

May 31, 2020
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Ephesians
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2020 David J. Whitcomb

LIFE IN THE BODY Ephesians 4:12-16

We are all familiar with examples of instructions lost in translation. It happens often when we buy an item made in a foreign country. The accompanying instructions can leave us nonplused about how we are really supposed to assemble or operate the item. Like the inexpensive electrical current tester that says, “Do no change it on your mind.” What does that mean?

We commonly experience the same problem when we travel. For example, this sign appeared in a Moscow hotel located across the street from a Russian Orthodox monastery: “You are welcome to visit the cemetery where famous Russian and Soviet composers, artists and writers are buried daily except Thursday.” Or this sign in an airline ticket office in Copenhagen: “We take your bags and send them in all directions.” Indeed they do. Hence the problem! And finally a brochure at a car rental establishment in China reads: “When passenger of foot heave in sight, tootle the horn. Trumpet him melodiously at first, but if he still obstacles your passage then tootle him with vigor.”

Sometimes I feel like the instruction from Christ to the Church He is building must have also become lost in translation. For all the noise that some people make about having the right translation of Church instruction (i.e. the Bible), we might fairly conclude that it doesn't matter. Briefly scan the landscape of ministries in America and you will be astounded at the broad array of examples of how it is to be done. Does Jesus Christ really intend for His Church to be patterned after the entertainment industry? Is it our Lord's intent to use the gimmicks of Vanity Fair to trick gullible sinners into sitting in our meetings where we will hit them with the gospel when they are

least expecting it? Or does Christ desire for the leaders of His sheep to run the operation according to the instructions and examples of successful businesses? Those are all common methods of operation in the modern, visible church.

The instructions that Jesus gave us for doing His work in the Church are not that difficult to understand. A careful comparison between the Greek texts and the English translations proves that we really have not lost anything important in the translation process. While it is true that there is room for variation in the application of these instructions, the real problem seems to be that church leaders by and large have chosen to ignore the instructions.

Our text is one of the clearest and simplest statements about the kind of work Jesus Christ expects us to do in His Body. Here we are reminded that Jesus gave gifted men to the Church in order to build up the saints to do the work of ministry which is always to help individuals become more like Christ. In so doing, we are also helping saints learn to identify and avoid error. The result is that the Body of Christ continues to grow into an accurate and vivid expression of Christ Himself. We will study the text by considering the duty of the gifted men (vv.12-13), the defense against error (v.14), and the desired results (vv.15-16).

The Duty of the Gifted Men (vv.12-13).

The first responsibility of the gifted men Paul listed was that they are to equip saints to build up the Body of Christ. Their work is equipping people for ministry. They are *to equip the saints for the work of ministry (v.12a)*. “They” of course are *the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers Christ gave (Ephesians 4:11)*. He gave them with the intent that they would equip saints.

To equip is to put something in order, to complete it or prepare it for a particular task. The idea requires the gifted men to work to make something adequate or sufficient for the task. It is the work of repairing and preparing for service. The same word is found in the story of Jesus meeting James and John at the seashore who were “mending” their nets preparing for the next night's fishing (Matthew 4:21). Again the same word is found in the instruction that the

spiritual person is supposed to “restore” the saint who was overtaken in a fault (Galatians 6:1). The implication of this word is that all saints are deficient and in need of completing on some level.

Christ intends for the gifted men to equip saints to do the work of ministry. The pastor/teacher does not do all the work of ministry. He is to be busy repairing and preparing saints so that they will do the work of ministry. The Greek word for ministry speaks of work, deeds, actions, or works of industry. It reminds us that Christ intends for His people to be busy accomplishing something. We are being repaired and prepared to do ministry, which is service. This is the same Greek word that gives us the English word deacon. Deacons do service, they attend to others. Ministry is always “other” focused.

I don’t remember where I saw it, but it was a glass box about the size of this pulpit. Inside the box were hundreds of different sized gears all interconnected and some oil. Outside the box was a handle that penetrated the box and connected to the gears. The object was to turn the crank and watch all those gears work together. It was fascinating. What did it do? Well, it didn’t do anything. You turned the crank, the gears all spun round and round, and the oil was picked up and dripped all around the box. But it didn’t accomplish anything. The box of gears reminds me of the typical church. We are as busy as we can be. But what are we accomplishing? The goal of the preaching of the Bible is to repair and prepare saints to do the work of ministry. That is not the same as just being busy with programs.

The work of ministry is a building process. The gifted men repair and prepare the saints so that they will do the work of service *for building up the body of Christ (v.12b)*. Saints are supposed to be learning to build. The word translated *building* literally refers to building a house. The first three uses of the word, in Matthew and Mark, occur when Jesus spoke of the actual temple, a physical building. But the other fifteen uses of the word in the New Testament are metaphorical, speaking about this ministry we have of building up others.

