

Today is Super Bowl Sunday. What a perfect time to hit this passage on building up the body of Christ. Some of us will be watching men who have natural ability combined with disciplined training. It took a lot of hard work and training to make them into the physical specimens that can perform to such a degree. I can't imagine two or three 250 pound men running into my body at top running speed. How in the world they could hang onto a ball while enduring that is beyond me! And the accuracy with which those quarterbacks can hurl that oval shaped pigskin in a perfect spiral is astounding.

Every one of those team members had to show they were big enough, disciplined enough, fast enough, and focused enough to outperform thousands of other men who would love to be in their place. After all, you just stay in great shape and play a game and collect your huge paycheck. Well you do risk permanent bodily injury, but that doesn't stop thousands from trying to get on a pro team.

The body of Christ has coaches too. They are the elders of the local church. They don't get paid as much, usually nothing at all, and their job is infinitely more important. We talked about them last week when we came to verse 11. *11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,* (See the sermon Gift Giver) I spoke of my personal conviction that the apostles and prophets were the foundation builders in the first century that laid the foundation of the church that Paul described at the end of chapter two. (2:20) Interpretations differ on this point.

The evangelist and pastor/teacher are still functioning today. The book of Acts describe the pastor/teacher as elders and use the term pastor (*poimen* Acts 20:28) and elder (*presbuteros* Acts 20:17; also see 1Peter 5:1-2) interchangeably. Elder is always used in the plural unless speaking of an individual. Paul instructed Titus to establish elders (plural) in every town (singular)(Titus 1:5). **The church has gotten away from having equal and accountable elders and has gone to a CEO model, and the results have been devastating.** It started early in church history over a lack of qualified men and is still a major problem today.

One man can't do all the work. One man can't equip everyone in the church, make all the visits that are needed, prepare and deliver every sermon and teach every class, resolve every problem and counsel and encourage every struggling member, let alone marriage counseling, funerals, building maintenance and on and on. Because of the "one man does it all" system, only 1 in 10 will retire while still in ministry. They resign or are fired and try again in another location. Many times they simply find another occupation.

Part of the difficulty is that the Bible sets the qualifications very high and few are able or willing to consistently live up to that standard and come alongside the pastor in ministry. The standard has to be there to keep the church on the right track. We are a small church

Commented [notes1]: Galatians 4:19 (ESV)
¹⁹ my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!

Commented [notes2]: Acts 20:28 (ESV)
²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

Commented [notes3]: Acts 20:17 (ESV)
¹⁷ Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.

Commented [notes4]: 1 Peter 5:1-2 (ESV)
¹ So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed:
² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

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but are blessed with elders that love the Lord, His Word, and you, the church body. We also have women that are capable of teaching the younger women. (Titus 2:3-5) As the elder that is employed to do most of the preaching/teaching, I'm blessed to be a part of a team that shares the load. The elders all have secular jobs and so can't devote as much time as they would like, but they are willing to take the time they are not at their occupation and invest it in you. We also are blessed with the trustees that care for the property so that I don't have to deal with the physical building.

Commented [notes6]: Titus 2:3-5 (ESV)

³Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good,
⁴and so train the young women to love their husbands and children,
⁵to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

Our passage today is telling us that the elders are ¹² *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ*. They are to come alongside you like a coach and give you what you need to step into the calling God has for you. They are to feed, care for, and lead the flock. You should feel free to go to them when you need instruction, Scripture, guidance, or prayer. If you are struggling in an area, go to one of your elders, including myself, and let us equip you. Often they don't know you have a need unless you mention it.

Our desire is for every member to be walking in the calling and ministry that God has uniquely given you. (1Corinthians 12:4-5) It may be prayer, service, giving, hospitality, encouragement, or any number of gifts, but whatever it is, we want you to be the best you can be for the sake of Jesus and His kingdom. Let us know how we can equip you and build you up.

Commented [notes7]: 1 Corinthians 12:4-5 (ESV)

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;
⁵and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord;

We want you all to be pro level servants in the kingdom of God. That means discipline and dedication. You won't get a pro-football salary; you'll get something better. You will lay up treasure in heaven and have a rewarding life. (Matthew 6:20)

Commented [notes8]: Matthew 6:20 (ESV)

²⁰but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

I was listening to one of Adrian Rogers' sermons this week. It was on God saving the best for last. He said the Devil always gives the best first and then you find out it is going to cost you a lot more than you ever imagined. Christians, however, have the best to look forward to. Well, I don't quite agree with him there, as we have the best right now in Jesus and our fellowship with him, but I understand his point. He went on to illustrate it by asking what old atheists sit around and talk about. What do they have to look forward to? One atheist said, "Sure was fun when I was younger. Can't do any of the things I enjoyed then." "Well soon our meaningless existence will be over," the other responded. "At least we won't be bored!" the other replied.

