

Norman C. Schwab  
Yacolt Efree  
September 29, 2002

### **Body Building Ephesians 4:11-16**

God designed the church as a place to grow. It was designed as a healthy loving family operates where each person plays his part, a place where you can invite people into as they grow. One of the purposes of the church is to help from new believers to spiritually mature Christians.

It's been fun having a new baby in our home. I'm amazed at the fresh and innocent beauty of her. When we brought Olivia into the church for the first time there were plenty of smiles and a crowd formed around her wanting to hold that little bundle of joy in their arms. Now she is mobile. She started crawling last week. It's great entertainment to see what she finds interesting and what attracts her attention. She loves to be rocked back and forth and laughs with glee.

Babies and toddlers are great fun, but nobody thinks its cute when a person remains a baby for too long. If a small child never learns to crawl, to walk, to feed itself. If a baby never outgrows her need for diapers then it's a sign that something is tragically wrong. Something needs to change. Professional help is needed....because babies are supposed to grow.

Spiritual babies, new believers are also a lot of fun to be around. I need to be infected by their enthusiasm and hunger. That is one thing I pray new believers will never mature, or grow up out of. Jesus was tremendously attracted to that "child-like" faith. But there are things that must grow in ones spiritual life. If a new believer never learns to feed himself in the Word. If a believer never learns to stand strong on her own when confronted with falsehood. If a believer never learns to walk in faith on her own. If a believer is content to take in, take and take more in never willing to give out and minister to others, then something is wrong.

If a believer's spiritual life remains stagnant and boring year after year then something is tragically wrong. Why? Because we are designed to grow.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Ephesians. We are continuing to study spiritual gifts and their place in the believer. We are hoping to set the foundation, the motivation, the power source and God's direction as we will then begin to study the different gifts and help all of you discover how God has uniquely crafted you for ministry and service. Ephesians is a book that is very easy to outline. Paul spends the first three chapters establishing a believers position in Christ and the last half of the book explaining the practice of how that all works out in our lives. It's a good practice to teach doctrine, position before you teach someone what they are challenged to live out. Ephesians 4 starts explaining some of the practical outworkings of being "in Christ" and saved by grace through faith (chp. 2:8,9) and God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works. Made alive with Christ, chosen before the foundations of the world. In Him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. So chapter four begins with an exhortation for we believers in the body of Christ to walk in keeping with who we are, striving for unity in the body with humility, patience and love.

Then lets pick up the context to our passage by beginning to read at Ephesians 4:7. READ v.7-10 Did you catch that phrase in v.7 But to each one is given. Paul calls for unity but recognizes the diversity within the unity is not a call to conformity. But to each one of us GRACE was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. There is that reoccurring theme of grace not only for salvation, but grace for empowering ministry of service and good works given to each one, however God decides to measure it out. Grace has been given each believer and we are to function according to the measure that Christ has given us. That means to those who have been given much, much is required. If God has

measured you out as a Ferrari then you may be able to blow others away by only staying in first gear. But that is not why He created you fast with power. You aren't made to compete against the Volkswagen people of the body. God didn't grace you with gifts to incite competition. You were made to run fast with power the gift He has measured out to you. Whatever God has measured you run it to its fullest so all of us can enjoy watching God run through you and give glory to Him. If you find yourself a Volkswagen, don't be rankled by what you have been given. It's been measured to you for a reason. Run that Volkswagen to its fullest potential and God will be pleased and you will experience the joy of being run by the master.

There is an interesting picture that Paul uses in v.8,10 that can be difficult to understand. READ. Now don't you love it when the illustrations that are supposed to explain and make things clearer simply muddy the waters in our modern American thinking. Paul has loosely quoted a summary of Psalm 68. He is describing a Roman Triumphal procession led by the victorious general who has come home after a successful battle. The leader would be in front with all his soldiers and then the spoils of wars and captives would be carted behind. It was the privilege of the general to distribute the spoils of victory however he chooses. The point Paul is making here refers to Christ's ascension to heaven after His resurrection. It's not simply an interesting fact, but the ascension shows the triumph of our Lord and establishment of His kingdom. In Acts 1:9 it says that he was received on a cloud of glory, that same shekinah glory the Old Testament speaks of. Ever since Christ descended to the earth as a God-man, died and buried and rose again, He has been collecting the spoil, the captives from the battle. The spoil is people, we who have been freed from the tyranny of our own sin and self and held captive by His love, transformed by grace and then we are given back to the church as gifts. It was in Christ death burial and

resurrection that brought about ultimate victory over the evil one. In taking us captive to Himself he actually brings us freedom. And by His grace, through faith He has saved us, we become His workmanship created for good works. We become a kingdom of priests to do His ministry here on earth. We become God's gift to the church.

