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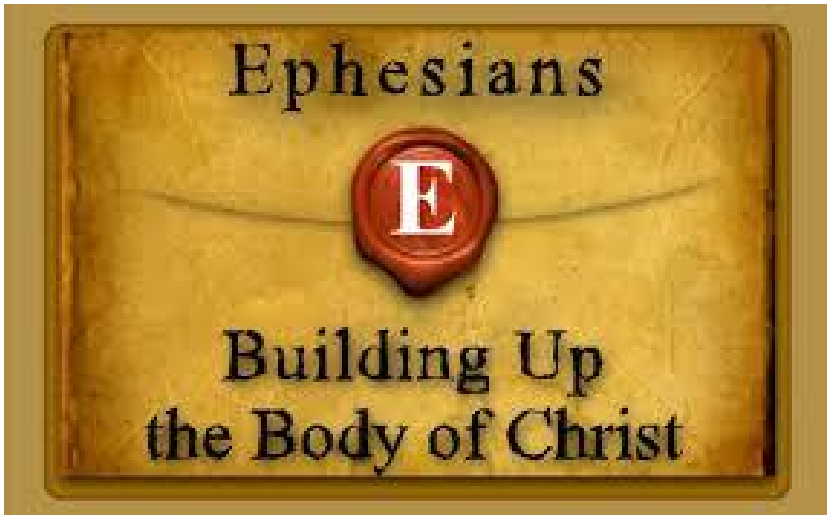
Building Up the Body of Messiah
4: 12-16

Building the Body of Messiah DIG: How is Messiah the "head" of the Church? What are the three parts of God's plan to build up the Body? What are five results of following God's pattern for building up the Body? What are some other ways of illustrating Paul's point?

REFLECT: What keeps believers from exhibiting humility, gentleness, and patience with one another and becoming one as Paul instructs in this passage? What are the four tools for your spiritual growth? Are you using all your tools? Are you growing in your faith with Yeshua?

Love is the main building block of the Body of Messiah.



The gift of **shepherd/teacher** (**to see link click Bj – Shepherds and Teachers**) is so important that **Rabbi Sha'ul** gives more details of **their** job description. Most **shepherds/teachers** do a large part of the work of ministry, but that is actually not their top priority. Their time is used much more efficiently when he equips his congregation to use their spiritual gifts and perform the details of the ministry. This is a profound thought and a principle taught to Moshe long ago (see the

commentary on **Exodus Cw – Moses and Jethro**). When acted upon, it will save **the shepherd/teacher** from burn out. The results of this balanced philosophy of ministry will be that all the members of **the Body of Messiah** will grow in faith and become mature ministers in **His** holy work.[165]

Equipping: The task of a shepherd/teacher (see **Bj – Shepherds and Teachers**) **is to equip God's people (4:12a).** The first task within **God's** design is for **the evangelists** and **shepherd/teachers** to be properly equipping believers. **The evangelist's** work is to bring men and women to understanding of **the Gospel** of salvation, to lead them to receive **Yeshua Messiah** as **Lord** and **Savior** and thereby become children in **His** spiritual family and citizens of **His** divine Kingdom. **The shepherd/teacher's** subsequent work, then, is to provide leadership and spiritual resources to cause believers to be conformed to the likeness of their **Lord** through continual obedience to **His Word** and to provide a pattern, or an example, of godliness **(First Thessalonians 1:2-7; First Peter 5:3).**

ADONAI has given four basic tools, as it were, for the equipping of believers. The most important is **His Word**, the Bible **(Second Timothy 3:16-17; John 15:3)**. The second tool is **prayer**. **The shepherd/teacher** is responsible to prepare **himself** and to lead **his** people to prepare themselves in **prayer (Colossians 4:12-13)**. The third tool of equipping is **testing** and the fourth is **suffering**. These are primary experiences by which the believer is refined to greater holiness **(James 1:2-4; First Peter 5:10; Philippians 3:10; Second Corinthians 1:4-5)**.[166]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** so much for your wonderful gift of **prayer**! Thank **You** that **You** are never too busy to listen to my needs. How awesome that **You** desire to live with me and to never leave me. **For God Himself has** said: **I will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5c).** To have **You** by my side to help and to guide me is such a great privilege.*

***Prayer** is so helpful during the trials of life. How encouraging it is that **You are** always there to guide and to comfort. I never go thru a trial alone, for **You** are there with me. I praise **You** for being omniscient, knowing all including what will happen in the future **(Daniel 2** and **7)**. That means that when I need to know what path to take, or what to do in a difficult situation, **You** know both the hearts of all those involved and you also know what will happen in the future. When I listen and follow **Your** advice in **Your Word** I know that I am following the wisest path. There will still be problems and pains in this life, but as I focus on spending all eternity with*

You** – I rest easy! **For I consider the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18).