Christians are another story. We keep serving till the day we die. Biddie can't cook donuts at 4 A.M. for Christian students any more, but she can pray. Oh the smile on her face when she talks about her prayer time in God's presence! And someday in the not too distant future she'll step over Jordan receive her reward. She'll see Jesus' face to face. She can hardly wait. What a difference! She is a pro! And her paycheck is so much bigger than a pro-ballplayer's that there is simply no comparison! (Romans 8:18) How many women

Commented [notes9]: Romans 8:18 (ESV)

¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

has she built up in the faith? Only God knows! She'll be waiting for them when they get there.

What does this "building up" look like? You hear me say it again and again. The goal is to look like Jesus. (1John 3:2) Here's how Paul put it in another letter, ²⁸ *Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.* ²⁹ *For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.* Colossians 1:28-29 (ESV) And in yet another letter, ¹⁹ *my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!* Galatians 4:19 (ESV) "Built up" is to have the fruit of the Spirit in all its fullness in your life. That is to have Christ formed in you. He demonstrated every fruit of the Spirit perfectly. It is a lifelong road of discipline and surrender, but the result is spiritual maturity and fruit that remains. (John 15:16)

So the evangelists and pastor/teachers are to build up the body ¹³ *until we all 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,* This is spiritual maturity, the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. That is the goal! We thought that in the last chapter Paul was perhaps a little over the top when he prayed we would be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (3:19) Apparently it wasn't an exaggeration. He really believed that the individuals in the body of believers should mature to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

What would that look like? Certainly it would be a holy life. It would express all the fruits of the Spirit, loving, kind, gentle etc. (Galatians 5:22-23) It would always be surrendered to the will of God. It would be walking with God each day. I don't believe it would necessarily be filled with miracles like the life of Christ, for Christ was demonstrating His power over all things, but it might include being an instrument for God to do the miraculous. It would be a life of faith. (Hebrews 11:6)

My little faith wonders if it is possible to mature to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, but then we have that benediction that Paul prayed after he prayed we would be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. *To Him who is able to do abundantly more than all we ask or think, to Him be glory in the church...* As we, the church, increasingly mature, we increasingly bring glory to God, for people increasingly see the outshining of Jesus. Just because you are stumbling along and not the spitting image of the life of Jesus doesn't mean you can't glorify Him to the level of your current maturity. Don't be discouraged that you haven't arrived. It's a lifelong process. Keep on increasing! (2Corinthians 3:18)

Our passage said we are to attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. The more we mature, the more united we are in the faith for the main things increasingly become the main thing in our life. Those core issues of who Jesus is and what

Commented [notes10]: 1 John 3:2 (ESV)

² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

Commented [notes11]: John 15:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

Commented [notes12]: Ephesians 3:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Commented [notes13]: Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Commented [notes14]: Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)

⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Commented [notes15]: 2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

He did increasingly become our focus while the peripheral issues settle into the less important place. Over my Christian life, many of the less important issues became too important, too much of my focus. They are important, but not nearly as important as Jesus. I certainly have my convictions and they will come out in my teaching and preaching, as they have in this sermon, but they should never distract from who Jesus is and what He has done for us. (Romans 10:9-10)

That is why the second part of that verse says "in the knowledge of the Son of God". **We need to know Jesus. That is the road to maturity.** That is the road to Christ likeness. Know Him more intimately. Love Him more deeply. Study His words. Let them speak to you personally. Commune with Him in prayer. God gifted us with teachers to build us up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood. Attend a Bible study or two. Read through the Bible with us. Take time to pray. Jesus said, "Learn of me!" (Matthew 11:29) That is where you will find rest for your soul.

Why do we need to grow up and mature in our faith? It's ¹⁴ *so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.* There are hundreds of false beliefs bombarding mankind, doctrines of devils that the Bible warns will abound in the last days. (1Timothy 4:1) There are false messiahs. Each one will lead you to have some kind of faith in yourself, or dependency on them so that you don't think you need a personal walk with Jesus. (2Peter 2:1-3)

They are cunningly worded and sprinkled with half-truths. They are enticing because they promise things that puff up our pride. They often tell you that you have the power within, and you can become a spiritual leader with knowledge others crave. After 9/11 there was a report of thousands of Americans converting to Islam. How counterintuitive! People are hungry for an "I can do it" religion. "Just follow the 5 steps of Islam and you will please God," they say. Why would anyone want to join a group after it murdered thousands of innocent people? It is cunningly seductive.

