

Introduction

When I think of edification and building up the body of Christ, my mind normally goes to Ephesians 4, where “God gave some as apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers and pastors for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.” I am an equipper so I think in terms of building up the body through my teaching and laying foundations.

(Eph 4:11-13) “And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, {12} for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ... {16} from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what 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.”

Sometimes when I think of edifying the body, I think of prophetic ministry. The purpose of prophetic ministry is edifying the body. These are positive actions that we do to build up and edify the body.

(1 Cor 14:3-4) “But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. {4} One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.”

When I think of edification, I also think about what Paul told the Ephesians, which was not to allow any rotten or unwholesome word proceed from their mouth, but only words that were needed at that moment, were good for edification and would give grace to others. We are to speak words that edify and build up the body. If the words do not edify, we should not speak them. I don't think in terms of what I don't say as building up the body; I think in terms of positive actions that we take to build up.

(Eph 4:29) “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear.”

In our text today, we are looking at Part 2 of Edification of the Body. In Part 1, we covered Romans 14:1-13, which was about accepting or receiving everyone without judging or regarding with contempt. Paul gave four reasons why we should accept the opinions of others without judging them. We are to accept them because God accepts them. We are to accept them because they are God's servants. We are to accept them because each person must be convinced in their own minds. Fourth, we are to accept and not judge them for we will all be judged and give account to God. So, the first part of edifying the body was accepting people. In Part 3, which we will cover next week, we are to seek to please one another.

We are covering Part 2 today, Romans 14:13-23, where we are to build up one another without offending anyone. Paul uses the word “not” ten times in our text. He says we are **not to judge** one another. We are **not to destroy** with food those that Christ died for. We are **not** to let what is a good thing be spoken of evil. We are **not to tear down the work of God for the sake of food**. We are not to eat meat or drink wine if it causes our brother to stumble. God is building His church and kingdom, and while there are some things like teaching, prophesying, and serving that build it up, there are things that we can do that hinder and tear down what God is building. Our passage today helps us be mindful of the things that can hurt and destroy what God is building.

We are not to do anything that causes our brother to stumble. Instead, we are to pursue things that make for peace and the building up of the body. Let's look at Romans 14:13-23.

Building Up the Body Without Offending

1. Don't do anything that causes others to stumble
2. Pursue things that build up and bring peace

(Rom 14:13-23) “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. {14} I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. {15} For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. {16} Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; {17} for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. {18} For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. {19} So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. {20} Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. {21} It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or *to do anything* by which your brother stumbles. {22} The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. {23} But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating is* not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.”

1. Don't do anything that causes others to stumble (Rom 14:

Paul transitions into this section by telling us not to judge one another anymore, which is what we covered last week. We are not to judge the opinions of others. We are taught confront sin, and if necessary, judge those sins in the body, but we should give grace in matters of opinion. Then, he added, we should “determine this – not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.” The Greek word that is translated as determine is *krino*, Strong's G2919), which is the same Greek word that is used for judge. *Krino* means to distinguish, decide, determine, try, judge, or condemn. We are not to make a decision, try, or judge our brother's opinions, but we are to evaluate, determine, and decide about what things would cause our brother to stumble. God is telling us that we have to live thoughtfully. We are also to make a conscientious decision or determination that we are not going to cause our brother to stumble.

One time I tried to tickle my granddaughter, Kara, to make her laugh. She was determined that she was not going to crack and she stood her ground; I was unable to make her laugh. We have to have that firm determination that we are not going to cause our brother to stumble.

(Rom 14:13) “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.”

Earlier in Romans 14, Paul used the examples of observing certain days, and of eating. Paul continues with the example of eating, but adds drinking to this in verses seventeen and twenty-one. Paul was convinced in the Lord that nothing is unclean in itself, meaning that he had the freedom to eat all foods, and that he was free from the Law about eating pork and other unclean meat. This is a new perspective for Paul, who had lived his life as a strict Pharisee, and would have been convinced from the Law that there were many unclean foods. Paul was aware that some people were going to regard some foods as unclean, and even though he had the liberty to

eat those, it was unclean to them. Therefore, he was not going to eat unclean meat in their presence so that they would not be hurt. He said if we hurt our brother with food, we are no longer walking according to love. In Romans 13, we learned that love does no wrong to a neighbor, so if we eat meat and cause our brother to stumble or be hurt, we are not walking in love.