To serve in ministry is to engage in a building process much like the construction of a house or other building. Building a house is a process that must follow specific steps from laying the foundation to installing finished moldings. Building people spiritually is a

process that must follow a specific order. As in the fact that saints are building other saints as we are *building up the body of Christ (v.12b)*

The phrase “body of Christ” is found only four times in the New Testament. Twice it refers to Christ’s actual body. Twice (here and 1 Corinthians 12:27) it refers to the Church. That text in 1 Corinthians removes all doubt to what the body of Christ refers. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it (1 Corinthians 12:27). This cannot be a reference to the actual body of Christ because His physical body does not need to be built up. This is obviously a metaphorical use of the term speaking of us individuals who make up the body of Christ. We, the people who make up the Church, need to be in a continuing state of building up, improving, advancing. It is *ministry* or service which is work in behalf of others. “Church” is not about you but it is about others.

How do we build up others, or in what way do we engage in this work of building? The aim is for the unity and maturity of the saints. Saints are prepared to do ministry *until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (v.13)*. We are supposed to be working toward unity of faith. Part of the goal toward which we are continually building is unity of the faith. An important principle is that Christ desires unity not uniformity. Satan loves uniformity because it is easier to control people who are all alike. Christ loves unity in diversity. That is obvious in the broad array of spiritual gifts He places in a local assembly. Unity is the beauty of differences working together.

But all the different personalities and capacities to serve must be directed toward the same goal. We must run within the same boundaries or there will be disunity. The right boundary is not determined by personal preference but by the Bible. We are striving to know and agree upon the same teaching. The term *faith* in this verse is not a reference to belief but to the body of truth, the Scripture. That is why we say in our founding documents that the Bible is our sole authority for faith and practice.

This is why the preaching events of a local church each week are so important. It is through preaching in corporate worship that the entire assembly hears the same truth and is given the same application of that truth. The person who is absent from preaching and teaching

in the assembly cannot possibly be experiencing the building up in unity of faith.

Furthermore, in doing the building ministry, we are working toward *unity of knowledge of the Son of God (v.13b)*. This is not the same as knowing about the Son of God. Nor is it a reference to knowing Christ through the salvation experience (i.e. “She came to know Christ”). The verb for knowledge speaks of full, deep, experiential knowledge. Academic knowledge about the Son of God will gender arguments and divisions. But learning to live out the character of Christ that we are learning through His self-revelation in the study of the Bible will make us unified.

At this point you ought to be able to see the critical importance of the Bible in doing the ministry of building each other up. We preach the Bible and we teach the Bible. But how often do you get together with other people in this assembly to just talk about the Bible? The beauty of the building-up process is that two or three of us get together, not for Bible study, but just to chat, and we end up talking about how Christ is teaching us the truths of the Bible in everyday life.

Ministry that leads to unity in faith and unity in the knowledge of Christ is all part of the process of working toward spiritual maturity. Our goal is to achieve *mature manhood (v.13c)*. Unity in Bible understanding and unity in experiencing Christ are necessary processes in becoming mature believers. Unity in feeling will always fail because it is human centered. Unity in emotion is a sign of spiritual childishness if not outright carnality as opposed to spiritual life.

The clear implication in this statement is that we come into the body of Christ as immature babes who need to grow in our knowledge of the Bible and experience with Christ. Each one of us is supposed to be engaging in that work with others. We can chart our spiritual growth by measuring it against Christ. Health professionals are good to give us charts that help us see if we are measuring up with good health. When I have blood work done, I receive a report that lists several results which are compared to the expected norm for someone my age. I am always satisfied to see that I am “okay” according to the measurement and not satisfied when I see that I have missed the mark.

Becoming mature is the result of working toward the measure of Christ. Spiritual maturity is *the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (v.13d)*. Our mark, our measurement for spiritual growth is Jesus Christ Himself. We are maturing spiritually only when we are becoming more and more like Christ. We know what the fullness of Christ is only by studying the Bible. Take away the self-revelation Christ gives us in the Bible and it is every man doing that which is right in his own eyes. That is a formula for disunity.

Probably you have experienced something like this. You sit and watch your child or grandchild working feverishly with Legos. The child puts piece upon piece, hunts through the pile for just the right pieces and builds a masterpiece. When he is finished, he holds it up and says, “Look at what I built.” And you might have responded, “Oh wow. That is great. What is it?” That was not the right question to ask. The child had a particular goal in mind but you couldn’t quite match the end product with the goal he was trying to achieve.

Does all our teaching, preaching, counseling, busy work, and programs in the church create people whose lives look like Christ? Do we work ourselves to exhaustion, then hold up the finished product to God and say “Look what we built,” only to have God say, “What is it?” Christ’s gifts to the Church are repairing and preparing saints to do the work of serving each other so that we are all becoming more like Christ.

The Defense Against Error (v.14).

It is critical for saints to become spiritually mature *so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes (v.14)*. Here we are reminded that saints are like children. We must grow spiritually so that we *may no longer be children, tossed to and fro*. As in mundane physical life, children need to grow.

Again the implication of our need is too obvious to ignore. We are born again into the Church as children. On one hand, it is a privilege to be children of the Heavenly Father. Paul reminded the believers in Philippi of the privilege *that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked*

and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world (Philippians 2:15). It is good to be children of light in a dark world (1 Thessalonians 5:5).

