

Theme: Christ's "Body Building" Program

1. Equipped
2. United
3. Growing

Dear fellow members of the body of Christ,

One of the main themes of Paul's letter to the Ephesians is the Holy Christian church—the sum total of all believers in Christ. In today's text we will hear Paul use an illustration comparing Christ's Church to the human body. In fact, in our text he calls the Church "**the body of Christ**" (v. 12). It is our Savior's desire to make His church, His body, stronger and larger. Today we will be taking a look at how He does this. These verses, which make up our sermon text, describe for us **Christ's "Body Building" Program**.

Ephesians 4:11-16 (EHV)

¹¹ He himself [Christ] gave the apostles, as well as the prophets, as well as the evangelists, as well as the pastors and teachers, ¹² for the purpose of training the saints for the work of serving, in order to build up the body of Christ. ¹³ This is to continue until we all reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, resulting in a mature man with a stature reaching to the measure of the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ The goal is that we would no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, when people use tricks and invent clever ways to lead us astray. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we would in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, being joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows in accordance with Christ's activity when he measured out each individual part. He causes the growth of the body so that it builds itself up in love.

There are many parallels that can be drawn between the spiritual building up of Christ's church, and the physical building up, and strengthening of the human body. Millions of Americans head to gyms and fitness clubs each day in order to get their bodies into shape. A major selling point for most people is how well equipped the fitness club is: Does it have the right staff and the proper equipment to help you begin looking and feeling your best? Most gyms have personal trainers on staff to help people set up personal workout programs and help monitor their progress to make sure that they are meeting their fitness goals. Most gyms and fitness clubs also have many different types of exercise equipment, from treadmills and ellipticals, to weight machines and free weights.

In the same way, Jesus has made sure that His Church is fully **1. Equipped** for "body building"—that is, the building of His body, the Church. First of all, Christ has given His church a fully trained and qualified staff: v. 11 "**He himself [Christ] gave the apostles, as well as the prophets, as well as the evangelists, as well as the pastors and teachers.**" Christ has given His Church these men and women to be "spiritual personal trainers" to God's people ("**the saints**" v. 12). Paul tells us that they have been given and called by Christ, "**for the purpose of training the saints for the work of serving, in order to build up the body of Christ.**" (v. 12). Ever since He ascended into heaven, Christ has been using His **apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors** and **teachers** to personally train and help the individual members of His body make the whole body stronger. He uses His called servants "**for the purpose of training the saints for the work of serving** ("ministry")" and for building each other up.

That brings us to our second point: Not only has Christ provided the right staff for His "**Body Building**" **Program**, He has also provided His Church with the proper "equipment." The "equipment" that the Lord has given His called servants, and all His saints, to use to strengthen and build up His body is His Holy Word—the Bible. His Word strengthens each one of us individually, while at the same time it is also what unifies us and makes us **2. United** as one body under Christ. This is our goal as believers: that "**we all**

reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, resulting in a mature man with a stature reaching to the measure of the fullness of Christ” (v. 13). Our unity, our oneness in the faith is to be based on the **“knowledge of the Son of God.”** The word for **knowledge** here in the original Greek literally means *full or complete knowledge*. We come to a full and more complete knowledge of Christ by using the “equipment” He has given us. His Word lets us know Him better. It tells us more about Himself and His saving relationship with us.

This is, of course the ideal: that all Christians—young and old—come to a complete and full knowledge of Christ, based on what He has revealed about Himself in the Bible. However, because we are sinful and imperfect, our knowledge of Christ while we are on this earth will be imperfect. Because of Satan’s lies, people’s own misinterpretations, and our lack of perfect knowledge, our unity of faith with other Christians will also be imperfect in this life. This perfect knowledge and perfect unity of what we know and believe will be ours when we reach heaven. Paul used the same expression for this “full knowledge” when he told the Corinthian Christians, **“Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).**

