



Church...Up Close and Personal

The church is composed of believers in Christ, all of whom are members of God's family. These members are equipped to interact with one another in a way that fosters Christ-like growth and proclaims God's glory. The New Testament describes this interactive dependence among members in various ways. Two images that emphasize the "up close and personal" involvement between believers are a body and a temple.

CHURCH IS A BODY

When describing the church, the New Testament often uses the metaphor of the body. The church is the body of Christ. Jesus is the head of that Body. As the head, Christ is the source of the church's strength and life. He sustains the church, and He causes her to grow. He controls her movements and provides all that the body needs to function harmoniously.

Ephesians 4:11-16 is one of the primary passages explaining the workings of the body of Christ. A verse-by-verse look at the passage will help us understand how His body is to function.

Ephesians 4:11-12, And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

Unless otherwise noted, verses in this study are from the New American Standard Bible © 1995 by the Lockman Foundation.

God gives certain gifted persons to the church for the purpose of *equipping* believers to serve. The body of Christ is built up as each part serves the others. The word *equipping* (*prepare* in some versions is the Greek word *katartismos* (G2677), meaning to make fresh or complete ... to completely furnish.

Note: Greek terms mentioned in this study are transliterated instead of being presented in the Greek language. The number following the Greek transliteration refers to Strong's listing, to aid in further study of the term. You can access Strong's at <http://biblesuite.com/strongs.htm> or <http://www.elijah.com/lexicon.html>

The word describes preparing something that is not yet perfectly fit for service. This noun comes from the verb *katartizo* (G2675), which means to restore, mend, or repair. It referred to setting dislocated bones.

A dislocated limb is unable to function as it was intended. When the bone is set and put into proper alignment, the limb is made complete. It is repaired, mended, restored. The New Testament draws a picture of all the different members of the body fitted together and aligned in such a way as to be useful for service, for the work that they were intended to do.

Ephesians 4:13 ... until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

This building up will continue until we attain to a certain goal. That goal is to become a mature man. The phrase "mature man" refers not to a male, or to any individual, but to the body of Christ. This maturity is made of two essential components:

1. **Unity of the faith:** The phrase "unity of the faith" refers not to acts of faith but to the essential doctrines of the faith. The mature man knows God's revealed truth, an essential element of Christ-like maturity.
2. **Knowledge of the Son of God:** The complete man also knows his Lord, the Son of God. This knowledge is not the same as knowing the truth intellectually. Nor is it a passing knowledge such as when we say "oh yes, I know so-and-so, I met him yesterday." Instead, it is an accurate, precise, and true knowledge resulting from faithful living and consistent fellowship with Jesus Christ through prayer and the Word.

Maturity is further described as having attained to a *measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ*. The body of Christ is full of Him: His power, His grace, His love, His majesty, His beauty. All of Him is in His body.

We are to grow as a body into full maturity and accurately measure up to the fullness of Him. We are to display Him to a world enslaved by Satan . . . ensnared in lies, dead spiritually, without hope, without peace, and without purpose

except to make it through another day. Sharing His life is not accomplished through an evangelistic rally. It is accomplished as the body of Christ, living by faith and according to truth, serves one another and sacrifices for one another by His power at work in each member. It is then that a dying world sees the life of Christ at work. When the church accurately reflects Christ to the world, she has attained to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:14, As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming...

The Apostle Paul switches metaphors here momentarily in order to teach by contrast. He contrasts the mature man with children. These children are unstable and tossed about. In their chronic immaturity, they are unable to discern truth, and their ears are tickled by every new so-called revelation. Too many in the body of Christ have remained children. They are unable or unwilling to discern truth from error because they have failed to evaluate everything they hear or do according to God's Word. As a result, they follow false teachers who lead them astray.

Ephesians 4:15... but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ.

It may surprise you to discover that the verb "speaking" in Ephesians 4:15 is not present in the original language of the New Testament. There are various Greek words that can be translated as "speaking," "saying," "declaring," or "proclaiming" but none of them occurs in this verse.

Instead, the Apostle Paul, the divinely inspired author of Ephesians 4:15, used the word *alétheuó* (G226) that can be translated literally as "to truth" (i.e. "to deal truthfully" or "be truthful"). He used a present participle to emphasize that truthfulness is to characterize every dimension of life. This would certainly include speaking.

