

SPIRITUAL BODYBUILDING

Ephesians 4:7-8, 11-16 - Dennis McBride - 1992

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SPIRITUAL BODYBUILDING

God's Design for Maturing His Church
Dennis McBride - 1992

Church growth is a topic about which there is no lack of discussion in Christianity today. Of course I want our church to grow: spiritually and numerically. I believe in the principles and priorities we affirm, and want as many people as possible to learn them. However, sometimes churches can lose their biblical orientation and begin to use numerical growth as a measure of success. But the priority must be spiritual growth. When we are the church God wants us to be, He will entrust into our care the people He wants us to shepherd.

“[Hold] fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with *a growth which is from God*” (Col. 2:19).

I want a growth, but a growth that is from God, and which honors Him. Increased attendance means increased responsibility and accountability, because He holds us responsible for all who call this church their home.

“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17).

As the Lord finds us faithful and entrusts others into our care, and as we reach out to others through evangelism and prayer, we will grow numerically. In the meantime, we must focus on spiritual growth and learning to minister to one another as effectively as possible. That requires unity, harmony, and a commitment to equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. That is God's design for a healthy and growing church.

Ephesians 4:7-8, 11-16 explains that design in detail, and sets forth the priorities God wants us to pursue. Therefore, as we consider God's vision for our church, we must thoroughly grasp the principles set forth in these verses. Otherwise, our philosophy of ministry will constantly be pulled in a lesser direction, and we will never fully appreciate the purpose for our existence.

“To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, ‘When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men.’

“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 fulness of Christ.

“As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which 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. 4:7-8, 11-16).

Paul is saying that within the concept of Christian unity there is a diversity of Spiritual Gifts and ministries. How that “unity of diversity” functions is much like the human body, with all its component parts. Each part has a separate function, yet each is indispensable to the overall health and effectiveness of the body. To the degree that each member of Christ’s Body (His church) understands and ministers his or her Spiritual Gift(s), the Body is strengthened. To the degree that a member fails to minister, the Body is crippled.

Let’s look more closely at what Paul says about Spiritual Bodybuilding.

I. THE OWNER OF THE BODY

vv. 7-8 - “To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, ‘When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men.’”

A. CHRIST IS THE OWNER OF THE BODY

He has an authoritative claim on, and exclusive right to, His Body.

- 1. Acts 20:28** - Utilizing another metaphor, Paul says, “Be on guard for yourselves and for 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.”
- 2. 1 Cor. 6:19-20** - “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

B. CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE BODY

The Body is under His headship and authority.

1. ***Eph. 1:22-23*** - “[God] put all things in subjection under [Christ’s] feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all.”
2. ***Eph. 4:15*** - “We are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ.”
3. ***Col. 1:17-19*** - “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness [of deity] to dwell in Him.”

II. THE TRAINERS OF THE BODY

vv. 11-12a - “[Christ] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints.”

A. CHRIST PROVIDES GIFTED PEOPLE

“[Christ] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers” (v. 11).

1. ***He gives gifted people to the corporate Body.*** (As well as Spiritual Gifts to individual believers. See our study on Spiritual Gifts for further details.)
2. ***Key passages***

1 Cor. 12:28 - “God has appointed in the church, first *apostles*, second *prophets*, third *teachers*.”

Eph. 4:11-12 - “[Jesus] 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.”

3. *Key people*

a. **Apostles**

- 1) Apostles = (*apostolos*) = “sent one” or “one sent out.”
- 2) Qualifications of the original apostles:

They were called “the apostles” in Acts 8:1 and elsewhere.

“A great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, *except the apostles.*”

- a) They were chosen by Christ Himself

- ***The Twelve:***

Mark 3:13-15 - “[Jesus] went up to the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons.”

- ***Matthias, who replaced Judas:***

Acts 1:24-26 - They prayed to the Lord for *His* choice.

- ***James, the Lord’s brother.***

Obviously James held an apostolic position in the early church, presiding over the Counsel at Jerusalem, and called an apostle by Paul in Gal. 1:19 (see also Gal. 2:9).

- ***Barnabas:***

Acts 14:4, 14 calls both Paul and Barnabas apostles (see also 1 Cor. 9:1-6).

- **Paul:**

He was commissioned by Christ Himself on the Damascus Road.

He introduces himself as “an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God” Ephesians 1:1 and elsewhere.

He vigorously defends his apostleship in Galatians and 2 Corinthians.

- b) They were witnesses of the resurrection (the resurrected Christ - **Acts 1:22**).

