and there are times when it is difficult for human beings to get along with each other. It isn’t easy to get along with members of the body from other denominations, especially when they say they are the only true church. This implies that we are not part of the body.

There are times when it is not easy to get along with members of the body gathered in this room right here. We may disagree on the kinds of music that are appropriate or necessary. We may disagree on how our hard-earned and -given money is spent. We may disagree on the menu for a church dinner.

Few things are more disconcerting than a conflict in the body of Christ. We come here to be renewed. We talk about being closer to God. We come to be in prayer and find spiritual peace. When that peace is rocked by an unkind word or by an outright struggle, it hurts. It’s easier to avoid being involved in the church at all and the church, the body of Christ, is diminished by one.

Jesus knew what people were like, and he knew that church members, being people, might have problems with one another. That’s why he gave advice about what to do when one member felt wronged by another. Jesus knew that our words affect others. We hurt far more than we can imagine because of our insensitivity.

A woman told this story to a Presbyterian Youth Connection internet meeting. Last week I took my children to a restaurant. My six-year-old son asked if he could say grace. As we bowed our heads he said, "God is good. God is great. Thank you for the food, and I would even thank you more if mom gets us ice cream for dessert. And Liberty and justice for all! Amen!"

Along with the laughter from the other customers nearby I heard a woman remark, "That's what's wrong with this country. Kids today don't even know how to pray. Asking God for ice-cream! Why, I never!"

Hearing this, my son burst into tears and asked me, "Did I do it wrong? Is God mad at me?"

---

<sup>1</sup>Romans 12:4-5 NRSV

As I held him and assured him that he had done a terrific job and God was certainly not mad at him, an elderly gentleman approached the table. He winked at my son and said, "I happen to know that God thought that was a great prayer."

"Really?" my son asked.

"Cross my heart." Then in a theatrical whisper he added (indicating the woman whose remark had started this whole thing), "Too bad she never asks God for ice cream. A little ice cream is good for the soul sometimes."

Naturally, I bought my kid's ice cream at the end of the meal. My son stared at his for a moment and then did something I will remember the rest of my life. He picked up his sundae and without a word walked over and placed it in front of the woman. With a big smile he told her, "Here, this is for you. Ice cream is good for the soul sometimes and my soul is good already."<sup>2</sup>

What can we do to brighten another's day, rather than make them feel guilty or wrong or bad? While there are some people who thrive on conflict, I would rather avoid conflict. Jesus doesn't ask us to avoid conflict, but rather to try to resolve it by communicating and reaching understanding.

Here is Jesus' formula for dealing with conflict. It can save us from destruction and slavery to retaliative conflict. It can maintain the unity of the body of Christ. It can help in many settings such as homes, dormitories, or apartments. If hurt, the proper procedure is to go directly to the person who caused the hurt. Do not pass go. Do not stop to complain about it to a third party. This is Jesus' formula, remember.

Go first to that person who you feel wronged you. If that person does not listen, then, you can take another with you to the offender and explain your hurt. This person should be a mediator or a good listener, not simply someone you perceive to be "on your side."

If that doesn't work, tell the whole church, and if the offender still does not change, treat that person as a Gentile or a tax collector. And, if you will remember, Jesus ate with tax collectors and Gentiles!

The point is to be open and direct. Don't beat around the bush. Don't gossip. Don't complain behind someone's back.

You can help reduce conflict. If someone complains to you about a third party, ask, "Have you spoken directly with the person you're complaining about?" If the answer is "no," say, "Please don't tell me about it until you've spoken to the person in question first."

Dealing with conflict and hurt openly and honestly can give us something to celebrate. Jesus said, when you reconcile with a disputant, you will have gained a brother or a sister. It's like welcoming that person back. When you can clarify a misunderstanding, it feels good. You want to celebrate like the Prodigal son and his generous father. Jesus doesn't want any members lost from his body. Note that this teaching follows Jesus' teaching about the lost sheep, where the shepherd left the ninety-nine sheep and searched until he found the one that was missing.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus wants us to make every effort to maintain ties with the marginal. It is not God's will that anyone should be lost!<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>"ECULAUGH" 5247 (of 5248) JIM KIRKPATRICK Nov. 18, 1997

<sup>3</sup>Matthew 18:12-14

<sup>4</sup>Matthew 18:14