That sets up the context for our passage of study this morning. So lets read Ephesians 4:11-16 (READ)

Point number one this morning. Receive the equipping leadership gifts God has given us. Look at verse 11 And He gave some as Apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists and some as pastor teachers. We will spend more time in the future fleshing out what exactly those gifts looks like. But unlike other passages that seem to emphasize the gifts that are given to believers. Here it seems the emphasis is gifted believers themselves that have been given to the church. Here in verse 11 Paul says that God has given those leaders as a gift to the body in order to equip them. Do you realize that the leaders that God has given this church are a gift from God? If they are a gift then it follows that we ought to receive well what Christ has given us for this time and place. For I believe that he has given our body everything we need to do everything that He desires to accomplish right here, right now.

In order to receive that equipping/leadership gift from Christ, it means we need to be *teachable* and *responsive* to our leaders. That means we pray for our leaders and encourage and support them. When they call us to pray in a certain area...we pray. When they lead in a certain direction of ministry we get on board. We put on a coat of teachability that only comes when we humble ourselves before God. We take our concerns not to our neighbor but straight to the leader. I'm so glad this has been a church that has received well the leadership God has gifted this church body. God has been pleased at the way we as a body has responded to the Godly leadership He has given us. We hold

that in trust. As leaders we are warned in I Peter 5 not to lord it over others or allow leadership to puff us up with pride. But leaders too are to clothe themselves with humility. Loving the people under the head leader who is the good shepherd Jesus Christ.

Jesus gave these leaders for what reason v.12 "For the equipping of the saints. That leads us into point two directed at the leaders. Equip the believers for the ministry. Those whom God has gifted the body with equipping gifts need to be diligent to equip. That is the whole reason He has gifted the body with you. Godly leadership is responsible to help people discover their gifts and then enable, equip and release them for doing the ministry. The believers will then be freed up to exercise their gifts wisely, skillfully and appropriately to grow up the body in truth and love.

The word there in v.12 equipping *katartiizo*. It is the same word used to describe the mending of fishing nets. That was the word used to describe what James and Peter were doing when Jesus called these two fishermen to follow him and become disciples of his. Just as they were equipping, repairing and restoring the nets for useful service there on the sea of Gallilee. Jesus had greater plans for them as they would be trained to one day equip, restore and repair people in the body of Christ. Equipped not to just to fix a few tears and put away in storage, but equipped for service. Ready for use.

I see the equipping leaders that God has gifted this church with similar to a Personal Trainers. I know some of us don't really look like it but in a sense we are to be body builders. If you go down to hire a personal trainer at the gym to help get you back into shape. The first thing he will probably do is to take an inventory of what kind of shape you are in right now. He might have you lift a few weights, run a while on the treadmill. In those first sessions, he may talk with you about what your goals are. Do you want more physical strength? Cardiovascular

endurance? Do you want to bulk up or slim down? Tone up or eliminate? Do you want to concentrate on the upper body, lower body or all over? See the work out will all depend on what you are planning to do with your improvements. And Ideally there is a reason you want to work-out. Where a shot-putter may need to bulk up, a ballet dancer may need to tone up. The end result isn't the work out, its what it will help you do better. The personal trainer will coach and encourage and provide direction and accountability and the "want-to" when you feel like giving up.

So also as equipping leader we need to help believers put together a goal and plan for their spiritual growth. We need to help them discover what it is they feel God has gifted them at and then provide opportunities to try out, to learn, to challenge themselves to growth in that area. We leaders are to be encouragers, coaches providing direction and accountability. We need to train and resource as best we can so that all of us can do the best job we can. So that we can grow up according the measure of grace that God has gifted us with, so that the whole church body grows. Have you ever been asked to do a job that your not trained for? Have you ever been asked to do a job without the resources needed or authority given? That's frustrating isn't it. We as leaders are committed to doing a better job at helping people discover their gift and then enabling, equipping, training and releasing them for ministry so the body can grow in love.

Often in a church it is the pastor that is the bottleneck to ministry. For some reason he has the unbiblical notion that he was hired to do all the work of the ministry. He is usually better at it then most so he feels the need to control and do most of it. Instead of releasing he stifles and controls. Its an easy trap to get into. Dale Burke tells pastors to get over the need to do it all. If there is someone who you have trained that can do it at least 80 percent as good as you then release them to do it. There

will be things they do differently than you...and that may even work out better than you imagine. I am not paid to do all the work here. I am here to equip the believers to do the work of ministry. I do a lot of ministry alongside you, but I would not be utilizing Christ's gift to our body if I am failing to equip believers along with the other equipping leaders.