1 Cor. 9:1 - Paul said, “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?” (See also Acts 22:6-10; 17-21)

Important note: *Paul was the last to meet that qualification and was thereby the last Apostle to be appointed - 1 Cor. 15:8.*

“[Jesus] appeared to Cephas . . . the twelve . . . 500 brethren at one time . . . James . . . all the apostles . . . and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also” (vv. 5-12).

- c) They were authenticated by signs, wonders, and miracles (2 Cor. 12:12--as shown above).
- d) They had great authority, which is evident throughout the New Testament:

1 Cor. 14:37-38 - “If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.”

New Testament prophets and prophetic utterances were subject to apostolic authority.

Gal. 1:8 - “Even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel

contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed.”

e) They spoke infallibly

i) ***Infallible*** = Sure, certain, will not fail.

“As men the apostles could fall. As men they could sometimes clash with each other. Yet when they stood up as spokesmen for the Lord they were infallible” (Budgen, p. 95).

ii) They knew that what they proclaimed in the name of the Lord was His Word.

1 Thess. 2:13 - “We constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God’s message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for *what it really is, the word of God*, which also performs its work in you who believe.”

iii) Paul and the other apostles received their message from Christ Himself--either while Christ was on earth, or by special revelation:

1 Cor. 15:3 - “I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received.”

Gal. 1:11-12 - “I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it [by a man], but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”

iv) Their teachings were the authoritative doctrinal foundation of the church.

Acts 2:41-43 - The 3,000 who had been saved “were continually devoting them-selves to *the apostles’ teaching* and to fellowship, to the breaking of

bread and to prayer. And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.”

- 3) Those referred to as “apostles of the churches” (better, “messengers of the churches”), did not function in the unique role of apostle as outlined above (Titus, Silas, and Timothy - 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25; Rom. 16:7).

Note: Romans 16:7 is better translated “well-known among the apostles” rather than “outstanding among the apostles.”

- 4) There are no apostles today.
- 5) The office ceased with death of John, and the completion of New Testament.

b. Prophets

- 1) Refers to the *office* of a prophet, not specifically the *gift* of prophecy.
- 2) Apostles were *more general* in their ministry, incorporating multiple churches, whereas prophets seemed to be associated with *specific churches*.
- 3) Apparently, the Apostles’ teaching was *largely doctrinal*, whereas the prophets was *more applicational* as they spoke to men for edification and exhortation and consolation (1 Cor. 14:3).
- 4) Whether Old or New Testament prophets, they were specially gifted men and women who sometimes spoke new revelation from God, sometimes reiterated previous revelations, but always spoke under divine prompting.
- 5) Therefore, they always spoke:
 - a) ***Infallibly*** - “The word of the Lord came to me, saying” was Jeremiah’s constant introduction.

This is the tone throughout all genuine prophecy because they were under divine guidance (2 Pet. 1:21).

- b) **Authoritatively** - No “perhaps” or “maybes” in their oracles. They spoke with divine authority: “Thus saith the Lord.”
- c) **Accurately** - The Holy Spirit never makes a mistake!

- The accuracy God expected of His prophets is borne out in His tests of a true prophet in the Old Testament:

Deut. 13:1-3 - Even if a prophet does signs and wonders, if he led God’s people after a false god, he was to be put to death.

Deut. 18:20 - If a prophet prophesies of the future in the name of the Lord, but his prophecy doesn’t come true, he was to be put to death.

- The accuracy of a prophet is also borne out in God’s tests of a true prophet in the New Testament:

1 Cor. 14:29 - “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.”

“Others pass judgment” could mean that the people were to *weigh the prophecy with a view to implementation* (as with the famine relief after the prophecy of Agabus in Acts 11:29ff), or could also mean that *false prophecy is to be rejected decisively* and the false prophet dealt with.

1 Thess. 5:19-22 - “Do not despise prophetic utterances. But *examine everything carefully*; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.”

Test against what? The Apostles doctrine! (1 Thess. was earliest writing of Paul).

In the context, “every form of evil” refers to false prophecy. False (inaccurate) prophecy is evil and is to be avoided by God’s people.