Does this mean that we should compromise and give up trying for complete knowledge and perfect unity in what we believe and teach? No. Everyone who goes to the gym knows that they will never achieve perfect health, no matter how much they exercise, or how well they take care of their bodies or eat right. Yet they continue to strive for improvement, better fitness, and better health. God desires this perfect unity in His church, and as His children, we want what God wants. Therefore, we are always striving for that ideal. Since we can never reach this ideal in this life, we know that there is always room for more improvement and growth, and no room for complacency or stagnation in our faith life. There is no limit to the amount of knowledge we can gain through God’s Word. There is no limit to the unity that His Word can create between Christians. He has given us imperfect human beings His perfect word on which we base our unity. In His word we find our common faith, our common confession, and our common purpose. Paul speaks of that “oneness” and encourages us in the verses just before our sermon text, **“Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in the one hope of your calling. ⁵ There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all” (Ephesians 4:3-6).**

As individual members of Christ’s body, having that unity of purpose is vitally important. All of us have a role to fulfill in **Christ’s “Body Building” Program**. We have not all been equipped to perform the same roles, but we all are needed. None of us have been given so little that we can’t contribute—at the very least we can all pray for the other members of Christ’s body. Yet, at the same time, none of us have been given so much that we can think that Christ’s church can’t get along without us. Each one of us needs to carefully examine every area of our lives—our occupation, our abilities, our finances, our family, our strengths, and our weaknesses—and prayerfully determine with God’s help, “How can I best use my role as a member of the body of Christ to serve the good of the whole body?” If each one of us members have this attitude toward ourselves and Christ’s body as a whole, then growth is inevitable. Paul reminds us that the purpose of **Christ’s “Body Building” Program** is the **3. Growing** of the body. He says in **v. 16**, **“From him [Christ] the whole body, being joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows in accordance with Christ’s activity when he measured out each individual part. He causes the growth of the body so that it builds itself up in love.”**

This “growing” that Christ causes in His body is first of all internal. We spoke earlier of how Christ wants all of us to become united in faith through our knowledge of Him. One of the main reasons for this is because He wants us to become more mature Christians, firmly rooted and joined to the body of Christ. He wants to make us **“a mature man with a stature reaching to the measure of the fullness of Christ.” (v. 13b).** The word used there can be translated “adults.” Jesus wants to make us “grown ups,” mature adults in our faith so **“that we would no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every**

wind of teaching, when people use tricks and invent clever ways to lead us astray. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we would in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head” (v. 14-15).

Jesus also wants to make His body stronger. Paul says that Christ is “building up,” His own body through the various individual members of His body. When you are working out and exercising physically your muscles can not only become stronger, they can also grow larger. The same happens with the body of Christ. As His individual members and the entire body as a whole gets stronger, it also naturally grows larger. When all the members of the body of Christ are working together according to the gifts that he or she has been given by Christ, “**He causes growth of the body**” (v. 16). Christ, our Head, is one who supplies us with the ability to do this, and He is the one who causes the increase.

He also is the one who supplies us with the key ingredient to strengthen and build up the body of Christ: **love**. Listen again to those words of the last verse of our text: “**He [Christ] causes the growth of the body so that it builds itself up in love**” (v. 16). Christ’s incredible love for us is what compels us to show love to our fellow members of His body, and reach out in love to those who are not. **In love** the body of Christ is edified and built up. This means that we show Christ-like care and concern for each other. We are patient with each other, and encourage each other to continue serving Christ with our gifts and abilities. **In love** the body of Christ speaks the truth. This means that no matter whom we are talking to, believer or unbeliever, we speak the truth of Christ and His Word, but we do so **in love**. Not arrogantly—“I have the truth and you don’t”—as if we did anything to deserve this gift. Not timidly either, showing love for the dying souls of our fellow man by courageously speaking God’s truth, even when it’s not popular or welcome.

When we are physically building our bodies by working out and exercising at a gym or a fitness club, we are required to pay for a membership that will expire after time. However, our membership in the body of Christ is not only an absolutely free gift of His grace, it also has no expiration date! In Christ, we have been given the free gift of spiritual fitness through the forgiveness, which He won for us on the cross, and the faith, which He created in our hearts through His Word.

- ✠ He has given us trained and qualified “personal trainers” who help **equip** us for the work Christ has called us to do.
- ✠ He has **united** us as individual members of One body, through faith in Him and His Word.
- ✠ Finally, He keeps His body, His church, **growing**—maturing in faith and growing stronger and larger in love.

Thanks be to God that we have been made members of His “**Body Building**” Program. Through His help and His motivation let’s all strive to get our “workouts” in everyday! Amen.