

7. Learning to Build Up One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to bear with one another. Today, we will look at another way that we help our physical and spiritual children learn how to show the love of Christ to others. We will look at some Biblical principles that will show us how to help our children learn to build up one another. Romans 14:19 says, “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.” The word that is translated “build up or edify” is used 18 times in the New Testament. Here, we see that we are to pursue the things that will build up one another.

To build up is used several times in the New Testament to speak of buildings. In Mark 13:1-2, we see the word used twice to speak of the temple and the buildings around it. Those verses say, “Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!’ And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down.’”

However, in the books of the New Testament written by Paul, it is nearly always used to speak either of building up Christians or to speak of building up the church. In those contexts where it is talking about building up other Christians, “to edify or build up another person” means *to encourage the growth of another Christian in godly wisdom and holy living*. This means that we are to encourage the spiritual growth and development of godly character in one another by example and by teaching. Such spiritual progress is the result of patient ministry to one another over an extended period of time. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.” In this verse, we see that the building up of one another is an ongoing process that happens over time. We will see how this process of building up one another happens.

First, Romans 15:1-2 says, “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.” These verses teach us several things. We see that some Christians are stronger than others. We also see that we are to be patient with those who are weaker Christians. However, the most important thing that we see is that God did not put us on this earth to live to please ourselves. Instead, the Lord put us on this earth to give us the opportunity to serve the Lord by serving others for their good. These verses say that such service will lead to the edification of others. This gives us a great purpose for life that will give our lives an eternal impact. That is why it is so important to learn how to build up our physical and spiritual children as well as all Christians.

Second, 1 Corinthians 14:3 says, “But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.” To “prophesy” means *to share the Word of God with others*. This may be done as two individuals are talking together or as a larger group shares together. The key thing we see in this verse is that as we speak the Word of God, we are to speak the Word in such a way that it builds up others, encourages them and provides comfort. We build up others by sharing the Word of God with one another and encouraging one another to put the principles of the Word of God into practice in our daily lives.

Third, Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” This verse gives us both a negative and a positive about how to serve other Christians and build them up in the Lord. The negative is what we are to avoid. We are to avoid letting any corrupt word come out of our mouth. Before we became Christians, we spoke many worthless and destructive words to others. Here, we see that one key to building up others is to remove those worthless and destructive words from our conversation. Instead, we are to speak words that will build the other person up. God says that in learning to transform the way we talk from corrupt words to encouraging words, we actually give grace to those who hear us.

Fourth, Ephesians 4:15-16 says, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” Here, we see the attitude that we are to have as we share the Word of God with others to build them up. We are to speak the truth in love. We see that every single Christian is to learn how to speak the truth in love so that every single Christian can learn how to do their part to build up the body in love. That means that a very important part of our ministry to one another is to show our physical and spiritual children how to speak to one another in love so that they build up each other.

Fifth, Ephesians 4:11-13 says, “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Apostles gave us eyewitness testimony of the resurrection of Christ – Acts 1:22. Prophets gave us the written Word of God – 2 Peter 1:19-21. The resurrection of Christ and the written Word of God provide the foundation for every Christian to be equipped for the work of the ministry so that every part of the body knows how to build up one another in the body of Christ.

Since every Christian is to learn how to have a part in building up the body of Christ, that means that the primary function of evangelists is to equip every Christian to share the Gospel so that every Christian knows how to share the Gospel and lead others to Christ and help them start to grow. It means that the primary function of pastors (translated “shepherds” in all 17 other uses) is to equip every Christian to minister to other Christians so that every Christian can have a part in the shepherding and building up of other Christians. It means that the primary function of teachers is to equip every Christian to know how to explain and apply the Word of God so that every Christian is equipped to build up other Christians by explaining and applying the Word of God. These verses show that when every Christian is equipped in these three areas that it makes it possible for every Christian to have a part in bringing others to spiritual maturity.

Ephesians 4:14 also warns what happens when we do not build up our physical and spiritual children in their spiritual lives. That verse says, “That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning

craftiness of deceitful plotting.” When Christians are not built up so that they become a functioning part of the body of Christ, they remain spiritually immature. The word that is translated “children” in this verse speaks of those who are not able to speak clearly. A Christian that has not yet learned to share the Word of God clearly with other Christians is still spiritually immature and has some or all of the following ten characteristics from this and the other passages where this word is used:

1. They are carnal. 1 Corinthians 3:1
2. They are not yet able to eat solid spiritual food. 1 Corinthians 3:2
3. They have envying, strife and divisions. 1 Corinthians 3:3
4. They speak, understand and reason like a spiritual toddler. 1 Corinthians 13:11
5. They are tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. Ephesians 4:14
6. They are easily deceived by false teachers. Ephesians 4:14
7. They have become dull of hearing. Hebrews 5:11
8. They have been Christians long enough to teach others but still need to be taught the basics of Christianity themselves. Hebrews 5:12
9. They are unskillful in the Word of righteousness. Hebrews 5:13
10. They have not developed to the point where they can discern good and evil. Hebrews 5:14

The tragedy of spiritual toddlers is the reason why every physical and spiritual child needs a spiritual parent. The various forms of the word “disciple” are used 274 times in the New Testament. However, the word is never used after Acts 21:16. Paul did not use the word disciple in any of his epistles because the Gentiles used the Greek pattern of instruction which involved telling people what to do (the lecture). In contrast, the Jews used the Hebrew pattern of instruction which was to show the children how to do what they were to do (imitate my life). As a result, Paul chose to use the picture of a spiritual parent to show people how to make disciples.

1 Corinthians 4:14-16 says, “I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me.” An “instructor” was a slave who raised a child for a father. The instructor would use severe discipline in raising the child instead of loving the child like a father. In contrast, Paul chose to become a spiritual parent that led by love and example as he invited spiritual children to imitate his life. Paul, Silas and Timothy used that same love and example in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12.

The Lord also calls each one of us to build up our physical and spiritual children. May the Lord richly bless you as you build up your physical and spiritual children so that they can become partners in building up other Christians.