

“Body Building 101”

Ephesians 4:11-16

Series: Core Strengthening The Holy Catholic Church

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I’m asked a lot of theological questions such as: “Why does God allow suffering?” “Can you explain the Trinity?” and “What is the meaning of Predestination?” But the top two are: Which is correct “debts” or “trespasses”? Survey says: Debts. Sorry all you who like to trespass but that’s what the Greek word means. The second theological conundrum is: Why do we say, “The Holy Catholic Church”? We are Protestant. We’re not Catholic. Sorry to break it to you Protestants but we are Catholic. Yes, one denomination – the Church of Rome – is called the Roman Catholic Church. The Latin word *Catholic* comes from a Greek word *katholikos* which means “universal.” The Catholic Church is the universal Church. When we say in the Creed “The Holy Catholic Church” we mean I believe there is only one, holy, universal Church of God.

Now this belief is as mind-boggling as our belief in the Trinity. Why? We say there is only one, holy, universal Church but we don’t see one, any more than we can see the Trinity. I see not one Church but thousands of denominations. I see not a holy Church but a Church that, at times, has committed great sins and caused great destruction. I see not a universal Church but a church in Zambia which is different than a church in the DR than a church in China, than a church in the United States or Peru.

And yet we do believe there is One Church which includes all the denominations. We believe it is holy though everyone in it is an imperfect sinner. We believe it is universal even though it works and worships in thousands of different languages and different ways. How can this be true? The Holy Spirit is the one who creates this Church, unites this Church, purifies this Church and works through this Church. This is why, in the Creed, “The Holy Catholic Church” comes after our belief in the Holy Spirit. If you follow Jesus you’re in the Holy Catholic Universal Church. Don’t deny it. Declare it!

The real confusion about this belief is the last word: Church. Let me clear up some of the misunderstanding. The Church is not:

- A building – such as a sanctuary on the corner of Edgewood and Heacock Roads
- A denomination – such as the Presbyterian Church USA
- A hierarchy – such as in the Pope, Cardinals and Bishops
- An institution – such as an organized religion
- A worship service – such as the Celebration, Classic or Higher Ground Services
- A time of the week – such as Sunday morning
- A pastor – such as me

The Church is people – the people of God. The Church is all the disciples of Jesus Christ. The word used in the New Testament is *ekklesia*. We get our word “ecclesiastical” from

it. *Ek* means “Out” and *Klesia* comes from the word “to be called.” So it originally means “To call people to come out for an assembly.”

Lisa and I recently enjoyed a trip to Greece. I told her it was to celebrate our 40th wedding anniversary but my secret reason was to gather sermon illustrations. In Athens we went up on a hill called the *Pnyx*. It has a commanding view of the Acropolis and a speaker’s platform from 400 years before the birth of Christ. Some of the greatest orators of Greece spoke here. I wanted to get up and preach a sermon but they politely told me to get down. This spot is the birthplace of democracy. Americans think they invented democracy but over 2100 years before George Washington, the Greeks called the people to come out to this spot, hear speeches and vote on laws. They called it the “ekklesia.” Ekklesia is a gathering, an assembly, a community of people. It is not a building, a day of the week, or a worship service. This is the word the Bible uses for Church.

Why am I telling you all this boring stuff which belongs on the History Channel? You have been invited, summoned, called out of the world to be in God’s community. You are not in God’s community by accident, your family heritage or your personal decision. Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, called you to join His Movement, to be in His Family, to be a citizen of His Kingdom, to be part of His Body. You are called to be part of the One Holy Catholic Universal Apostolic Church that exists in every time and place and for eternity. You don’t GO to Church. You ARE the Church whether you are in this building or not, whether it’s Sunday morning or not.

The Apostle Paul calls the Church the Body of Christ. Jesus is the Head, we are His Body parts and the Holy Spirit gives us life. Sadly, at least in America, the Body of Christ is out of shape. It needs to be built up. It doesn’t look like Jesus. The Barna Research Group found “Openness to Jesus Isn’t the Problem – the Church is.”

When we asked Americans whether they have a positive or negative opinion of Jesus, 71% say they view him positively. Of all U.S. teens and adults, 63% say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today. This is actually most common among Millennials, of whom 70% say their commitment to Jesus is still important to them.