While "speaking the truth in love" emphasizes only verbal communication, a more literal translation of Ephesians 4:15 would be, "Being truthful in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, Christ."

Admittedly, Bible translators wanted Ephesians 4:15 to be readily understood but, in the process, they lost the more comprehensive meaning. Some Bible versions attempt to present the more complete meaning of "truthing" by adding notes apart from the text or by using other words in the translation. For example:

The Amplified Bible – Rather, let our lives lovingly express truth [in all things, speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly]. Enfolded in love, let us grow up in every way and in all things into Him Who is the Head, [even] Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One).

Darby translation—but, holding the truth in love, we may grow up to him in all things, who is the head, the Christ

Douay-Rheims 1889 American edition—But doing the truth in charity, we may in all things grow up in him who is the head, even Christ:

Phillips New Testament—But we are meant to hold firmly to the truth in love, and to grow up in every way into Christ, the head.

New American Standard Bible—but ^[a]speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ (*marginal note* ^[a]—*holding to or being truthful in*)

Young's Literal Translation—and, being true in love, we may increase to Him [in] all things, who is the head—the Christ

Even though the use of "truthing" in Ephesians 4:15 indicates having a lifestyle of truth, the concept of verbally communicating truth appears ten verses later in Ephesians 4:25 (NASB), "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speaking truth each one *of you* with his neighbor, for we are members of one another." [underlining added] In Ephesians 4:15, however, the original language indicates that the way we deal with others—not merely in speech but in every facet of life—must mirror truth and demonstrate love.

In this context, believers are to counter and refute the false teaching spoken of in Ephesians 4:14 by professing, teaching, and living out the truth of God's Word. Rather than repeating or believing false doctrine, we are to speak and demonstrate truth to one another.

When the early church met together, believers would not just sit and listen to a speaker and go home. Instead, they were actively involved in teaching one another, especially when they were in the context of a "church in the home" meeting. Paul exhorts the believers in 1 Corinthians 14:26, "When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification."

Similarly, Colossians 3:16 says, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

We in the family of God are all teachers to some extent! We can lovingly teach each other with the purpose of building up the body. Therefore, in our “truthing,” we are not to remain as children, but we are to grow in Christ in every aspect of our lives.

Ephesians 4:16... from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Our goal as a body is to be like Jesus, to reflect His majesty, purity, goodness, mercy, forgiveness, and love. Believers are to grow into the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. Six words in verse 16 are rich in meaning and, upon close examination, reveal how the body of Christ grows together—up close and personal – into a greater measure of Christ-likeness.

1. *Sunarmologeō* (G4883)—fitted (NIV and KJV—joined); literally, several pieces harmoniously joined together, with the sense of being fit together for a purpose. For example, if you were to pick up a handful of sticks, that bundle in your hand is not *sunarmologeō*, but, instead, is just a random bundle of sticks. If, however, you shape those sticks and put them together so that they form a little toy house, then you have *sunarmologeō*.
2. *Sumbibazo* (G4822)—Held together (KJV—compacted); literally, to knit together in close harmony. To function properly, the body must be purposefully and harmoniously working together.
3. *Haphe* (G860)—joint (NIV—by every supporting ligament); literally fastening, connecting band.
4. *Epichoregia* (G2024)—supply; *Epichoregia* has the sense of lavish resources or a superabundance.
5. *Energeia* (G1753)—working; literally, operative energy. *Energeia* carries with it the sense of work that accomplishes something . . . purposeful work. It does not mean busy work or fruitless work.
6. *Metron* (G3358)—proper (KJV—Effectual; NIV—does its part); literally, measure, or measuring device (vessel), it refers to the capacity of the vessel.

The body of Christ has been put together with a special purpose in mind. Each member operates according to his God-given capacity for service. Through the close, harmonious interconnection of the individual parts, the body then receives from Christ the superabundant supply of life and energy it needs to mature and grow. Conversely, if the members are not serving one another and ministering to one another in close, tight-knit fellowship – up close and personal – the supply lines of Christ’s life are broken between members of the body.

