

EDIFICATION IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

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10/8/2007

INTRODUCTION

The New Testament word edify and its various forms is based on the Greek words oiko and domay or domeo, depending on the form used. Together they mean “to build the house” or “house builder.” Remember that the OT house of God was the tabernacle and later the temple, but the NT house of God is His people (you are the temple of the Holy Spirit.) We’ll take a brief look at the OT picture and then develop an in-depth view of the NT perspective.

THE OLD TESTAMENT REVELATION

There are a number of OT areas which set context for building the house (edification.) Ezra and Nehemiah are books which are concerned with the building of both the temple and the wall around the city. Both contain much insight which is directly applicable (prophetically) to the building of the NT church, or body of Christ. Kings and Chronicles both detail the specification and construction of the temple. But I’d like to look at a passage in Exodus 35 which relates to construction of the tabernacle of Moses.

Exo 35:30 And Moses said to the Israelites, See, the Lord called by name Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; **31** And He has filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and wisdom, with intelligence and understanding, and with knowledge and all craftsmanship, **35:32** To devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, **35:33** In cutting of stones for setting, and in carving of wood, for work in every skilled craft. **35:34** And God has put in Bezalel's heart that he may teach, both he and Aholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. **35:35** He has filled them with wisdom of heart and ability to do all manner of craftsmanship, of the engraver, of the skillful workman, of the embroiderer in blue, purple, and scarlet [*stuff*] and in fine linen, and of the weaver, even of those who do or design any skilled work. Amplified Bible

Exo 36:1 BEZALEL AND Aholiab and every wisehearted man in whom the Lord has put wisdom and understanding to know how to do all the work for the service of the sanctuary shall work according to all that the Lord has commanded. **2** And Moses called Bezalel and Aholiab and every able and wisehearted man in whose mind the Lord had put wisdom and ability, everyone whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work;

Moses (the type of Jesus) called Bezalel (shadow or protection of God) by name and filled him with the Spirit and with all the wisdom, knowledge and skills needed to design and construct the tabernacle. Bezalel also was given the ability to teach, or to pass this anointing on to Aholiab (the tent of the father) son of Ahisamach (brother of strength), tribe of Dan (judgement) and others. What a picture of Jesus calling out his disciples, then the seventy, etc. Giving the necessary gifts and anointing to do the work of building His body, and also stirring the hearts of his people to do the work needed and to provide all the necessary resources. As a matter of fact, Moses had to restrain the people from giving, as they brought more than was needed for the work.

THE NEW TESTAMENT REVELATION

The NT scripture presents a clear view of “edification,” so I’ll just offer a few comments as we move through them.

Rom. 14:19 So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. NASB
Pursue is an active term. The definition for “peace” is order, prosperity, oneness, quietness, rest.

Rom. 15:2 Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.
Please means to be agreeable to or make happy. Notice the motivation is to serve our neighbor and be concerned for his good.

I Cor. 10:23 All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.
Edification clarifies our relationship with the Law. The law of the Spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2.)

I Cor. 14:3 But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.
12 So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, seek to abound for the edification of the church.
26 What is *the outcome* then, brethren? 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.

Spiritual giftings for their own sake or for our personal use or gain often cause confusion and strife in His body. But we are admonished to “let all things be done for edification.” The gifts are some of the tools in our Father’s tool box and are the hammer, square, saw, etc. which are specifically designed to “build His house.”

II Cor. 10: 8 For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be put to shame,
There is authority in His body and it must always be used for edification.

12:19 All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. *Actually*, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved.
Sometimes we can’t see edification because it doesn’t appear in the way we expect it.

13:10 For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I *need* not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down.

This scripture is relevant to discipline in the body.

Eph. 4: 11 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; **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. **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; **15** but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* 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.

This is the fullness of NT Christianity. The body building itself up in love. Each part complementing the other. Fitting together, supplying every need, functioning to represent Jesus to one another and to the world. Reproducing after its kind throughout the earth.

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.

The way we communicate is important. Grace is what we have been given freely by our Lord. We can bless or curse with our mouth.

I Th. 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

We are able (in His Spirit) to give courage (encourage) others. This is a very powerful gift that is desperately needed in a world which is based on judgment and condemnation. Think of the times that someone gave you courage to continue on in a desperate time.

I Tim. 1:3 As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, **4** nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than *furthering* the administration of God which is by faith.

Edification sets a standard for doctrine as well as speech and action. If it builds His house, then it is appropriate, if it slows down or confuses the building process, then it should be examined carefully and rejected if necessary.

COMMENTS FROM A BUILDER

The traditional view on edification seems to denote a passive, non-confrontive type of interaction which does not “rock the boat” but only blesses and encourages. Speaking edifying words usually means using words which agree with the receivers’ condition or spiritual state and don’t attempt to bring correction or challenge. If the receiver of these words is left in a confused, challenged, distracted or convicted state, we normally do not consider the words to be edifying.

Since the NT words which describe edification have to do with the “building of the house,” I have a bit of insight, since I am a house builder by profession. As a house builder, I know that building is a process. Each step is unique and specific and we must follow the correct order for the finished structure to be completed. If you change the order, there are usually serious delays or deficiencies. Everything is focused on the end product, which is a complete and functional structure. Things which do not work to this end are useless and have no place in the building process. They are simply distractions and often cause delays and rework, which add to the time and cost of the project.

The building process does not start with the finished product, however. It begins with a piece of land which may be covered with trees and grass. The land seems complete and in order. But the project begins by cutting down trees, dozing over the grass, cutting roads, digging holes, putting in utilities, etc. The land becomes a disaster zone. Piles of dirt, ditches, pipes, string lines, heavy equipment, workers . . . total disorder to the untrained eye. Yet this is the process of edification (building the house.) As the work continues, there are days that seem to bring order and days when it looks like things are getting worse instead of better. Of course, ultimately, the house is completed and is the beautiful home which the owner envisioned.

The building (edification) process is about bringing order to the confusion, but the outward appearance is seldom a good indicator of the state of edification. The soothing words and passive demeanor may serve to minister in a needful way to the needs of someone, but that may not necessarily be edification in the Biblical sense. Sometimes edification may cut down some trees or weeds, level a field, dig a trench, drain a lake or divert a stream.

Paul said to “speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15,16.) The context of these passages is the edifying of the body as it builds itself up in love. I’m not advocating being cruel, accusing, judgmental or coarse in the edification process. We are to be respectful and considerate, but truthful as we are being used by the Lord to “build His house.” I hear a lot of “spiritual” jargon which sounds edifying on the surface, but never really addresses real issues dealing with needs, problems, strife, discouragement, etc. If the house is to be built to our Master’s specifications, then the body must learn how to communicate beyond the superficial, speaking His words in love into every situation and acting on His words that are spoken. The result of this is the edifying (building) of the house of God.