Another deceitful scheme says, "Just pay \$5000 for this course on skipping your fifth karmactic life cycle and then you can teach it to others." Pride and easy wealth lure the uninformed. I've heard people tell me a number of times, "I used to be where you are, but I've evolved." Well, if they've evolved beyond Jesus, I certainly don't see any evidence. Part of the problem is often that they were inoculated to Christianity by liberal theology that had no power or relationship with the living God.

When they are told that they are god (Genesis 3:5), the crafty purveyors of these false teachings have another soul ready to pay for enlightenment. It reminds me of the sorcerer that asked Peter the price necessary to buy the Spirit. Peter responded, "Your money perish with you!" (Acts 8:20) The gift of relationship with God can't be bought. We call

Commented [notes16]: Romans 10:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

Commented [notes17]: Matthew 11:29 (KJV)

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

Commented [notes18]: 1 Timothy 4:1 (ESV)

¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,

Commented [notes19]: 2 Peter 2:1-3 (ESV)

¹ But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

² And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.

³ And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Commented [notes20]: Genesis 3:5 (ESV)

⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Commented [notes21]: Acts 8:20 (ESV)

²⁰ But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!"

buying a relationship, "prostitution". Jesus paid our sin debt so we, rich or poor, could freely enter into a relationship with God without cost.

Instead of the cunning craftiness that seduces the spiritually unstable, ¹⁵ *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,* We tell the truth in love, gently, respectfully, but honestly. It's free. It isn't a path to being your own god, but rather the humble path of dying to yourself so that Christ can live in you! (Matthew 16:24) As the head of the body, He tells us what to do and when to do it. No more good ideas or programs! We wait on Him and do as He directs. That is growing up in every way into Him, for He only did what He heard from the Father. (John 5:30)

Jesus, the head ¹⁶ *from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.* Each member of the body with its own unique gifting and instruction works together for the whole. When the head tells the legs to jump, He isn't telling the arms to jump. When He tells the hands to reach out and hold, He isn't telling the feet to grab something. Let each part hear and obey. We want to equip you to do just that. When we all hear from the head and live for the whole body, then we work properly and in a way that builds the whole up in love. (1Thessalonians 5:11)

If one part tries to imitate another part, or decides it is going to work for itself and begins to ignore the head, the body is in trouble. The whole suffers. Let me give you an example from the book, *In the Image of God* by Paul Brand and Philip Yancey. The fat cells are marvelous little storehouses. We need them. We may not like them, but when we run low on energy, these little storehouses keep us from crashing. They release their stored up fuel and the body goes on with its work. There are cases when the fat cells refuse to release their fuel when needed. It is a cancerous condition called lipoma. They grow and reproduce and store and store until a large fat tumor is seen. If not treated, it can grow large than the rest of you. Those cancerous cells are in mutiny toward the head. It's ugly! It's sad. Perhaps that teaches us in the American church that we need to be ready to give of our abundance when we see a need in the body of Christ around the world, as indeed you are doing.

You see, we not only work together with this local body of believers that attend here, but we are a part of the worldwide body of Jesus. Only when we obey the head will we grow and build one another up in love and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Are you listening to the head? Are you living to know Him better? Is He your life? Are you becoming a serious, disciplined pro-player, an MVP? What gift has he given you, and how can the elders equip you and build you up? Let us know, please. I can't predict the winner of today's game, but I know that ultimately Jesus' team is going to win. Get in the game.

Commented [notes22]: Matthew 16:24 (ESV)

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Commented [notes23]: John 5:30 (ESV)

³⁰ "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

Commented [notes24]: 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (ESV)

¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

Train! Practice! (Titus 1:8) Spiritually exercise. We are all meant to be MVPs by letting Jesus live in us. Now, let's take the field!

Commented [notes25]: Titus 1:8 (ESV)

⁸but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

We already know the final score. We win! But we have the privilege of working together to see that victory become complete. Take your position. I won't say play to the best of your ability, but rather, let the power of the Holy Spirit make you one of God's many MVPs!

Questions

- 1 How does the Bible describe New Testament coaches?
- 2 What instruction has most of the church missed?
- 3 What is the result? Have you seen it?
- 4 What is the elder's role?
- 5 What does "built up" look like?
- 6 To what are we to attain?
- 7 How do we mature in the knowledge of the Son of God?
- 8 How are people lured from the truth?
- 9 Where does each get instructions?
- 10 What happens when we don't?
- 11 What is the lesson of the fat cells?