(Rom 14:14-15) “I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. {15} For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.”

(Rom 13:10) “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law.”

Then, Paul said that we are not to destroy with our food those whom Christ died for. If we hurt others with our liberties, then we are not building up the body, but tearing it down. We are working against what God is doing. We are destroying the very people that Christ died for. We should determine in our mind that we are not going to destroy our brother with our liberties and destroy the work that Jesus gave his life for. We are not to let what is a good thing for us, be spoken of as evil. Our freedom from the Law is a good thing. Our freedom to eat whatever is set before us is a good thing, but if we use our freedom to destroy our brothers and sisters in Christ, it would be an evil thing.

(Rom 14:16) “Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil;”

I love what Paul wrote in verse seventeen. The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteous and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Kingdom living is not about what you eat and what drink. The kingdom of God is about righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. I have used this verse many times to distinguish what is kingdom living and what is not. A young man and young woman were dating, and there was nothing but strife. There was no peace and joy in the relationship. I did not see them walking in more righteousness. Therefore, I did not think that this was God’s will for them. If we are seeking first the kingdom of God, we should see the fruit of righteousness, peace, and joy.

(Rom 14:17) “for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Our life is not to be about what we eat or don’t eat, or what we drink or don’t drink. The focus of our life needs to be on pursuing things that promote righteousness, peace, and joy. For that to happen, we have to live thoughtful lives. We have to intentionally think about what we are doing and how it will impact the lives of those around us. We cannot live selfish lives, thinking only of ourselves. We are to do nothing from selfishness, and with humility of mind, we are to regard one another as more important than ourselves. We cannot merely look out for our own interests and rights and freedoms, we also have to look out for the interests of others. We have to determine not to do anything that will cause our brother to stumble, and then be disciplined to flesh out those decisions.

(Phil 2:3-4) “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; {4} do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

In verse twenty, Paul tells us not to tear down the work of God for the sake of food. In verse fifteen we were not to destroy those for whom Christ died, and here we are not to tear down the work of God. The work of God is not organizations, buildings, bank accounts, investments, or material things. The work of God is people. We are not to do anything that tears down or destroys people. Even though we believe and are convinced that all foods are clean, if someone else is convinced that it is unclean, we should not eat it and cause him to stumble.

(Rom 14:20-21) “Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. {21} It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or *to do anything* by which your brother stumbles.”

Paul included anything by which our brother stumbles. This includes many other things besides what we eat or drink. My dad always liked Cadillacs. When Cadillac came out with an Escalade pick-up, my father bought one. He loved driving that Cadillac truck. I have to say that it was one of the most comfortable trucks that I have ever ridden in. My father wanted me to have his Cadillac truck when he died. When that time came, I sold the truck for my mother and gave her the money. Why would I have not accepted this generous gift? I was pastoring a rural church, and I might add, a poor church. There were a few people with money in it, but many of the people did not have much money. I did not want to drive to church in this expensive Cadillac truck. I did not want the truck to be an issue between me and anyone in the church, so I drove my GMC truck. I had freedom to drive the Cadillac, but I determined to drive my work truck.

I have chosen not to drink wine or liquor. God called me to church leadership thirty-six years ago. In Proverbs 31, Bathsheba told Solomon that it was not good for kings to drink wine or strong drink, lest they forget what they had decreed. So, being in a ruling and managing role in the church, I always wanted to keep a clear mind. Additionally, I believe that in a leadership role, people are looking up to you, so it is highly likely that there are people that struggle with alcohol in any congregation, and I did not want to be a poor example or a stumbling block. I was also in prison ministry, and 95% of the people incarcerated are there for drug and alcohol related charges. The liberty I had to drink a glass of wine was the ball and chain that put them in prison. Therefore, I gladly gave up the right to a glass of wine.

(Pr 31:4-5) “It is not for kings, O Lemuel, It is not for kings to drink wine, Or for rulers to desire strong drink, {5} For they will drink and forget what is decreed, And pervert the rights of all the afflicted.”

For ladies, dressing modestly may be a way of keeping guys from stumbling when they look at you. For some parents, they may choose not to eat or do certain things in front of their children. I have seen adults eating sweets, but telling their children that they can't have sweets because it makes them to hyperactive. I believe it would be better for them not to eat sweets in front of them. Paul gave the examples of food and drink, but he left the door open for other applications. We should not do anything which causes our brother to stumble.

