

Essential Truths III: Working With God

10

Ministry to the Body

Read 1 John 3:23

In this verse, John summarizes the Christian experience.

“And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.”

The Christian life consists of two equally important elements:

- **The individual** – “...to believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ...”
- **The collective** – “...to love one another as he commanded us.”

The Christian life is not just a “me-and-God” experience. It is also a “one-another” experience. Just take a look at some of these verses in Peter’s first epistle alone:

Read 1 Peter 1:22

Read 1 Peter 3:8

Read 1 Peter 4:8

Read 1 Peter 4:9

Read 1 Peter 5:5

Read 1 Peter 5:14

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians likewise places great emphasis upon the “one-another” dynamic of the Christian life:

Read Ephesians 4:2

Read Ephesians 4:32

Read Ephesians 5:19

Read Ephesians 5:21

The Birthright

Taking the Baton

The Great Commission

The Body of Christ

The Ministry of Every Believer

Joining the Work of God

The Tree of Life

The Ministry of Reconciliation

Filled with the Spirit

Ministry to the Body

Sent into the Harvest

Speaking the Word of God

A Lifestyle Gospel

Salt of the Earth

Enforcing the Victory

Signs and Wonders

A New Kind of Leadership

Establishing a Daily Church

Making Disciples

The New Wine

The Goal of Ministry

Weaving right through the content of the New Testament is the concept that what impacts your life with God as an individual *must* have a corresponding impact upon your attitude toward and relationship with other Christians.

This concept of the inseparability of the individual and the corporate may be summed up in John's immortal words, found in **1 John 4:20-21**:

“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

The Message rephrases the core meaning of these two verses:

“If anyone boasts, ‘I love God,’ and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both.”

The Christian life is a blend between these seemingly contradictory emphases – the vertical “God-and-me” experience and the horizontal “one another” experience. The individual aspect is what I first experience as a Christian. When I am “born again” by the Spirit of God, I realize that I am saved and have come into a personal and intimate relationship with the Lord. But before long it begins to dawn on me that although this individual relationship with the Lord continues, it is not the complete picture. As Gene Getz describes it:

“Our relationship to Christ in salvation is a personal experience. We must individually receive Christ as Savior and Lord. And we must continue to nurture that relationship through personal communication and worship. But unless we are a vital part of the functioning body of Christ, we will not grow into well-balanced Christians. We need the ministry of others in our lives in order to become mature in Jesus Christ.”¹

The Bible reveals another dimension to the Christian life – what may be called the “together” dimension. *Together* we are the Body of Christ (**Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12,20**). *Together* we are being built into a temple (**2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21-22**). *Together* we express the fullness of Christ (**Colossians 2:10**).

Read 1 John 1:7

The Body of Christ

Throughout Paul's letters, the allegory of a body is used to describe the nature of the Church. Just look at these verses:

- “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ *we who are many form one body*, and each member belongs to all the others” (**Romans 12:4-5**).

- “Because there is one loaf, *we, who are many, are one body*, for we all partake of the one loaf” (**1 Corinthians 10:17**).
- “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. *So it is with Christ*” (**1 Corinthians 12:12**).
- “For we were *all baptized by one Spirit into one body* – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (**1 Corinthians 12:13**).
- “*Now you are the body of Christ*, and each one of you is a part of it” (**1 Corinthians 12:27**).
- “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for *the church, which is his body*, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (**Ephesians 1:22-23**).
- “His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and *in this one body* to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility” (**Ephesians 2:15-16**).
- “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, *members together of one body*, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” (**Ephesians 3:6**).
- “There is *one body* and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called” (**Ephesians 4:4**).
- “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹²to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that *the body of Christ* may be built up” (**Ephesians 4:11-12**).
- “From him *the whole body*, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (**Ephesians 4:16**).
- “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for *we are all members of one body*” (**Ephesians 4:25**).
- “For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, *his body*, of which he is the Savior” (**Ephesians 5:23**).
- “...for we are members of *his body*” (**Ephesians 5:30**).
- “And he is the head of *the body*, the church” (**Colossians 1:18**).
- “Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of *his body, which is the church*” (**Colossians 1:24**).
- “He has lost connection with the Head, from whom *the whole body*, sup-

ported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow” (**Colossians 2:19**).

- “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as *members of one body* you were called to peace. And be thankful” (**Colossians 3:15**).