Point number 3; Do your part and the body of Christ will be built up. If the equippers are equipping and the people are receiving that gift well and are responding with teachability and utilizing their gifts, the body will be built up. The body is built up and matured when each discovers its gift and develops the gift and does its job. V. 12 Gifts were given...to equip the saints...for the work of service... to build up the body of Christ.

Spiritual gifts are the tools of ministry for building the church. Many Christians have been given a tool, but they don't know what it is or how to use it. Many may not even know that they have the tool. A few years ago an aging master mechanic was getting rid of his tools and he gave me a box full of tools. I was happy to take them, but some of them I have never used and some I'm not even quite sure what they are used for. I'm sure they would be very helpful in certain situations but if I don't know what I'm supposed to be doing with what I have then it's useless to me or my family. Am I supposed to dig a hole with this? Saw a board? Pull a bearing? How can we use the tool properly if we don't recognize which tools we have in our garage and why they are used? It would be cruel to give you a box of tools and send you out into the woods to build a house if no one had ever showed you the purpose and use of each tool and had given you some training and experience using it. You might stride out into the woods full of confidence, but it's doubtful that you would get much done besides getting frustrated. We need to learn how to recognize the tools that God has put in our personalized spiritual gifts tool box and then use the tools that God has given each of us. God will

never give us a hammer and then ask us to go saw a board, nor will we give us a saw and demand that we drive nails. If God wants us to cut a board, He's going to give us a saw.

As we receive the gifts God has given, as the leaders equip and we respond in teachability, as we each begin to do our part, the body builds and grows up and we mature. Verse 13 We attain greater unity in the midst of our diversity. We become more mature men and women to the measure that God desires. We become more like Christ. If we enter this body building process we will no longer act like spiritual children, but spiritually mature believers.

V.14 the spiritually immature Paul says are tossed here and there with every wind of doctrine, by trickery of men and deceitful scheming. The first year or two after a person has come to Christ, that person is an easy mark and vulnerable to be fooled by false teachers because they have yet the solid truth under their belts to discern the genuine from the fake. Do the false teachers come and knock on your door and say, "Hi ...we are from a cult that doesn't believe in salvation by grace alone and we deny the trinity so we'd like you to listen to how we twist and distort the Scriptures in order to pull you out of your church and into our cult. May we come in? That's not the way they say it. They are far more sly and deceitful. Instead they say, "Hi we are Christians in your neighborhood talking to people about Jesus Christ. We would like to come into your home to study the Bible with you." See how subtle and crafty it is? Baby Christians and even those who ought to know better can be led astray by a false teacher on their doorstep or even on their TV. They are vulnerable to the fake until they get to know the genuine truth so well. Once they immerse themselves in the truth they will be able to spot the fake immediately, at least they will know something is not quite right and can come find the right answer.

That leads us directly to point number 4 Remember it's a process...maturity doesn't happen overnight. V. 15 But speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is Christ. That growing up implies a process it takes time. A group of tourists were visiting a picturesque village up in the alps when they walked by an older man sitting on a bench next to a fence. In a rather patronizing manner, one of the tourists asked him, "Was there any great men born in this village?" "Nope, he said, Only babies." Profound truth growth is not a microwave warm-up, it's a long slow crock-pot process. When we come to Christ we are not immediately vested with spiritual maturity...for a reason. God tends to forge Christian character in the furnace of affliction and trial and struggle and time. Suffering brings about proven character. It's a process that may at times be difficult but fully worthwhile and satisfying even in the middle for one who chooses to be teachable.

Maturity happens in the context of truth bathed in love. This is the godly balance that leads toward maturity. Never let truth be unloving in your communication with another. Truth without love is brutal and love without truth is hypocrisy. Never speak ill of another, or gossip without that other person present to defend themselves. If someone comes to you with a bit of gossip about another person in our body the most mature thing you can say is to stop them right there and say, "lets go find this person, I know they would want a chance to defend themselves, maybe it will be our chance to restore this one who is struggling. If they don't have the guts to do that and want to snipe from behind peoples back without speaking the truth in love, then you need to walk away after rebuking them for gossip. Nothing can kill the unity and spirit of a church like gossip..don't allow it to infect this body.

If we receive the gifts God has given with a spirit of teachability. If our leaders equip the saints, enable and resource and release God's people for ministry, then the body will mature and grow. V.16 the whole

body joined together causes growth together, building the church in love. Each joint, each part together in love for the glory of God. That's the picture of the church that Christ wants us to pursue.