- d) ***Urgently*** - There was a sense of urgency in their words. They were compelled to speak even when, like **Jonah**, they would rather not speak.
- e) ***With Prediction*** - New Testament prophets didn’t *always* speak *predictively*; they often reiterated prior revelation, but New Testament prophets *always* had a predictive element to their ministries.
- **Agabus** predicted (“indicated by the Spirit”) a great famine (Acts 11:28), and Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 21:11).
 - **Ananias** disclosed the future ministry of Paul (Acts 22:12-15).
 - **Luke, Mark**, and other New Testament writers, who were not Apostles, recorded past, present, and future elements of God’s redemptive plan.
 - **New Testament writers who were Apostles** wrote of prophetic events (return of Christ, etc.).
 - **All Scripture** is summarized by Paul as “the Scriptures of the prophets” (prophetic writings):
 - **Romans 16:25** - “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and *by the Scriptures of the prophets* [prophetic writings], according to the commandment

of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith.” (See also *2 Pet. 1:20-21* - “No Prophecy of Scripture”)

- **Note:** The revelatory and predictive elements of prophecy are the primary distinctions between Prophets and teachers. Teachers do not receive direct revelation from God; they reiterate what has already been revealed.

In the Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Tim., Titus) great emphasis is placed on Elders knowing, teaching, and guarding the “faithful Word which is in accordance with the teaching” (Titus 1:9).

Nothing, however, is said of sign gifts, prophecy, or additional revelations.

In 1 Peter 4:10-11, Peter says, “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God.”

“Utterances of God” = Scripture (Rom. 3:2; Acts 7:38). They were to speak in accordance with Scripture.

- 6) There are no prophets today, and no gift of prophecy.

(See Norman Geisler’s *Signs and Wonders* for an excellent treatment of supposed modern-day prophecy.)

- 7) So-called prophets and prophecy today clearly fall short of the biblical guidelines for true prophecy (see our study of Spiritual Gifts for illustrations and documentation).

c. Evangelists

- 1) To evangelize is to proclaim the good news of salvation through faith in Christ.

- 2) New Testament evangelists, in the stricter application of the word, were missionaries and church planters.
- 3) They would found a church, build the believers up in the faith, then move on to a new work.
- 4) Their work was to preach and explain the gospel to those who hadn't yet believed.
- 5) **Philip** was an evangelist whom the Lord specially gifted to proclaim the gospel to the Samaritans (Acts 8:4-8; 21:8).
- 6) **Timothy** was instructed by Paul to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5).

d. Pastor-Teachers

- 1) **"Pastors and teachers"** = Teaching Shepherds
- 2) **"Pastor"** = Emphasizes the care, protection, and leadership of the flock.
- 3) **"Teachers"** = Emphasizes his primary function.
- 4) **1 Timothy 5:17** - "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching."
- 5) **NOTE:** Ideally a church should be led by a combination of evangelists and teaching shepherds. People gifted to bring the lost to Christ, and people gifted to lead and feed them in the Word.

e. Teachers

- 1) Teachers are not specifically mentioned in Ephesians 4:11, but are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:28.
- 2) "Teacher" is perhaps a broader term than Pastor-Teacher, referring to all who possess the gift of teaching and who edify the church thereby.
- 3) By God's design, all pastors are teachers, but not all teachers are Pastors.

- 4) The ministry of the church fell to the evangelists, pastors, and teachers as Scripture was completed and the apostles and prophets faded from the scene.

B. CHRIST PROVIDES A GREAT PRIORITY

“For the equipping of the saints” (v. 12a).

1. The meaning of “equipping”

Equipping = (*Katartismos*) “The word was a medical technical term for ‘the setting of a bone.’ The noun describes the dynamic act by which persons or things are properly conditioned” (Rienecker/Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, p. 531).

The term was also used of mending fish nets. It speaks of wholeness, completeness.

2. The tools for equipping

a. God’s Word

2 Tim. 3:16-17 - “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

b. Prayer

Acts 6:4 - “We [the apostles] will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”

c. Trials (testing)

James 1:2-4 - “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

d. Suffering

1 Pet. 5:10 - “After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.”

- e. **Restoration** (even discipline)

Gal. 6:1 - “Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore [katartizo] such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted.”

Note: As your Pastor, I focus on prayer and Scripture; God brings tests and suffering; We all participate in restoration.

3. ***My calling to equip***

- a. I am a Pastor-Teacher, called by God to equip you for spiritual service. Early in my ministry I discovered God’s design for my life was to teach His Word.
- b. That calling doesn’t eliminate my responsibility to evangelize the lost, but it does emphasize my priority. While I may be able to do other things, teaching must be the focus of my ministry.
- c. I believe that the most effective ministry a believer can render to the church is to minister in the area of his or her giftedness.

4. ***Some perspectives to embrace***

- a. We are not here to entertain you, make you feel good about yourself (if you need to feel conviction), or program you to death. We are here to equip you. That takes time and wisdom.
- b. You are to see this church, in part, as an equipping center--a spiritual gymnasium.
- c. Please guard against the “meet my needs” mentality of many church attenders.
- d. I am to equip you so that you, “may stand perfect and full assured in all the will of God” (Col. 4:12).
- e. “The pastor-teacher’s . . . work . . . is to provide the leadership and spiritual resources to cause believers to be taking on the likeness of their Lord and Savior through continual obedience to His Word and to provide a pattern,

or example, of godliness” (*Ephesians*, MacArthur, p. 152).

