

BODY BUILDING

Jesus said: "*I will build my church*" Mt 16:18

The church is the Body of Christ. We know that the church is not the actual *buildings*. But neither is the church simply *meetings*, although meetings are important. The church is *people*, the people of God—people in relationship with God and each other, functioning in gifting and service together as the Body of Christ.

Formerly, I was an individual. Then I was introduced to relationship with Jesus, and became part of a Body. Now together in the church, we have an individual identity and a corporate identity. "*Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*" 1 Cor 12:27 ESV. God shapes and forms us corporately and individually, but His ultimate intent for individuals is that they take their place in the Body.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

Eph 4:11-13 NASU

God does work with individuals, but He's after something more than cleaning, restoring and buffing up individual believers to an impressive shine. God's goal is not that there finally be the dazzling glint of racked-up saints, polished in their individual perfection. No, He's looking for a mature *man*, for His *Body* to be brought to maturity, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, to what's been described as "the maturity of the perfectly balanced character of Christ", in corporate function.

How do we get there? What builds the Body of Christ? We could say many things, but here are three:

Strong relationships are Body builders

Relationships are the glue that sticks the building together and keeps it "built". In the picture of living stones being built into a spiritual temple, relationships are the cement between the stones, and therefore the difference between a spiritual *building* and a spiritual *brick pile*.

In the Body, relationships are the *joints*, and a joint is a meeting of two members.

Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. Eph 4:16 NASU

The Body is held together by that which every joint supplies. Without properly-functioning joints, the Body is stiff and immobile. If there is tension in the joints through lack of love, the Church is unbuilt, or is at best the arthritic Church, suffering from inflammation of the joints. We need to confront our independent-mindedness, find our joints, and form strong, loving relationships, enabling life, gift and ministry to flow over that joint, and around the Body.

Equipped saints are Body builders

Jesus gave those listed in Eph 4:11 "*for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ*". The "saints" here are *us*—those being set apart—we could simply say "believers". The Church is built by saints being equipped and doing the works of service. And the extent to which it's built is the extent to which we co-operate.

Steve Shank said, "*Disciples of Jesus are duty-bound to pursue training. It's part of every Christian's job description.*" We must therefore *allow* ourselves to be equipped, which necessarily also implies allowing others to minister to *us*, as they fulfil the goal of their own equipping.

The NIV renders the end of Eph 4:16, "*...grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*" There is a work for each part. But there are two problems. The first is that some, in laziness, abdication or self-satisfaction, don't want to work at all. Without being too insensitive, these need to be encouraged to embrace God's purpose for their lives, to read Eph 2:10, and to repent! The second problem is that many Christians try to do someone else's work rather than their own. One may be trying hard to be a *hand* in the Body, usually because all his friends are hands. But he may in fact be a *foot*. In that case he will look dysfunctional and feel frustrated attached to a wrist, and the local body may be limping or hopping because of his absence from the ankle!

To help the Body build itself up in love, do your work individually — simply be the part you were made to be!

Gifted ministries are Body builders

And he [Jesus] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ Eph 4:11,12 ESV

I've kept these until the end because we usually start with them. Their importance must not be belittled nor their role reduced. Their impact on the whole Church is critical. They must be embraced as the gifts and the equippers that they are. We cannot expect to come to "the mature man" God has in mind and yet neglect or downplay apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Most members of the Church are not in the list, but all can be involved. While the majority will not *be* Ephesians 4:11 ministries, everyone can *embrace* Ephesians 4:11 ministries. And as we do, the Body will be built.

In this regard, my earnest hope is that these e-mail teaching articles will be Body-Builders in function, not just in name; and they can make a difference and assist in the equipping process, that the Body of Christ may be built and built up.

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