But on the other hand, if we remain spiritual children, something is wrong and dangerous. That was a problem for fleshly Christians in Corinth, to whom Paul wrote, *But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready (1 Corinthians 3:1-2).* The writer to the Hebrew Christians wrote a similar, somber warning. *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child (Hebrews 5:12-13).*

The danger is that children tend to be *tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine (v.14a)*. This summer after a hurricane hits the SC coast, as is likely to happen, we will see pictures of boats on land. Boats are not supposed to be on land. They cannot operate on land. But that is where they end up when they break loose from their moorings because of the wind and waves.

Spiritual children must grow in the truth of the Bible or they will be tossed around like a little boat in a hurricane. Yet the immature spiritual children are often the very ones who don't see a need to read their Bibles. They are the ones who lay out of preaching services whenever it is convenient to do so. Though they are indeed born again, they struggle with the flesh, with carnality, and are often found chasing all kinds of foolish teaching that presents itself as "the latest trend in Christianity."

This is a dangerous situation because even mature saints can be impacted by human deception. The children are being tossed about *by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes (v.14b)*. There were many winds of doctrine flying around in the first century, and there are still a lot of those ill winds blowing. Doctrine is teaching. The implication here is that Paul was warning about teaching that looks Christian but is not Bible. These winds of doctrine come to us in the form of books, blogs, sermons, and

YouTube clips. It is sad to watch immature Christians run after all the latest trends, changing like the wind.

These false teachings are so subtle because they are intentionally deceitful schemes. Immature, non-growing spiritual children are tossed around by such human cunning. They are tossed about by craftiness. They are tossed around by deceitful schemes. All of these phrases picture the intentionality of deceiving. The deception originates with Satan and the powers of darkness. Unregenerated religious people who present themselves as children of God promote this deception, often being deceived themselves. The saddest part is when true, but immature, children of God get sucked up into the deception and live stunted, unChristlike lives. This is why the New Testament contains no fewer than fourteen warnings about the deceptiveness of false teaching.

The Desired Results (vv.15-16).

Speaking truth results in growth. Instead of remaining immature like children who are tossed around by error, Christ's goal is *speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ (v.15)*. The gifted men repair and prepare the saints to do the work of ministry, part of which is *speaking truth in love*. Speaking the truth includes teaching, preaching, sharing the Word of God, which is not the same as human opinion.

The qualification that this speaking is to be done in love does not always mean soft and squishy. Love desires the best for the recipient. Therefore, love will also reprove, rebuke, exhort with longsuffering. The friend who truly loves will offer faithful wounds correction (Proverbs 27:6). The immature Christian who is in danger of being tossed about by deceptive teaching needs for someone to speak truth into his or her life.

The result of speaking truth in love will be that we are growing into Christ in every way. Or as our text states it, *we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ (v.15b)*. The body cannot function without the head. Christ is the head of the Church in matters of, authority (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18), leadership (Eph. 5:23), and sovereign power (Col. 2:19 and in this text). Christ the head supplies the authority, leadership, and power for the rest of His body.

We are growing up into Him our head when we are submitting to Him, following Him, becoming like Him.

We know how to submit and what to submit to from our study of His self-revelation. Maybe you have seen shrubbery that is shaped in particular ways. For example, we once had a couple of hibiscus plants that looked like corkscrews. At Disney World the shrubs look like all the famous Disney characters. Rest assured that those shrubs did not grow like that on their own. The shrubs' master and creator spent much time trimming, shaping, molding according to his predetermined design.

Our Master's plan is that all the work of ministry is supposed to produce people whose character looks very much like Christ. And drawing on Christ's grace results in that kind of growth. We are growing up in Christ, *from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love (v.16).*

Spiritual growth occurs through or because of Christ-given graces. It is from Christ that *the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped (v.16a)*. The Body of Christ is held together by every joint. This work is explained and illustrated by the many "one another" passages we find in the New Testament. There are fifty-one statements in the New Testament that specifically address our relationship with or responsibility to each other with the phrase, "one another." Thirteen times we are told to love one another. Seven statements prohibit certain actions or attitudes like lying, speaking against, repaying evil for evil. Six times we are told to greet each other with a holy kiss, which is against the law in our culture. Nevertheless, we are to serve each other, encourage each other, build each other up, pray for each other, teach and admonish each other.

We can engage in this "one another" work successfully because Christ equipped us with the "joints." The statement, *from whom*, identifies the source. The Body is equipped because Christ has given each part according to His grace. Because Christ's grace is evident, each part is supposed to be engaged in the functioning and growth process.

As a result, spiritual growth appears to be self-perpetuating. *When each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it*

builds itself up in love (v.16). Christ's goal is for each part to work properly. It is just like all the parts of our physical body working together as it is pictured in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. There are also pictures of a working family, or like stones in a building that help explain this goal. Christ's grace working through each part results in the building-up process.

So how are you engaging in the growth process of the Body of Christ which is manifested in this local assembly? Showing up for preaching is important because here we receive the teaching and resources for building up the Body in the unity of the faith and knowledge of Christ. But, that resource is to be put to work in our relationships with others. Who are you mentoring, discipling, helping to grow to be more like Christ?