III. THE TRAINEES WITHIN THE BODY

v. 12b - “For the equipping of the saints.”

A. THE SAINTS

The Greek word translated “saints” is *hagion* (from *hagios*), which means “holy ones.” This term applies to *all* true Christians.

B. THE SUMMARY

1. Examples

- a. **Rom. 1:1, 7** - “Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called saints.”
- b. **1 Cor. 1:1-3** - “Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
 - Stated literally: “To the ones who have been made holy in Christ, holy by calling.”
 - One would hardly mistake the Corinthians for saints in the contemporary understanding of the term. But God saw them as such.
- c. **Eph. 1:1** - “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus, and who are faithful IN CHRIST JESUS.”
- d. **Eph. 5:3** - “Do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints.”
- e. **Phil. 1:1** - “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons.”
- f. **Col. 1:2** - “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful

brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.”

- g. **Col. 1:12** - “Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”

2. **Summary**

- a. Saints are those who:
- are beloved by God
 - are called by God as saints
 - are sanctified (made holy) in Christ
 - are recipients of an eternal inheritance
 - have called upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ
 - are to be faithful and morally pure
- b. As Christians, you are truly saints, and I am to help equip you for the work God has gifted you to do.

IV. THE GOALS OF SPIRITUAL BODYBUILDING

vv. 12c-14 - *“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 fulness of Christ.*

“As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which 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.”

A. GOAL #1: SERVING THE BODY

“For the work of service” (v. 12c).

1. The Greek word

“Work” = Diakonias, from which we get the term “Deacon.”

2. The general application

A deacon is a servant: one who cares for and dispenses the goods and property of another. Each believer is to be a faithful

steward of that which God has entrusted to him or her (Spiritual Gifts, talents, resources, etc.). Spiritual leaders are to help equip believers for that task.

3. *A crucial perspective*

- a. There is a common misconception that congregations pay the pastor to do the work of the ministry. However, God has given me a task to do, which is somewhat narrow in focus, and to which I am directly accountable to Him.
- b. By far, the most influential ministry (in terms of breadth) is yours. You are to do the work of the ministry that God has entrusted to you.
- c. The coach trains the team members to play the game. That's his responsibility. If he fails, the team languishes and loses. The coach doesn't take the field at game time. He oversees, encourages, and admonishes the players. In one sense, he's more a part of the game than the individual players, but he has a prescribed role he must attend to, otherwise things become chaotic.

Where many churches fail is in wanting to change the coaches job description to a player/coach. Beyond that, many expect him to play the game alone (i.e., "Here's my money, let's see what you can do").

- d. No matter how gifted or talented a pastor may be, the demands of the ministry far exceed his ability to handle them alone.

4. *Summary exhortations*

- a. **1 Cor. 15:58** - "My beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."
- b. **1 Pet. 4:10-11** - "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

B. GOAL #2: BUILDING THE BODY

“To the building up of the body of Christ” (v. 12d).

1. The analogy of bodybuilding

The Greek word *oikodome* means “to build up.” It was used literally with reference to building a house, building, or structure. It was used metaphorically with reference to developing, maturing, or strengthening individual believers or the church as a whole. In either case it refers to the *process* of building.

2. Old Testament usage

(In the Greek translation of the Old Testament [LXX]):

- a. It was a common term, often used in its literal sense.
- b. It was used metaphorically in reference to the regathering and restoration of Israel:

Jer. 24:1-7 - “After Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and the officials of Judah with the craftsmen and smiths from Jerusalem and had brought them to Babylon, the Lord showed me: behold, two baskets of figs set before the temple of the Lord! One basket had very good figs, like first-ripe figs; and the other basket had very bad figs, which could not be eaten due to rottenness.

“Then the Lord said to me, ‘What do you see, Jeremiah?’ And I said, ‘Figs, the good figs, very good; and the bad figs, very bad, which cannot be eaten due to rottenness.’”

“Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord God of Israel, “Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the captives of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans. For I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them again to this land; and *I will build them up* and not overthrow them, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. And I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the Lord; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart. I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness. Again *I will build you*, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel!’””

3. *New Testament usage*

- a. It was used of both numerical and spiritual growth in the early church.

Acts 9:31 - “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.”

- b. Our text (Eph. 4:12) speaks of spiritual growth.

