

Building Up One Another

Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth

As a child of God, you have a very special relationship with other Christians. Paul's letter to the Ephesians pictures this relationship in two different ways. First, every believer is a member of the Body of Christ. Christ is the Head of His Body. His Body has many members, each of which is very essential. Paul says that every member of the Body must grow up and work together. "We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into 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" (Eph. 4:15, 16).

Second, the people of God are growing into a temple for the habitation of God. "[You are] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Eph. 2:20-22).

If the Body of Christ is to become mature and the temple is to be built as a dwelling place for God, every individual Christian must be committed to building up each other. Edification is the biblical term for this process (Eph. 4:12). Evangelism leads to spiritual birth. Edification results in spiritual growth. The goal of edification is spiritual maturity and Christ-likeness. As each individual member does his part to build up the others in the Body, the entire Body grows up and becomes mature and healthy.

There are different ways to edify the Body of Christ. Many New Testament phrases with the words "one another" or "edify" suggest specific ways to build up one another. Let's look at some examples.

1. "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Eph. 4:29).

We so easily speak to one another words that hurt, criticize, or tear down or words that are just plain useless. Rather, we ought to build each other up with words of grace. Words of grace are the right choice of words spoken at the right time with the right spirit. Words of grace minister to others and meet their needs. These words express love, encouragement, acceptance and affirmation. Which of us is not built up in our spirit when we hear genuine words like, "I appreciate you." "I love you." "God has used you to

minister to me." "Thank you for your selfless ministry." "I have noticed the way God is changing this area of your life and I am rejoicing with you about it."

2. *"Be kinds to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32).*

Genuine love is not easily offended; it does not hold a grudge; it does not place expectation or demands on others; it is not conditional. As those who have received His infinite mercy and kindness, God expects us to extend the same kind of love toward each other. This kind of love puts others first and is clothed in a spirit of humility. "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor." "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Rom. 12:10, Phil. 2:4). This kind of love demonstrates the spirit of Christ by seeking for ways to serve others and is willing to be inconvenienced in order to meet the needs of others. "Through love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13).

3. *"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works . . . encouraging one another" (Heb. 10:24-25).*

The Christian life is a battle; it is a race. It is not always easy. Sometimes soldiers get discouraged. Sometimes runners get tired. They need to be encouraged. They need to be cheered on. Paul told the Hebrew Christians, who were suffering persecution and were discouraged, "Let us consider how we can spur one another on to love and serve Christ more faithfully. Let's cheer each other on!"

I remember watching a junior high basketball game one day. The home team was trailing badly. The boys were exhausted and discouraged. But instead of encouraging one another, they began to pick on each other. They began to compete against each other instead of against the other team! We are a team owned, selected, and coached by God Himself. Rather than constantly taking pride in our own achievements, we need to discover ways to stimulate and encourage others to be effective for Christ.

4. *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16).*

Every believer needs a personal relationship with the Word of God - not only for his own growth but that he might minister to others as well. Each of us needs the teaching and admonishing ministry of Spirit-filled believers. And each of us must be actively engaged in building the lives of others with the biblical truths that have been "put to work" and validated in our own lives.

Sometimes this means we must be willing to confront a brother or sister with an area of his life that is not in conformity to scripture (Rom. 15:14; Gal. 6:1; Matt. 18:15). Such admonition must always be gentle, loving and humble, recognizing that only the grace of God has given us victory in that particular area. It is not easy to build up one another in this way, for admonition is often painful. But it is also one of the greatest evidences of genuine love. I thank God for those believers who love me enough to point out areas of my life that are not pleasing to Him. Such individuals are essential in helping me to become more like Christ.

5. *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together"* (Gal. 6:2; Rom. 12:15; 1 Cor. 12:26).

One of the privileges of membership in the Body of Christ is that we need never carry a burden alone. When one of us is hurting, we all suffer together. When my Dad went to heaven, many of God's people shared that burden with me. God used their prayers, tears and words of encouragement to sustain me and remind me of His personal love for me. We must learn how to be sensitive to those who are carrying burdens. We need to practice expressing care and concern through listening, praying, encouraging and whenever possible, shouldering the burden ourselves.

There are many more "one another's" in Scripture. "Do not speak evil against one another" (James 4:11). "Do not grumble against one another" (James 5:9). "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16). None of us can become spiritually mature if we are not committed to let others build our lives and to build the lives of those around us.

God gave Jonathan a special ministry of edification in David's life. Jonathan loved David as his own life. They exchanged a lifetime commitment to meet the needs of each other's families. The Scripture gives us a beautiful insight into this relationship. One day when King Saul was searching for David in order to take his life. Jonathan came to David and helped him find strength in God (1 Sam. 23:16). Years later, in the absence of Jonathan, David once again faced a very difficult situation. This time, "David strengthened himself in the Lord his God" (1 Sam. 30:6). You see, Jonathan was a life-builder. God used him to develop David to spiritual maturity.

Whose life are you committed to build up with the "one another's" of Scripture? Commit yourselves to meet together at least once a week (more often if possible) to "build up" each other. In your times together be sure to include time for questions such as, "What specific areas of your life has God been building this week?" "What is the greatest need or burden in your life?" "What can I do to minister to you?" "Do you know of any area of my life that needs to be corrected or dealt with?" Use this time to encourage each other

with Scripture, to hold each other accountable in vital areas of spiritual growth, and to pray for each other.

What a joy it is to belong to the Body of Christ, to know that I don't have to live the Christian life by myself. Every day I am encouraged, exhorted, rebuked, loved and built up by individual members of the Body of Christ. They are committed to help me become more like Jesus. I love those people God has put in my life, and I want to fulfill my responsibility to build them up, "until we all attain to the unit 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 (Eph. 4:13).