There is a beautiful picture of this kind of close intimate fellowship in two different passages in the book of Acts.

Acts 2:42-47, They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. ⁴⁶ Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 4:32-35, And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one *of them* claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. ³⁴ For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales ³⁵ and lay them at the apostles’ feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.

At the very deepest level they belonged to each other. Unity was not a theory; it was a defining characteristic of their lives. They experienced the life of Jesus Christ together. Serving one another was not something that a few of them did once a week on Sunday; they all served each other *daily!* Meeting together regularly in one another’s homes was the natural expression of the fact that they had each been placed in the body and that each member of that body was intimately connected to every other member. They exhibited the reality of Romans 12:4-18.

Romans 12:4-18, For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶Since we have gifts that differ

according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷ if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

⁹ Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹ not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹² rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ¹³ contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. ¹⁷ Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

CHURCH IS A TEMPLE

Another metaphor for the church is a temple, a dwelling of God in the Spirit that is described in Ephesians 2:19-22. This passage begins in verse 19 with a picture of the church as a community and a family. While this partially describes the closeness God intends for His people, the picture of the church as a building may highlight even more the *up close and personal* interconnectedness that is God's will for His children.

Ephesians 2:19-22, So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and are of God's household, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the corner stone, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

In a temple constructed of stone there is a unity between the stones that is even closer than that which exists among members of a community or a family. The members of a family are distinct individuals. They can separate from one another and go their own way, yet still be a family. However, if the stones in a building were to go their own way, the building would no longer exist.

God is constructing the church as a temple so that He may dwell in it. It is "fitly framed together" (KJV) by the Master Builder according to His eternal purposes. The material He is using is comprised of "living stones" (1 Peter 2:4-5), the redeemed, the called out ones.

1 Peter 2:4-5, And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, ⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

The word used to describe the process of fitting the living stones together is used only one other time in the New Testament (Ephesians 4:16) and emphasizes the importance of commitment to face-to-face, heart-to-heart, relational Christianity. We briefly noted this word earlier in our study of Ephesians 4:16.

This word, *sunarmologeō* is a double compound (three words put together to form one new word). The first two words are *sun* and *harmos*. *Sun* means "with," "together;" "united," and *harmos* means a "joining," a "binding." The word "harmony" is derived from *harmos*.

Harmos already suggests the idea of joined together, and *sun* emphasizes the unity aspect of the church. The idea is not just "together," but "united together." The final word included in this compound is *legeō*, which means to pick up or choose. It describes the deliberate selection of one thing from among many.

In explaining the meaning of *sunarmologeō*, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said this about the process God uses to construct His temple:

Have you ever watched a mason doing his work? Many times as a boy I did this, and it always fascinated me. He took the stone and then with his various types of hammer he knocked bits off. He trimmed it, he shaped it, he fashioned it, he chipped bits off it. He tried it. Then he took it back again because it was not quite right. He would knock off another piece, perhaps with the chisel and hammer. And so he went on dealing with it until it was just right. Then he put it in, and stood back. Satisfied he put the mortar on, then he took the next stone and did the same to that. Now that is what the apostle means by "fitly framed together."¹

A definition of the word *sunarmologeō* then would be ... several pieces deliberately chosen from among many, harmoniously united together for a definite purpose. Now that is up close and personal.

CONCLUSION

Believers in Christ who are not regularly supporting and interacting with fellow believers are crippled spiritually as much as a body would be crippled physically if its parts were not connected with each other. Similarly, disconnected believers fall short of realizing God's purpose, just as disconnected stones fall short of realizing the glory of the temple. On the other hand, when each part of Christ's body or God's temple functions in harmony with fellow members, the complete entity benefits and those not yet part of God's family have opportunity to see the magnificence of God's plan at work in the world.

Every body part and every temple stone, spiritually speaking, may seem insignificant by itself. Each, however, is vital for the body to function effectively and for the Temple to enlarge proportionately for the glory of God. May each of us be faithful in fulfilling our privileged responsibilities to and with fellow believers—up close and personal—as we anticipate our soon coming Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Endnotes

God's Way of Reconciliation (Studies in Ephesians chapter 2) by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, MI; 1972).