Church life can never be fully understood without taking into account this imagery of a body. Paul says that “we who are many form one body” and then goes on to say that “each member belongs to all the others” (**Romans 12:5**) or, as the *New King James Version* puts it, we are “individually members of one another.” The *New Living Translation* renders **Romans 12:4-5** in this way:

“Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ’s body. We are all parts of his one body, and each of us has different work to do. And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others.”

This version emphasizes four clear facts about your relation to the Body of Christ:

- You are a part of the Body of Christ
- You have a specific function to play in the Body of Christ
- You belong to all the other members of the Body of Christ
- You need the other members of the Body of Christ

In **1 Corinthians 12**, Paul invests almost a whole chapter to explain how the Body of Christ works, and for good reason. The Corinthian Christians had little understanding of their unity in Christ. They exalted one leader over another, measuring themselves by themselves, each boasting in his so-called superior spirituality. As the *Teacher’s Commentary* exclaims:

“How much we need to rediscover the reality of the body of Christ today! For our age too is ruggedly individualistic. We too exalt competitiveness and individual achievement. We too find it hard to work with others in a team relationship. But we *are* a body. And it is as a body – honoring each part, ministering and being ministered to – that we must learn to live in God’s family.”²

In this lesson we are examining a key part of your general ministry as a believer in Christ: the part you play in ministering to the rest of the Body of Christ. This “inter-ministering” is described in **Ephesians 4:15-16**:

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and *builds itself up in love*, as each part does its work.”

Building One Another

What does it mean when Paul speaks of the Body of Christ “build[ing] itself up in love”? We know from Scripture that the Church is described as “God’s building” (**1 Corinthians 3:9**). Jesus declared that he would “build” his Church (see **Mat-**

thew 16:18). Peter proclaims that “you also, like living stones, are being *built* into a spiritual house” (**1 Peter 2:5**).

Two facts revolutionize our concept of the Church and the role we play within it:

The Church is a construction in progress

The Church is under construction, a work in progress. It is *being* built. In **Ephesians 2:21-22**, Paul tells us:

“In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

We are co-laborers in this construction

Although God is the Architect and the Master-Builder of the Church, every single Christian is a co-builder with God. This is why **Ephesians 4:12** explains that leadership gifts were given to the Church in order “to prepare God’s people for works of service, *so that the body of Christ may be built up.*”

This is why in **2 Corinthians 6:1**, after explaining the principles of being a minister of reconciliation in the chapter before, Paul declares to the Corinthian church:

“As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain.”

Becoming Co-Laborers with God

Read 2 Corinthians 13:10

Paul described his authority as a leader in the Body of Christ as being given specifically for building up the Church. To explain this, he parallels two ways that this authority could be used:

- ➡ Tearing down
- ➡ Building up

In the same way, you have been given a measure of authority (according to the capacity of your gifting and your role within a church) for the fulfilling of the ministry that God has delegated to you. But that authority can be used either to tear down what God is building or to reinforce what God is building.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:8

Let’s have a closer look at what it means to have a ministry of “tearing down” or “building up.”

Tearing down

There are two ways a Christian can tear down the Lord’s building – wittingly or unwittingly. Let’s first take a brief look at how we can unwittingly participate in the process of tearing down what God is building.

Read Romans 14:13-21

As we read this passage, we may think this has little to do with us today. After all the issue of “eating and drinking” is rarely an issue that arises today in church life. But in the early first century it *was* an issue. Contention had arisen over whether a Christian could:

- Eat food that had previously been sacrificed to idols (**1 Corinthians 8:4-13; 10:25-30**)
- Eat food previously prohibited by the Law of Moses (**Colossians 2:16-17**; read again **Romans 14:13-21**)
- Eat meat, or should be a vegetarian (**Romans 14:1-6**)

For some, these issues may still be real today. But for most of us, these issues are a part of history. But what of other issues of more immediate concern? Even today, there are issues such as:

- Should a Christian drink alcohol?
- Should a Christian get into debt?
- Should a Christian dance at a disco?

Paul’s advice is to make up your own mind on the issue, but to avoid being a stumbling block to another Christian who sees differently.* His principle, as outlined in **1 Corinthians 10:31-32**, is:

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God...”

