

## Principle #7

# Body Life 2 – Maturity *equipping the saints*



## Principles of Discipleship

Paul calls all of us together a “body”. What kind of shape is our body in? How can we “shape up” and work as we were intended? By building up one another, says Paul. And he points the way to the spiritual “gym” in Ephesians 4.

<sup>1</sup> As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. <sup>2</sup> Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. <sup>3</sup> Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit -- just as you were called to one hope when you were called -- <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

<sup>7</sup> But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. <sup>8</sup> This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."

<sup>9</sup> (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)

<sup>11</sup> It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> 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.

### Main Passage: Ephesians 4:1-16

1. Paul mentions a lot of “one’s” in this passage. What are they? How are they connected?



2. Why does God give the various gifts listed in 4:11?

3. What does it mean to “build up” or “edify”?

4. What does Paul say causes the body to grow?

5. Taking ideas from this passage and also from other New Testament passages, describe what you think a “mature” Christian looks like. What would be some of the essential ingredients for maturity?

## The “Fatal Comma” and the Meaning of Ephesians 4:12

Ephesians 4 is a good example of how a particular translation can drastically change the meaning of a verse. Verse 11 is fairly clear no matter what translation you read (“God gave apostle, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers...”) and verse 13 is essentially the same (“until we reach unity...”), BUT verse 12 reads very differently depending on your version you read. What differences do you see in these 3 translations? What is each one saying is the job of the four types of leaders mentioned in verse 11?

- ⇒ New International Version: *“to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up”*
- ⇒ New American Standard: *“for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ”*
- ⇒ King James: *“For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”*

The King James Version places a comma after “saints”, which makes the verse say that these 4 groups of leaders do all three jobs: perfecting saints, doing the work of ministry, and edifying the Body. What do the “saints” do? That’s right – nothing! They’re spectators.

But take away that comma (which actually doesn’t even exist in the Greek manuscripts) and what do you get? Suddenly, leadership has only one responsibility: “perfecting” or “equipping” the saints, who then do the ministry.

What a difference! Now everyone has a part to play – leaders can focus on equipping, and then they won’t get burned out doing everything. And the “saints” can discover and use their gifts, which ends their “unemployment”.

### How have you been personally effected by this verse?

- Have you generally attended churches that model the King James reading of this verse, or the way the NIV and NASB portray it?
- Do the leaders in your church tend to be equippers or do they do everything?
- On a scale of 1 -10 , how would you characterize your church experience? Would you rate yourself more as a “spectator” or a “player”?

spectator    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10    player

### Have you been “equipped”?

- In what areas do feel spiritually equipped to function in the Body?
- In what areas do you feel a need for more help?

**“A  
functioning  
body is  
absolutely  
essential for  
growth and  
maturity to  
take place in  
the church.  
The very  
nature of  
the body of  
Christ makes**



**it important  
for every  
member to  
function and  
contribute  
to the  
process of  
edification.”**

Gene Getz,  
Sharpening the Focus  
of the Church



When Paul speaks of the church as a body he makes it clear that no one joins that body except by a new birth, through faith in Jesus Christ. There is no other way into this body. Once he has become a part of that body, every member has contribution to make. As each member works at what God has given him to do, the whole body functions as intended. When Paul describes the church as a building he makes clear that it is a living, growing building. Every Christian is a stone added to that building, a “living stone” as Peter calls him in his first letter. Each is a vital part of the great temple which the Holy Spirit is building as a habitation for God. We can never understand the church till we accept that picture. Many people, seeking to discover God today, say that he is dead. The trouble is, they do not know his present address. They don’t know where he lives. But he is very much at home in his body, the building made for him by the Holy Spirit.

If we think of the church as a body, then in Ephesians 4 we are viewing the physiology of that body – how the organs operate, how the various members are coordinated to do things. If we think of the church as a building, then we are considering the blueprints, the architecture, of the building. But whether the church is regarded as a body of a building, there are four ministries, or functions, within it which are so universally needed and so mutually shared that we must consider them independently from the other gifts which Christ gives to his church. These four are now brought before us by the apostle in verses 11 and 12:

His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up of the body of Christ.

These four – apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers – are the gifts we reserved for later discussion and are part of the gifts which a risen Lord imparted to men. They constitute what we shall call “support gifts” as contrasted with the “service” and “sign” gifts previously considered from 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. These four relate to the whole body of Christ very much as the major systems relate to the physical body. There are, within the human body, four major systems upon which the entire body is dependent for proper functioning: the skeletal and muscular framework, the nervous, the digestive and the circulatory systems. There are other systems in the body which are not essential for life itself (such as the reproductive system) but these four are. In a most remarkable way they correspond to the four support

ministries within the body of Christ.

First, there is the basic structural system of bones and muscles. This gives the body its fundamental support and makes possible mobility and activity. We would all be nothing but rolling masses of gelatin if it were not for the bones and muscles. This clearly corresponds to the apostles and their function in the body of Christ. Their work was foundational, skeletal. They formed the basic structure which made the body of Christ assume the particular form it has.

The apostolic gift is still being given today, though in a secondary sense. There is no new truth to be added to the scriptures, but the body of truth which we have is to be taken by those who have an apostolic gift and imparted to new churches wherever they may begin. It is part of the apostolic gift to start new churches. We call those who do this “pioneer missionaries” today. Through the course of church history there have been many such secondary apostles as Adoniram Judson in Burma, William Carey in India, Hudson Taylor in China, etc. These were men who had the apostolic gift and were made responsible for imparting the whole faith to new churches.