Earlier in Romans Paul wrote that each person should be convinced in his own mind. I gave several ways of forming our opinions based on God's word. We should study and seek godly counsel and be convinced in our own minds about food, drink, and other areas. In verse twenty-two, Paul reiterates that thought, saying, “The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.” Paul is referring to our conscience. Our conscience either blesses us or

condemns us based on how it has been calibrated. We need to have our consciences programmed with Scripture so that we have meaningful help from our consciences. When we looked at our consciences, I gave you the outcome of those who seared or defiled their consciences. It is important to calibrate our consciences, and then to live our lives with a perfectly good conscience. We will be happy if we do not condemn the things that we approve, and to do that, we need to have Biblical convictions.

(Rom 14:22-23) “The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. {23} But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating is* not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.”

2. Pursue things that build up and bring peace (Rom 14:19)

The majority of our text focuses on being careful not to do things that offend our brother or cause him to stumble. Our lives cannot be selfishly focused; we have to be mindful of the needs and convictions of others. But, in verse nineteen, Paul wrote, “So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. On the positive side, we need to look for and pursue things that will make for peace and the building up of one another.

(Rom 14:19) “So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.”

A number of years ago Karen had a Great Pyrenees dog named Max. She has had four Great Pyrenees dogs. They are great Livestock Guardian Dogs (LGD), and she started using them when she had goats. They lived with the goats and kept away other dogs and coyotes. Great Pyrenees dogs like lots of space, and they are not indoor dogs. One year it was ten below zero outside and blowing fifty miles per hour so the wind chill was really frigid. She tried to get Max to come in the garage where it was much warmer, but no, he wanted to be outside; the cold did not bother him a bit. So, Max lived outside all the time, and because he was an LGD, he liked to roam our ten acres and protect it. Unfortunately, when coyotes came around, and there were a lot of coyotes, he would bark. In the summer time in Tijeras, everyone slept with their windows open. It would be fifty degrees at night, and very few people had air conditioners; people just left their windows open. Our neighbor, Brad, was a light sleeper, and with his windows open, he would hear Max bark in the middle of the night when coyotes came by. He complained about Max’s barking, so Karen made a decision to pursue peace with our neighbor and give Max away. She advertised him and someone immediately took Max. Karen had a right to have a dog, and with ten acres and chickens, it was also alright for Max to be outside. But Karen wanted to pursue the things which make for peace, so she got rid of Max. The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy, so we need to pursue doing the right things, pursue doing things that will bring peace, and joy. Karen did the right thing, and it brought peace with our neighbor. It also demonstrated love to our neighbor and a few weeks ago our neighbor commented to me what an impression that made on them that she was willing to get rid of her dog for them.

At the subdivision we are building in, the Homeowners Association (HOA) has to give approval of the landscape plan and any structures on a lot. Since we were going to build a shed I submitted to the HOA the location and type of shed that I planned on building. On my plan I also had all the trees that I was planting, and a garden area. The HOA said that I was not to plant anything because they were not approving my trees and garden. I told them that the trees and garden were in my back yard and there was nothing in the HOA covenants that prohibited trees and a garden.

They said that because of the shape of my lot, they considered the area for my trees and garden to be front yard. So, we have a strong disagreement of opinions about that. I contacted the landscape designer that will be doing our front yard and had him come meet with the HOA and myself. He came up with a plan to create a buffer zone with trees and bushes that will make a visual barrier between what they say is the front yard and my back yard. We were determined to pursue peace with the HOA and all of our neighbors. In this case, I used some outside counsel to pursue peace. There may be times in your life where you want to pursue peace with someone or a group of people and you don't know what to do. Ask God for wisdom and get His counsel. Ask other people, and subject matter experts (SME), like I did by asking the landscape designer. The principle is that we pursue the things that will make for peace.