As the *New Commentary on the Whole Bible* explains:

“It is not enough merely to ask whether or not something is permissible. Love goes on to consider, ‘Is it helpful and best for others?’”³

But as an active member of the Body of Christ, it is not only *unwittingly* that I can tear down what God is building. It is also more than possible that I can *wittingly* be a destructive counter-force within the Lord’s building program.

Read Galatians 5:15

The “one another” description of church life, sadly, can also have a negative expression. Not only can we build “one another” up, we can also tear “one another” down. This is why the Lord emphasizes so strongly the issue of unity and selfless concern as the basis for all ministry (note **Ephesians 4:1-4; Philippians 2:1-4**).

Satan is the master-demolitionist. Sometimes he attacks the Church with a large ball-and-chain, but more often he simply plants small demolition charges in an effort to sabotage the building efforts of the Lord. Whether wittingly or unwittingly, it is usually Christians who cooperate with him in this work of sabotage.

But God has called you to something different! He has crafted your gifting and ministry to play a specific role in the building up of others in the Body of Christ.

* Note that this principle applies only to those areas not directly or indirectly circumscribed by the Word of God. These are the so-called “gray areas” of moral conduct or, as Paul calls them, “matters of conscience.”

Building up

Read Romans 15:1-2

Read 1 Corinthians 14:12

The gifts that God gives his people vary in the degree to which they build up the Body of Christ. And so Paul encouraged the Corinthians to “to excel in gifts that build up the church.”

So what is it that builds up the Body? Paul identifies the key characteristic in **1 Corinthians 8:1**, where he again addresses the issue of “eating and drinking”:

“Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge *puffs up*, but love *builds up*.”

Paul contrasts two things – knowledge and love – to explain what it means to tear down or build up the Body. An intellectual approach to a problem, he says, has the appearance of building up, but all it does is puff up (the speaker and the hearer). In fact, the Greek word that Paul uses for “puff up” literally means “to blow up like a billows.”⁴ Only love, says Paul, actually builds the Church up toward the “full measure of the stature of Christ” (**Ephesians 4:13**).

Do you remember **ES106-07**, the lesson on “The Tree of Life”? In that study, we contrasted the two approaches to life and ministry, summed up in the two trees – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life. In a similar manner, Paul now says:

- Knowledge puffs up – produces a *bubble*
- Love builds up – produces a *building*

If we take a “knowledge of good and evil” approach to our relationships with others in the Body of Christ, we will inevitably tear down the work of God. It may give an initial appearance of “puffing up,” but the smallest pin will pop the bubble. On the other hand, if we take a “love” approach to others, we will reinforce the building work of the Lord. This is why **Ephesians 4:16** tells us:

“From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and *builds itself up in love*, as each part does its work.”

How do we “build [others] up in love”? The verse before describes the actual mechanism through which the Body of Christ “builds itself up in love”:

“Instead, *speaking the truth in love*, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.”

Read Ephesians 4:29

We are co-workers with God! We are sub-contractors on his construction site! We are not just the object of the construction process (the building itself). We are also valuable participants in the construction process (the builders). We are not just being built. We are co-builders with the Master-Builder!

Each of us has a choice to make as part of the Body of Christ: to tear down or to build up. Building up is a five-step process:

- Accept one another (**Romans 15:5-7**)
- Be devoted to one another (**Romans 12:9-10**)
- Encourage one another (**Hebrews 10:24-25**)
- Pray for one another (**James 5:16**)
- Serve one another (**Galatians 5:13-15**)

Read Acts 20:32

Learning to Encourage

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:11

In this verse, Paul equates two concepts: “encourag[ing] one another” and “build[ing] each other up.” In the original Greek, the word “encourage” means “a coming alongside” to encourage, counsel or comfort. This is the work of the Holy Spirit (**John 16:14**), who is called the Counselor, the one who “comes alongside.”*

The Holy Spirit’s primary mission is to “come alongside” the believer in order to build up the believer (individually) and the Church (corporately). But the instrument that the Holy Spirit seeks to use in this ministry of encouragement is you! Through you, the Holy Spirit builds up others in the Body of Christ!

Read Hebrews 10:25

The writer to the Hebrews rebukes those who are “in the habit” of skipping meetings, not because meetings are important in themselves, but because of what the meetings are designed to do. Do you notice the primary purpose of “meeting together”? It is so that we may “encourage one another”! Thus we see from this verse that we can get into one of two habits:

- The habit of missing meetings
- The habit of encouraging one another

Can you see that God has made encouragement the baseline of all ministry within the Body of Christ? Your primary ministry is not “teacher” or “pastor” or “intercessor.” It is “encourager”! But the way that you express that ministry of encouragement will be different, according to the gifting God has placed in your life.