To return to the figure of the body, this apostolic system of truth is the bones and muscles of the church. There is no other line of truth about Jesus Christ. There is no other information which can come to us about Jesus than what the apostles have given. There is nothing else. If there seems to be, then, as Paul says to the Galatians, “it is another gospel”. It is something different (Acts 4:12; Gal. 1:7). Here is the skeleton of the body and upon this the church is built and from this comes its strength.

Linked with the skeletal system in the human body is the nervous system. It is the means by which the bones and muscles are stimulated to activity, galvanized into action. The nervous system is the directive system. It is linked directly to the head, and from there it conveys messages to every part of the body. This system corresponds to the work of prophets in the body of Christ.

The gift of a prophet differs from that of an apostle: The apostles give an authoritative declaration of the whole body of truth concerning Jesus Christ; but the prophet interprets that authoritative word and explains the truth so that it becomes very clear, vital, and compelling. The very word “prophet” suggests this. It derives from a Greek root which means “to cause to shine,” and is linked with the prefix “pro” which means “before”. Thus a prophet is one who stands before and causes the word of the apostle to shine. That is beautifully reflected in Peter’s second letter

when he says, We have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to him as to a lamp shining in a dark place (2 Pet, 1:19). Paul also says in 1 Corinthians 14, He who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation (v.3).

The third support ministry within the body of Christ is the evangelist. He is linked with the work of the pastor-teacher. Evangelists and teaching pastors work together just as the apostles and prophets work together. Evangelists are men and women with a special gift of communicating the gospel in relevant terms to those who are not yet Christians. Since the evangelist is primarily responsible for the growth, numerically, of the body of Christ, his ministry corresponds to the digestive system within the human body which takes food which is quite unlike flesh and transforms it into flesh and bones, making it a living part of the body.

All Christians are expected to evangelize, but not all have the gift of an evangelist. Christians are to evangelize, but not all have the gift of an evangelist. Christians are to evangelize as witnesses, but a witness is different than an evangelist. Any individual Christian should be able to related what happened to him in becoming a Christian; to give a simple testimonial of what Jesus Christ has done for him. This is as easy as talking about any other meaningful experience. If you can talk about how wonderful your husband is, or your wife, or your children or grandchildren, you can also witness for Christ. To talk about your Christian experience simply and naturally is Christian witnessing. But an evangelist goes further. He knows how to explain the why and how of the great redeeming story of Jesus Christ.

He is able to proclaim the truth which results in new birth. He is forever dealing with the truth that God has not left man in a hopeless condition but has made a way, at great and incredible cost, by which men and women involved in an endless battle against the deteriorating forces of life, can be freed, given anew start and a new basis for the battle. That is the work of an evangelist.

Many Christians today possess the gift of an evangelist, both men and women. Evangelism can be done anywhere. It is not restricted to mass meetings, such as in the great Billy Graham crusades, though Graham's ministry is also true evangelism. The gift of an evangelist can be exercised toward a single individual, as is clear in the book of Acts when Philip the evangelist spoke to the Ethiopian eunuch as he was riding along in a chariot and told him of the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

The fourth great system within the physical body upon which the body is totally dependent for life is the circulatory system with its veins and arteries linked to

the heart and lungs to distribute food and oxygen to every part of the body, and take away the accumulated wastes. Obviously this corresponds to the work of teaching pastors within the body of Christ who are there to maintain the life of the body by feeding and cleansing it and preserving its life in vigor and vitality. The word 'pastor' means a shepherd. The pastor is also called in the Scriptures an elder, as well as overseer or bishop. These last two are the same Greek word, translated in two different ways. "Bishop" is the English translation of episcopus, which literally means an overseer. Elders or bishops were always limited to one locality, one church, in New Testament days. A man who was an elder or pastor in one church was not also an elder in another place. Nor were these men who always devoted their full time to ministry. Certain of the elders were called ruling elders and they were often supported by the church to devote full time to their work, though this was not always the case. There were also others who were elders but were not called ruling elders. These included anyone who did shepherding work within the church. Today these would be involved as Sunday school teachers, home Bible class leaders, and young people's leaders. Many Christians have the gift or pastor-teacher whether they are working at it full time or not.

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**Ray C. Stedman** was one of the great Bible teachers of the twentieth century.

Ray's primary teaching method was expository preaching, systematically teaching through entire books of the Bible. This style enabled the Christian to build up a broad base of biblical knowledge from which the Holy Spirit could draw upon in daily life. It was very important to Ray that Christians become personally well grounded in the whole breadth of the Bible.

Ray was very conscious of the need for individual Christians to grow and flourish and some of his chief themes (the new covenant, body life and the ministry of the saints) reflect practical aspects of vibrant Christian life. He was also a strong proponent of a plurality of pastors and a non-hierarchical style of church government since all believers have spiritual gifts.

From 1948 to 1990, Ray was one of the key leaders at Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California, and the explosive growth of that church during that time was largely due to the power of Ray's teaching.

Although Ray went home to the Lord in 1992, his messages continue to have world wide impact as thousands of people use the resources of this web site daily: [www.PBC.org](http://www.PBC.org)

## SCRIPTURE

*Which verses significantly impacted you and why?*



## ARTICLE

*What did you personally glean from this article?*



## PRINCIPLE

*Summarize the truth you've learned in a concise statement:*



## LIFE APPLICATION

1. *Relate a time when you were built up or edified by someone.  
What did it look like? How did it make you feel?*

2. *What gets in the way of our using our Spiritual Gifts?*

3. *What could you do this week to be part of the process of "building up the Body in love"?*

