

# Body Building

Ephesians 4:11-13

I want to talk with you today about bodybuilding... but not this old flesh and blood body. I'm talking about Jesus' body, the church.

Every week I get mail inviting me to attend a conference, order a video series or read a book about church growth. All over our country there are organizations devoted to helping churches grow and become more effective. Some are very helpful. Some are after a share of our budget. However, I subscribe to one great principle of church growth. Jesus said in Mt. 16:18, **"I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."** I love that! I am not responsible for building the church, Jesus is! We cannot build a great church by human means. Jesus will build His church and He wants to work through us so that we are an integral part of that growth process.

What do you think of when you hear the word "church?" This church is much more than a place to sing Sunday morning songs and hear a Sunday morning sermon. It is the body of Christ, a vital community of born-again believers, alive in the Spirit, committed to lovingly sharing the truths of God's Word as it makes disciples.

When a church stops making disciples, it stops being a church. If a publishing company stops publishing books, if a newspaper stops producing papers, if a toy company stops producing toys... they go out of business. If a church stops making disciples it stops being a church, regardless of the building, the services or the pastor. A church must produce disciples! That is our mission.

Last week we learned that God gifts His church in order to build it. He gifts every believer with spiritual gifts to use in His service. Today we will see that Jesus not only gives gifts to each individual believer, but also to His combined Body. To each believer He gives divine abilities, to the whole church He gives gifted men as leaders.

Here in Ephesians 4 the apostle Paul gives us a sound biblical philosophy of ministry for the local church. He is saying, *Those with leadership gifts are to equip the saints for the work of service, so that the body will grow to unity, maturity, and Christ-likeness.*

In verse 11 Paul lists these gifted men that He gives to the church. There are four of them listed here. He is not listing all possible gifts, but instead he concentrates on leadership gifts. As I describe them, you will notice that each of these leadership gifts centers on the Word of God because the Word is foundational to a mature church. This is why I devote myself to the work of expository preaching of the Word. It is how we grow.

## **I. Every Church is gifted with Spiritual Leaders (v.11).**

### **A. The Lord Gave Some as Apostles.**

The word **"apostle"** means "one who is sent with a commission." It is used in two senses in the New Testament. First, it is used of the twelve apostles appointed by Christ. Jesus had many disciples but selected 12 **"apostles."** A disciple was a "learner" or follower, a student of a teacher.

An "**apostle**" was a divinely appointed messenger or representative. Along with the original twelve, (Mathias replacing Judas in Acts 1), Paul and possibly James, the brother of the Lord may be apostles in this sense.

These apostles had to be taught personally by the Lord and had to be witnesses of His resurrection (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor.9:1-2). The Lord gave them the ability to perform miracles as an authentication of their apostleship (2 Cor. 12:12). Their teaching from the Lord became "**the foundation**" upon which the church is built (2:20). Their inspired and authoritative writings constitute the bulk of the New Testament (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

Because their role and qualifications were unique, when they died, there were no legitimate successors. There are no apostles in that sense today. In fact, we don't find the word used in Acts after 16:4. There is no record of any of them being replaced. Once they laid "**the foundation**" they fulfilled their task.

In the second sense, apostle is also used in the Bible of others sent out under the authority of the church or of the twelve for some task (Acts 14:4; 1 Thess. 2:6; Rom. 16:7; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25). The men in the first group are designated as "**apostles of Christ Jesus**" (Gal. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1; etc.), whereas the other men are called "**messengers [apostles] of the churches**" (2 Cor. 8:23). In a very loose sense, the term might apply to modern missionaries (the word missionary comes from the Latin word for "apostle").

## B. The Lord gave some as prophets.

We already saw in Ephesians chapter 2 and 3 that along with the apostles, the New Testament prophets received direct revelation from the Lord and they laid the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20; 3:5). "**Prophets**" sometimes foretold the future, but at other times they expounded on revelation already given (Acts 11:27-28; 13:1; 15:32; 1 Cor. 14:3, 24-25, 29-32). They told forth the truths of the Word of God. During the time before the completion of the NT, they were second only in importance to the "**apostles**."

Again the church was "**built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets**" (2:20). This foundation we have contained in the scriptures of the New Testament. Although God may still gift some as prophets today, most all evangelical scholars would agree that there is no current revelation on a par with that of the New Testament.

## C. The Lord gave some as evangelists.

The apostles and prophets gave us the Word of God by direct revelation. The evangelists proclaim the Word as it relates to people's need for salvation. The name "**evangelists**" and the word "evangelism" come from a word which means "good news." Although all believers must proclaim the gospel, evangelists are those with a special gift to do

so. An evangelist is especially spiritually gifted to share the good news of Jesus Christ so that people receive salvation.

This is an on-going gift. There are many people alive today who are gifted in evangelism. Some evangelists speak to large audiences (i.e. Billy Graham, Greg Laurie, Luis Palau, etc...) Some evangelize one on one, like Ron Clement.

How do we know who is an evangelist? We see people who have a special ability to make the gospel plain and simple. They are gifted to probe the heart, answer objections and encourage people to accept Christ. The proof of an evangelist is that they lead people to Christ.

