

The Body of Christ

Lesson 8: Members Who Build Up the Body -- Ephesians 4:11-16

Picture a coach standing on the sideline during the big game, clipboard in hand, calling plays, encouraging, correcting. Now imagine if that coach decided to run out and play every position himself, quarterback, lineman, receiver, all at once. It would be absurd. No team works that way. The coach's job is not to play the game for the players. His job is to get the players ready to play. The team wins when every player does his part, not when one person tries to do everything.

For some reason, many of us picture the church the opposite way. We imagine the preacher and the elders as the players who do the actual work of ministry, while the rest of us sit in the stands and watch, evaluating the performance, cheering or complaining. But that is not the picture Paul paints in Ephesians 4. He says Christ gave leaders to the church for a very specific purpose: "to equip the saints for the work of ministry." The leaders are the coaches. The members are the players. The work of ministry belongs to all of us.

And the goal of all this equipping is staggering. Paul says it is so that we will all grow up, that we will reach "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God," that we will become mature, attaining "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The church is meant to grow up into Christ Himself. No more spiritual infants tossed around by every new idea. Instead, a body of people maturing together, becoming more and more like their Head.

Here is the heart of it: Paul says the body "builds itself up in love" when "each part is working properly." Not the leaders alone. Each part. You. The growth of the whole church into Christ depends, in God's design, on ordinary members doing their part and speaking the truth in love to one another. This lesson is an invitation to stop sitting in the stands, to take the field, and to become someone who actually builds up the body of Christ.

Group Discussion: We have all been part of groups where a few people did all the work while everyone else watched. Why does that pattern develop so easily, and what does it do, over time, both to the few who carry everything and to the many who only watch?

Personal Reflection: Be honest about your default posture in church: are you more often a participant who helps build up the body, or a spectator who evaluates how others are doing? What would it take to move from the stands onto the field?

Read Ephesians 4:11-16

Study Questions

1. Paul says Christ “gave” leaders to the church, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers, “to equip the saints for the work of ministry” (vv. 11–12). According to this verse, who is supposed to do “the work of ministry,” and how does this correct the common idea that ministry is mainly the job of the paid or appointed few?
2. Paul says leaders exist to equip you for ministry, which means God intends you to be equipped and put to work. Where have you been content to let others minister while you remain unequipped, and what would it look like to let yourself be trained and sent?
3. The goal of all this equipping is that the body would “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). What does it mean for a church to grow up into Christ, and why is maturity, not mere numbers or activity, the true measure of a healthy church?
4. Paul describes spiritual immaturity as being “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (v. 14). Where are you most easily blown off course, by cultural pressures, by appealing but false ideas, by your own changing feelings, and what would greater maturity look like there?
5. Paul says the alternative to being tossed about is “speaking the truth in love” so that “we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (vv. 15). Why does Paul join truth and love together, and what goes wrong when a church or a Christian holds one of these without the other?

6. Speaking the truth in love is a skill most of us find difficult; we tend to be either truthful but harsh, or loving but silent. Which of those two is your usual failure, and with whom is God calling you to grow in speaking truth and love together?
7. Paul says the body grows “when each part is working properly” and so “builds itself up in love” (v. 16). What does this teach about the relationship between every member doing their part and the growth of the whole church, and what happens to a body when some parts stop working?
8. Paul pictures a body where every joint and part supplies something the others need. What do you think you specifically supply to your congregation, and what is the cost to the body when you withhold it or stay on the sidelines?
9. This passage teaches that Christ designed the church to grow toward maturity and Christlikeness through the equipping work of leaders and the every-member ministry of the whole body speaking truth in love; growth is corporate, not merely individual. Why is it significant that God ties your personal spiritual maturity to your active participation in the body, and what does this say about the idea that a person can grow into the fullness of Christ while remaining a passive spectator or apart from the church?
10. Look back across Ephesians 4:11–16. Having seen that Christ means for you to be equipped and to build up His body toward maturity, name one specific way Jesus is calling you off the sidelines and into the work, and what is the first step?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Romans 12:4–8, members with different gifts, each contributing to the body; 1 Corinthians 14:26, let all things be done for building up; Hebrews 5:12–14, the call to grow from milk to solid food and maturity; Colossians 1:28, presenting everyone mature in Christ; 1 Thessalonians 5:11, encourage one another and build one another up.