A number of years ago we had a dog that was attacked by coyotes. He suffered a lot of internal and external injuries, and was in a lot of pain, so Karen took him to the vet. He said there was nothing he could do for the dog because of the extent of the injuries. I was out of town on business so I asked a neighbor of mine, who was in the special forces of the Marines called, Force Recon, to put the dog down for me. Unfortunately, when the dog was being put down, the plan did not work out and the dog was injured and ran to my neighbor's yard. My neighbors were greatly offended. They thought that I needed to be reported to the Humane Society and receive counseling. Since we attended the same church, I asked one of the pastors at the church to help me pursue peace with my neighbor. We came up with a plan of action and I went and apologized to my neighbors. I was not in town when the event happened, and the manner in which the dog was euthanized is the most common method in America, so there were no sins to repent of. However, I humbled myself and apologized to my neighbors and asked them for forgiveness. I was pursuing peace with my neighbor. Even though I had apologized, that relationship never was reconciled. In Romans 12:18, God tells us, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." We have to do our part to pursue peace. If the other party is not willing to be at peace, you have done your part.

(Rom 12:18) "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."

Paul said to pursue things that make for peace, and the building up of one another. One of the best ways to build up one another is prophecy. The goal of prophecy is to build up or edify. Some of the prophetic ministry that I have seen has been more doom and gloom, and I think this is unfortunate, because the majority of prophecy is supposed to bring edification. There are five-fold prophets, like Jeremiah, who was called to the nations, and at that level God will sometimes issue warnings and judgments. For those simply operating in the gift of prophecy, the goal is to edify, console, and exhort. Therefore, God tells us to earnestly desire spiritual gifts and especially that we may prophesy, so that the church may receive edifying.

(Rom 14:19) "So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another."

(1 Cor 14:1-5) "Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.... {3} But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. {4} One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. {5} Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but *even* more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying."

In Hebrews 10:24-25, God exhorts us to “consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” The church needs to be a place where people encourage one another. Going to church is not just for our personal gain and edification; God wants us not to forsake the assembling together so that we can encourage others. As we all prepare for gathering together, we should ask the Lord for words of encouragement for others. My daughter, Kathleen, used to write down prophetic words of encouragement to people and hand them out on Sundays. People were greatly encouraged and built up through her ministry.

(Heb 10:24-25) “and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, {25} not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

Conclusion and Applications

God wants His church to be built up and edified. In Part 1 we looked at how we are to accept one another, and not for the purpose of judging. We have to go beyond acceptance; we must look for ways to build up one another without offending. We must be sensitive to the convictions of others, and proactively filter our words and actions so that we do not offend others. We are to pursue peace with our neighbors. Finally, we are to pursue ways to build up one another. Next week, we will look at the third part of this section on edification, and it is about seeking to please one another.

In Galatians 5:1, Paul wrote that Christ has set us free and given us freedom. Then, in verse thirteen he tells us not to turn our freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. Our text today talks about our freedom to eat or drink, but it also says that we are not to do anything that causes our brother to stumble. If we are going to love others, we cannot allow our freedom to hurt or destroy others, otherwise, we are not walking in love. We have to pursue the things that make for peace and the building up of one another.

(Gal 5:1) “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”

(Gal 5:13) “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only *do not turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

Prayer

Father God, thank You for setting us free from the Law, and for the freedoms that You have given us. Father, help us to do nothing from selfishness and to look at things from only our perspective. Help us to be mindful of the interests of others. Help us to be discerning and wise, so that we do not do things that will hurt or destroy our brothers and sisters. Instead, help us to pursue the things that are going to bring peace, and that will build up others. Father, we want to be a church that encourages and builds up one another. We want to be a community of believers that are connected to You and to one another. We want to be a community of believers that are filled with righteousness, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit. We want to be a community of believers that bring honor and glory to You. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Q & A

- Have any of you ever been at odds with a neighbor and you made a conscientious effort to pursue peace with him? How did you pursue peace and what was the outcome?
- What is one of the ways that you are edified and built up?
- What are some things that you have found helpful in edifying others?
- What would a church look like when the whole congregation came with a mindset to encourage one another?
- Is there a balance or a happy medium between exercising our personal freedom in Christ and living a life that does not offend others?

Introduction (Eph 4:11-13, 1 Cor 14:3-4, Eph 4:29, Rom 14:13-23)

1. **Don't do anything that causes others to stumble** (Rom 14:13-23, 13:10, Phil 2:3-4, Pr 31:4-5)
2. **Pursue things that build up and bring peace** (Rom 14:19, 12:18, 1 Cor 14:1-5, Heb 10:24-25)

Conclusion and Applications (Gal 5:1, 5:13)