*Making time to praise **You** is such a wise use of time, for praising both pleases **You** and encourages our own heart. Praise to **You** for **You** are Holy, Almighty, All-powerful, All-wise, our Forgiving **Savior** and Loving **Father**! I **love You** and rejoice in following **You** in all I do. In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

Service: The second part of **God's** plan to **build up the Body of Messiah** is **the work of service (4:12b)**. No **shepherd**, or even a large group of gifted leaders, can do everything a Messianic congregation or church needs to do. No matter how gifted, talented, and dedicated a **shepherd** may be, the work to be done where he is called to minister will always greatly exceed his time and abilities. **His** purpose in **God's** plan is not to try to meet all those needs (see **4:16a** below). Obviously the leaders share in serving, and many of the congregation share in equipping, but **God's** basic design for **the Church** is the equipping done so that the believers can serve each other effectively. The entire congregation is to be aggressively involved in the work of **the Lord (First Corinthians 15:58; First Peter 2:5, 9,** and **4:10-11;** and contrast **Second Thessalonians 3:11)**. When leadership is faithful in **prayer** and in the teaching of the Word, the people will be properly equipped and rightly motivated to do the **work of service.** This is the work of every believer. Attendance is a poor substitute for participation in ministry.

Building up: The third element and immediate goal of **the Body of Messiah** is it being **built up (4:12c). Building up** (Greek: *oikodome*), literally refers to the building of a house, and was used figuratively. Of any sort of construction. It is the spiritual edification and development of the **Ephesian** church of which **Paul** was speaking here. **The Body** is built up externally through evangelism as more believers are added, but the emphasis here is on its being built up internally and spiritually as all believers are nurtured to fruitful service through **the Word**. **Rabbi Sha'ul's** encouragement to **the Ephesian elders** emphasizes this process: **I commend you to God and to the Word . . . which is able to build you up (Acts 20:32).** The maturation of the congregation is tied to learning of, and obedience to, the Scriptures. Just as newborn babies desire physical milk, so should believers desire the spiritual nourishment of **the Word of God**. **Be like newborn babies, thirsty for the pure milk of the Word (First Peter 2:2).**[167] **There are five results of following God's pattern for building up the Body of Messiah.**

Unity of faith: As **the Church** is built up, it is **unified**. **Until we all arrive at the unity implied by faith (4:13a).** The ultimate spiritual target for the church begins with **the unity of faith. Faith** here does not refer to the act of salvation or of obedience, but sound biblical doctrine (see below). **Faith** is the content of **the Gospel** in its most complete form. As the church at Corinth so clearly illustrates, disunity in the church comes from doctrinal ignorance and spiritual immaturity. When believers are properly taught and when they use their spiritual gifts and serve faithfully, **unity of faith** is the inevitable result. Only a biblically equipped, faithfully serving, and spiritually mature church can **arrive at the unity of faith.** There can never be any unity in the church apart from doctrinal truth.

Knowledge of Messiah: The second result of following **God's** pattern for **building up the Body of Messiah** is **knowing the Son of God (4:13b). Paul** is not talking about salvation knowledge, but about the deep **knowledge** (Greek: *epignosis*, meaning *a full knowledge that is correct and accurate*) through a relationship with **Messiah** that comes only through **prayer** and faithful study of, and obedience to, **God's Word (Philippians 3:8-10** and **12).** Growing deeper in **knowing the Son of God** is the process of sanctification and takes a lifetime. It will not be complete until we see our **Lord** face-to-face **(John 10:27)**.

Spiritual maturity: The third result of following **God's** pattern for **building up the Body of Messiah** is **spiritual maturity, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Messiah (4:13c ESV). ADONAI's** great desire for **His Body** is that every believer, without exception, be **conformed into the likeness of His Son (Romans 8:29)**, reflecting **the full and complete standard of Messiah.** Therefore, we are called to **walk in the same manner as He walked (First John 2:6; Colossians 4:12)**, and **He** walked in complete and continual fellowship with, and obedience to, **the Father (Second Corinthians 3:18)**.[167] But because of our **sin nature (Romans 3:23),** spiritual maturity is neither instant nor automatic; it is a gradual, progressive, life-long process. The Bible says that when we are finally able to see **Yeshua perfectly, we will become perfectly like Him (First John 3:2 NLT).** We were created to be like **Messiah**.[169]