As verse 12 implies, evangelists should not only preach the gospel, but also help encourage and equip the rest of us to do it better. This Saturday Ron Clement will be doing just that, leading a workshop on "*Tuning any conversation into a spiritual conversation.*" Ron says, "This workshop give practical tools for sharing Christ. You will be reminded how fun it is to share the Good News!"

Share the gospel. Don't say it is not your gift. I am praying that God will raise up a number of "**evangelists**" in this church, men and women who will tell the good news so people get saved.

#### D. The Lord gave some as pastors and teachers.

I always enjoy pointing out to the congregation that the Bible refers to we pastors as gifts to you! Do you think of us as gifts?

The two words "**pastors and teachers**" are linked by a single "**some**" probably indicating that there is one office with two ministries.

The word "**pastor**" is another word for "shepherd." This is the only place in the New Testament where the noun is used to refer to a ministry in the church, but the verb appears several times in this sense (John 21:16). The local church is like a flock of God. Paul told the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28, "**Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.**" To the elders of the church Peter in 1 Pet.5:2 says, "**Shepherd the flock of God which is among you.**"

There are two other terms given in the N.T., which are equivalent to "**pastor.**" The first is "**bishop**" which is from *episkopos*. It means an "overseer" or "guardian." Thus it refers to the pastor's management, leadership and oversight of the local body. The other term is "**elder**" from *presbuteros*, which basically referred to someone who was "aged" or "gray-haired," someone to be respected. It refers to the qualifications of the office.

The title pastor also suggests someone who is tender and gentle, one who can not only defend the sheep from predators but also lovingly cares for them.

Sheep can only be healthy when they are fed. A church can only be strong when she is fed. Thus "**pastors**" must be "**teachers**" so that they may feed the people of God on the Word of God.

1 Tim.5:17 says, "**Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor** [lit. "labor to the point of exhaustion"] **in the word and doctrine.**"

All gifted teachers of the Word are not pastors, but all pastors must be gifted teachers of the Word. One of the first qualifications for a pastor is that he be "**able to teach**" (1 Tim.3:2).

There is nothing that will take the place of dedicated, labor intensive teaching and preaching of the Word of God. Nothing will revive a dead church like a pastor who teaches the Word. Nothing will mature immature Christians like preaching the Word. Nothing will bring a church together in unity, will spur a church on to greater challenges, will motivate the church to serve like the Spirit-anointed, verse by verse preaching of the Word of God.

If I ever come to the place in my ministry where I stop studying and preaching the Bible word for word, you have my permission to fire me!

Nothing can take the place of anointed preaching of the Word God by the power of the Spirit of God to mature the People of God!

## **II. These Leaders Equip the Saints for Ministry (v.12).**

The Lord gifts the church as a whole with these special leaders.

The King James Version put a comma after the word "saints," making the sentence read as if the pastors had three tasks: to equip the saints, to do the work of the ministry, and to build up the body of Christ. But the context (4:7, 16) and the Greek syntax (there is a change of prepositions after the first "for") indicate that the task the leaders is to equip the saints so that the saints may do the work of service (or ministry), resulting in the building up of the body of Christ.

One of the most crippling ideas to pervade the church over the centuries is that there is a special class of Christians, called "clergy," who do the ministry, while the rest of the church sits back and lets them do it.

Many pastors, perhaps out of a lack of trust in the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the flock, or perhaps out of a wrongful need to control everything, have perpetuated this crippling distinction. They do almost everything in the local church, while the flock just attends the services and does nothing else.

That is a totally unbiblical view of the church. Of course, evangelists and pastor-teachers are also engaged in the work of the ministry. But the point is, they don't do it by themselves. Rather, they equip the entire body to work in accordance with their various spiritual gifts. Every Christian is "in the ministry" in the sense that every Christian has a ministry to do for the Lord in building the body of Christ.

### **A. Leaders Equip the Saints.**

Think about the players on the football field. How many of them go out to play that game with just their running suit and tennis shoes on? No, they

all have helmets, pads, mouth-guards, cleats, and uniforms on. It would be dangerous for a football player to go out on the field without the proper equipment. No coach would send out his players unequipped. In much the same way, God doesn't want to send His people out into the world unequipped. That's why He gave the church "**pastors and teachers... for the equipping of the saints.**"

Every believer is a "**saint**" (lit. "set apart one, holy one") and every believer needs to be equipped to serve God.

The word "**equipping**" comes from a Greek word from which we get our English word "artisan"--an artist or craftsman, someone who works with his hands to make or build things. It means "to make fit, restore to original condition or make complete."

It is interesting that this word first appears in the New Testament in connection with the calling of the disciples. As Jesus walked along the Sea of Galilee, he saw the brothers James and John, sitting in a boat busily working (Matt 4:21). What were they doing? They were mending their nets. The word "mending" is the same verb translated in Ephesians 4:12 as "equipping." They were equipping their nets by mending them. They were fixing their nets, making them strong, preparing them for service, getting them ready for action!