Receiving and Giving

Read Matthew 10:8

God gives freely to each one of us in order that we give just as freely to one another. There are two things that we receive which we can pass on to others:

- **Revelation** (**1 Corinthians 11:23**) – what we hear *from* God
- **Experience** (**2 Corinthians 1:3-4**) – what we go through *with* God

* The Greek word for Counselor or Comforter (the name given to the Holy Spirit) is *parakletos*. The word for encouragement is *parakaleo*. Both come from the same Greek root words meaning “to call” and “alongside.”

This mutual sharing of revelation and experience is often called “Body ministry.” Body ministry is the participation of a significant portion of the members of a meeting in sharing from the Word, bringing a prophetic message or giving a testimony of God’s goodness in their lives.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:26

In this passage, Paul is actually rebuking the Corinthian church. Everyone came together with a hymn, a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation, but none of these were aimed at encouraging or strengthening other believers. Paul does not mean for the Corinthians to cease their sharing, but rather that the goal of their sharing should be focused on the building up of the church.

God desires for us to minister to one another, both during and outside of meeting times. It is for this reason that the Holy Spirit has distributed gifts to every believer (**Ephesians 4:7; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11**).

Read Colossians 3:16

Body ministry has only one purpose – to build one another up toward “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (**Ephesians 4:13**). The guidelines given for prophecy apply to all forms of Body ministry. What we say should be “for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort” (**1 Corinthians 14:3**). Humility, not pride, should be the motivation behind all Body ministry (**Ephesians 4:2-3; Colossians 3:15**). Everything should be done “for the strengthening of the church” (**1 Corinthians 14:26**).

Read 1 Corinthians 12:24-26

Body ministry works on the basis of mutual identification – knowing what the other is going through. **Romans 12:15** (KJV) says: “Rejoice with them that do rejoice; weep with them that weep.” As ministers of God’s grace, we must learn to feel with the other person, before we can truly minister comfort and encouragement to their heart.

Read Galatians 6:2

Anointing of the Spirit

Read 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

Each of the gifts of the Spirit is a “manifestation” of the anointing of the Holy Spirit – the Counselor, the “one who comes alongside.” There are many expressions of the Spirit’s anointing, but five are common in Body ministry:

- Prophecy (**Romans 15:5-7**)
- Prayer (**Romans 12:9-10**)
- Tongues, if interpreted (**Hebrews 10:24-25**)
- Sharing God’s Word (**James 5:16**)
- Song (**Galatians 5:13-15**)

During Body ministry, the anointing of the Spirit can be expressed in any of these (and other) forms. It is the same anointing, but expressed in different ways. According to Paul, this anointing is under your control (**1 Corinthians 14:32-33**), and can be expressed in a form that best fits the time and situation.

Not every meeting is suited to Body ministry, but under the guidance and correction of leadership, ministry through the participation of many believers can bring great encouragement and growth. God desires for us to be filled with his Spirit, and that the overflow of this infilling will spill over in the form of encouragement and comfort to the lives of others within the Body and out in the world. As Paul states in **Ephesians 5:18-20**:

“...be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord...”

Pray carefully about the Life Assignment described on the right. When you have completed this Life Assignment, go to:

www.online-bible-college.com/as/la106-10.htm

Life Assignment

Put what you have learned in this lesson into practice. This week, follow these three steps:

Step 1: Identify a Person

Ask the Lord to help you identify a person who needs encouraging.

- Someone discouraged
- Someone under pressure
- Someone overworked
- Someone always ministering
- Someone anxious or fearful
- Someone physically ill
- Someone grieving
- Someone who's jobless
- Someone lonely

Step 2: Identify a Message

What can you say (or do) to encourage this person? This may or may not involve a verse of scripture.

Step 3: Identify a Method

- Person-to-person
- By letter or card
- By email
- By phone
- By any other means

Be creative, but most importantly, be sensitive – both to the Lord and to the person's needs.

Remember **James 1:22!**

¹ Gene A. Getz, *Encouraging One Another* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1982), p.9.

² *Teacher's Commentary*, 1 Corinthians 12-14, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0.

³ *New Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0.

⁴ Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House), p.411.

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