Sound doctrine: The fourth result of following **God's** pattern for **building up the Body of Messiah** is **sound doctrine**. Part of maturity is being able to evaluate different claims about truth, and to reject those that are unworthy of **the Gospel**, and to embrace those of **God's truth**. **We will then no longer be infants (4:14a).** Building up **the Body of Messiah** means growing into **maturity**, a progressive development out of the condition of being spiritual children. Here **Paul**

makes an analogy between physical development and spiritual development. As with one's physical birth, there needs to be a spiritual birth. This was the point that **Yeshua** discussed with another famous rabbi of the first century (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Bv – Jesus Teaches Nicodemus**). After one's birth, there is the time to grow. An **infant** moves from the crib, crawling, then to toddling, as he begins walking. It is this analogy that **Rabbi Sha'ul** brings in **his** word of encouragement. The **Ephesian** believers, both Jewish and Gentile, had been born of **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh**, but the time had come for them to move on beyond spiritual infancy. It is understandable for a baby to throw some of his food off of his plate, but it's totally shocking to see a grown man do the same thing. Yet, there are believers who never grow beyond their **infant** stage. **Paul** wants them to know they should grow up. Do not be **tossed about by the waves and blown along by every wind of teaching, at the mercy of people clever in devising ways to deceive (4:14b).** There is a bit of irony in the **Rabbi's** encouragement here. **He** had just highlighted the importance of good **shepherds** and good **teaching** to **the Ephesians** above. But evidently some of **them** were all too willing to accept some counterfeit **teaching** that was not correct. They are said to have opened themselves up to some **clever people** who were skilled at deceiving the ignorant. As a result of not listening to sound doctrine, they found themselves **blown along by every wind,** like a rudderless ship in a storm. **The waves** were causing them to be **tossed about** as if they lacked the foundation of good biblical **teaching** from the Scriptures.[170]

Speaking the truth in love: The fifth and final feature that is primarily a requirement, and yet also a result of following **God's** pattern for **His Body** will be in direct opposition to being tossed, carried away, tricked, and deceived by the schemes of the Adversary, namely, **speaking the truth in love.** Much of our growth as believers doesn't come from sitting in a classroom, but from experiences where we see mature believers **speaking the truth in love. We will in every respect grow up into Him who is the head, the Messiah (4:15).** In contrast to the deceptive message of false teachers, **the Ephesians** were encouraged to live in the truth of **Yeshua** and the purity of **the Good News**. This truth was not only good for their own spiritual life but it would also have a positive impact with those around them.

What is the basis of this **truth**? **A rabbinic midrash illustrates it well where it is pointed out that the word truth (Hebrew: *emet*) comes from the letters and are first, middle, and last in the Hebrew alphabet (alef, mem, and**

tav). This is said to be a reminder that all truth comes from God, the first, middle, and last things (Genesis Rabba 81.2). Yes, we must communicate the truth of **ADONAI**, but we must do it in a loving manner. It does no good to berate people with the truth. We might drive them away further. But our calling is not to compromise the truth of **God** as we let it shine through our loving spirit. We need both elements in balance: truth and **love**. By doing so, **the Apostle** says that we will grow up **in Messiah**.[171]

In our physical health, we understand how important wholeness is. Problems in one part of **the body** affect other parts. Likewise, **under ADONAI's control, the whole Body is being fitted and held together by the support of every joint, with each part working to fulfill its function (4:16a). The** spiritual **Body of Messiah** is fitted together in such a way as to be beneficial to us and to bring glory to **YHVH**. **He** is the one who gives **the** required **gifts** (see **Bf – The Gifts of Messiah to His Church**) and holds us all together. **He** even provides the nutrients for the healthy movement of **His Body**, down to the very joints of the skeleton. We do things **God's** way, **Sha'ul** says that each part will fulfill its intended function, resulting in a strong spiritual body.

As if to emphasize the point, **the Rabbi** asserts that **love** is the main building block for **the Body of Yeshua. This is how the Body grows and builds itself up in love (4:16b).** This was just as important a word for the first century Messianic believers of **Ephesus**, as it is for us today. Am I growing in my faith in **Yeshua**? Have I discovered my spiritual gift(s), and am I using them within a local Messianic congregation or church? May we, like **the Ephesians**, receive the teaching of **Rabbi Sha'ul** and apply it in a dynamic way as we press on **in Messiah**.[172]