How does God equip us for works of service? Primarily through the Word of God.

**"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work,"** (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

**"So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified,"** (Acts 20:32).

God gifts the church with pastor/teachers to patiently feed the people the Word that they might be equipped.

What is the greatest need of this church? Is it more programs and committees? No. Is it entertaining services that bring in people? No. Is it bigger buildings? No. The greatest need of this church is that every believer is equipped. The more of us who are equipped, the stronger the body, the church becomes.

## **B. The Saints Do the Work of Ministry.**

When a football player is hired by an NFL team he is issued all his equipment: cleats, uniform, pads, helmet and more. What does he do with it all? Sit in the locker room? No! He gets in the game. He plays to win.

When a police officer graduates from the police academy, He receives a badge, gun and lots of other equipment. What then is he supposed to do? Sit at the doughnut shop? Hang around the station? Sit in the parking lot? No! He is to be out on the streets doing the "**work**" of a police officer. In

the same sense, as God equips believers, He equips them for the **"work of ministry."**

The job of the pastor is to join God in **"the equipping of..."** who? The **"saints!"** Why? For **"the work of ministry."** Get it? Pastors equip you. You use your gifts to do **"the work of ministry."**

God's plan for building His body is NOT for the pastors to do the **"work"** so that you can come and enjoy a nice Sunday morning service! God's plan is for YOU to be involved in worship, fellowship and the ministry of the Word that YOU may be equipped to do YOUR ministry that God has called YOU to do. *Every member is a minister!!!*

What is your **"work of ministry?"** It is using your spiritual gift(s) for the glory of God. It may be evangelism, prayer, giving, ministering to the poor, helping the elderly, whatever you do ... Do it all to the glory of God.

Someone once said, **"Attendance is a poor substitute for participation in ministry."** God didn't save you to set you on a pew; He saved you to serve. Don't be satisfied with the pew! You'll never be content or fulfilled just sitting there.

I don't know what **"the work of ministry"** is for you. I'm just called to equip you. I do know that if you will seek the Lord, He will lead you into a ministry that is waiting for you. You won't be complete until you do it.

### **C. Equipped Saints Edify the Body of Christ.**

When God's people are properly equipped and involved in **"the work of ministry"** then they will edify the body of Christ.

What does edify or **"edifying"** mean? The term literally translates "building up." It pictured the building up of a house or building.

If we think of the church like a building, we know that Jesus is **"the chief cornerstone"** and the **"foundation"** is the teaching of **"the apostles and prophets"** (2:20). Now we help build up the church by **"edifying"** encouraging one another.

In one sense the church is built up through evangelism. As people are saved they enter into the local fellowship of the church, the church grows, is built-up. We read in the early chapters of Acts how **"the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved"** (2:47b). I am not content with the fact that we see very few coming to saving faith here at New Covenant. I realize that there are unusual times of revival, when the Spirit of God brings many to repentance and salvation. But, we should pray for such and even in more normal times we should be seeing lost people coming to salvation. That's why I want you to be equipped to share Jesus. God will use some of you to tell the good news so that people are added to the church. That is the outward growth of the body of Christ.

And secondly, there is the inward growth. Here I believe Paul is speaking primarily of the church being built up inwardly, the church growing spiritually. As Paul wrote (Col. 1:28), **"Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present"**

**every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” Or, (Col. 2:6-7), “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”** In both those verses, Paul mentions teaching or instruction as a primary way that these saints were being built up. We do this here at New Covenant through the preaching of the Word on Sunday mornings, through the various Sunday School classes, and through various men’s and women’s ministries. Also, we seek to equip the saints through one-on-one contact, whether in counseling or over a cup of coffee or a meal. To the degree that you are equipped, you should also engage in teaching others (2 Tim. 2:2), so that the entire body grows to maturity.

Some of you are relatively new Christians. You should take advantage of the different opportunities for being equipped with God’s Word, both on Sundays and throughout the week. As you grow in the faith and apply the Word to your own life, look for ways to impart God’s truth to others.

Others of you are more mature in your faith and you’re involved in ministry to others. I would encourage you not to grow weary in the work (and it is work!) Helping others grow in Christ is kind of like raising kids. It’s a long process, and in church terms, you no sooner get some out of the nest and on their own, but there are more needing to grow in Christ.

But my concern is for those of you who have been Christians for quite a while, but you’re not involved at all in ministry to other believers. Perhaps you’ve become stagnant in your walk with Christ. Start there, by recovering your first love for Him. But, also, look around for new people in the church that need a friend. Older couples should look for younger couples who need mentors. Invite them over to your home and get to know them. Suggest that you study the Bible together, or if you don’t feel gifted to lead a study, take them with you to a Bible study and then interact on the truths that you both are learning. When was the last time you encouraged or built up a brother and sister in the Lord? When was the last time you performed a selfless act of service?

The point is, get out of the stands and onto the playing field Christianity is not a spectator sport! If you need more equipping, then get equipped. But, use what you’ve got in the work of service toward other believers. In that way, this church will grow to maturity in Christ.