- Church grows externally through evangelism.
- It grows internally through edification.

- c. That brings us back to the ministry of God’s Word, and the mutual ministry of individual believers.

1) The ministry of the Word

- a) **Acts 20:28** - “Now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

- b) **1 Pet. 1:22-2:5** - “Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.

“For, ‘All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord abides forever.’ And this is the word which was preached to you.

“Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that *by it you may grow in respect to salvation*, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and

precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, *are being built up* as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (emphasis added).

Note comparison of spiritual growth in 2:2 to “being build up” in 2:5.

- c) **1 Thess. 2:13** - “For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God’s message, you accepted it not as the word of man, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.”
- d) Summary of the work of God’s Word in the believer’s life:

The Word of God:

- Bears witness of Christ - John 5:39; 20:30-31
- Brings conviction - Heb. 4:12-13
- Imparts knowledge and wisdom - 1 Cor. 2:12-13
- Imparts salvation - Rom. 10:17; 1 Pet. 1:23-25
- Indwells believers- Col. 3:16; 1 John 2:14
- Strengthens believers - Col. 1:9-11
- Guides believers - Ps. 119:9, 105
- Infills believers - Col. 1:9
- Equips believers - 2 Tim. 3:16-17

Correspondingly, the Holy Spirit:

- Bears witness of Christ - John 15:26
- Brings conviction - John 16:8
- Imparts knowledge and wisdom - 1 Cor. 2:6ff
- Imparts salvation - John 3:5; Titus 3:5
- Indwells believers- 1 Cor. 6:19
- Strengthens believers - Eph. 3:16
- Guides believers - John 16:13
- Infills believers - Eph. 5:18
- Equips believers - 1 Cor. 12:11

- e) **Key principle:** The work of the Word and the Holy Spirit are paralleled in Scripture because the Holy Spirit works *through* God's Word to transform believers into the image of Christ.

2) The ministry of individual believers:

One rule that governs everything that happens within the Christian community is that everything is to be done for edification. All things must serve to build up the Body of Christ.

- **1 Cor. 14:4, 12, 26** - "One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. . . . Since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church. . . . Let all things be done for edification."
- **Rom. 14:19; 15:2** - "Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. . . . Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification."
- **1 Thess 5:11** - "Encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing."
- **Eph. 4:29** - "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear."

C. GOAL #3: ATTAINING DOCTRINAL UNITY

"Until we all attain to the unity of the faith," (v. 13a).

1. That phrase does not refer to saving faith, but to the *content* of our faith. As Jude 3 says, "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." We are to know it, guard it, and live it (Titus 2:10).
2. In an age in which doctrinal precision is often labeled as decisive and unloving, we must hold fast our commitment to biblical truth, and not be timid about refuting those who teach false doctrine (Titus 1:9).

D. GOAL #4: DEEPENING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST

“Until we all attain to . . . the knowledge of the Son of God,” (v. 13b).

That phrase refers to a knowledge of Christ that comes only through prolonged prayer, Bible study, and daily communion with Him. It goes beyond knowing *about* Christ (as important as doctrinal precepts are), to knowing Christ Himself in a deep, personal, intimate, profound, and ever-maturing way.

E. GOAL #5: GAINING SPIRITUAL MATURITY

“Until we all attain to . . . a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ” (v. 13c).

Christ Himself must be our standard for spiritual maturity. Nothing less will do. Focusing on Him eliminates all pride and pretense. We are on a life-long pursuit to be like Him, and the rate and quality of our growth is to some measure dependent upon the ministries we share with one another.

F. GOAL #6: SHEDDING SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY

“As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming” (v. 14).

We are no longer to be immature:

- Like spiritual children
- Influenced by false doctrine (waves and winds)
- Influenced by false teachers

V. THE REGIMEN FOR SPIRITUAL BODYBUILDING

“But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part” (vv. 15-16a).

How do we promote spiritual growth?

A. HOLDING TO THE TRUTH

“Speaking the truth in love” (v. 15a).

B. UPHOLDING CHRIST AS OUR STANDARD

“We are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ” (v. 15b).

C. WORKING TOGETHER IN UNITY AND HARMONY

“Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies” (v. 16a).

D. MINISTERING OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

“According to the proper working of each individual part” (v. 16b).

Note the parallel in Col. 2:18-19 - “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.”

VI. THE RESULT OF SPIRITUAL BODYBUILDING

“The proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (v. 16c).

To the degree that individual believers gain maturity and exercise their Spiritual Gifts, the Body is built up in love. There is no other way to fulfill Christ’s design for His Church.