Beyond Jesus, when it comes to views of other Christian groups or entities, positive opinions wane. People may be reluctant to hold Christian beliefs, with the top reason today being “hypocrisy of religious people.”

They like Jesus. They don’t like the Church – especially young people. Now our purpose is not to try to make young people - or any people – happy. From what I hear, young people don’t like any authority or institution – the government, businesses, even their universities. In a Bible study this week a recent college graduate said, “Everyone on campus is so negative. They are negative about their professors, their classes, the food, everything.” Where is all this negativity? In Happy Valley. Our calling is not to make people happy. It’s to make Jesus happy. Jesus is happy when His Body acts like Him. The Barna study concluded,

The work of Christians is to embody Jesus—full of truth and grace—and reflect his image in all they say and do. The data shows they too often fall short.¹

We need to build up the Body of Christ, the Church. We need some Core Strengthening.

That's what my wife said to me. "You need to get back to the gym and exercise." I stopped going when Covid hit and kept making excuses. But Lisa did not give up. She's a Ph.D. physical therapist. Her calling is to heal and help people get in shape. Her job is to "Pump You Up." So I signed up for the gym. But as I watch everyone work on the outer shell, what surprises me is how rarely people work on the inner spirit. It's a tragedy to work on the outside and neglect the inside. Even two thousand years ago Paul said:

For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. I Timothy 4:8

Godliness or spiritual exercise is a partner, not a replacement, of physical exercise. It connects you with the God, heals relationships, helps you in difficult times, fills you with faith, hope and love. Spiritual exercise prepares you for eternity. We all know the body does not last. But the spirit continues on. It's the only exercise that improves your life now AND lasts forever. If we build up the individual parts of the Body of Christ, we will build up the whole Body of Christ.

That's where we come in. We want to help you get spiritually fit. In other words, "Ve at Voodside vant to pump you up!" The Apostle Paul said to the Ephesians. It was he (Jesus) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...Ephesians 4:11-12.

We all need **Coaches** to help pump us up spiritually. When I go to the gym all those machines intimidate me. And so did those muscular body builders – those women can tear me apart. I have one thing in my favor: a wife who loves me and patiently leads the way. She takes the fear out of those machines by setting up a personal exercise plan. She says start slow, stay consistent and build gradually. Too much pain means no gain.

But she can't do it for me. One of the greatest fallacies in the Church today is that pastors do the ministry and the people receive the ministry. That is similar to my wife drawing up an exercise plan for me and then getting on the machines and doing it while I watch from a comfortable chair – a lazy boy chair. "Keep it up honey! You're doing great. I can really feel my muscles getting stronger." The job of the coach is to get you out there to do it. Paul says the same for spiritual coaches: "to prepare God's people for works of

¹ https://www.barna.com/research/openness-to-jesus/?utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Barna+Update%3A+Openness+to+Jesus+Isn+t+the+Problem-the+Church+Is&utm_campaign=2023-5-17_Spiritually+Open+Issue+3_BU&vgo_ee=%2B%2FgaC%2Bon3qtbwyRyySIMN9x5D8uPZIRnuWNH Z112Wqdre%2Bq7o9YeSA%3D%3D%3An696LBpfYeVdXYoyomehf%2F%2BahOIqUVYD

service, so that the body of Christ may be built up..." (Ephesians 4:12). If you want to grow spiritually you have to get out of the stands and in the game.

The coaches Jesus provides are apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers – we call this APEST. At first they coach you but eventually you become one of them – APEST. Which one are you?

Do you like to start things? Then you're an Apostle and we need you to start growth groups, ministries, mission projects, microchurches, plant churches.

Do you like to shine the Light on dark places? Then you are a Prophet and we need you to fight injustice, feed the needy, bring hope and healing to the struggling,

Do you like to share Good News? Then you're an Evangelist and we need you to make friends with seekers, listen to them, and help them find their way back to God.

Do you like to offer care? Then you're a Shepherd and we need you to give compassion, a listening ear and a warm heart. We need you to spiritually nurture believers.

Do you like to explain things? Then you are a Teacher and we need you to train disciples, teach the Word, lead Growth Groups and Microchurches started by the Apostles.

So what is the spiritual exercise plan for the Body of Christ? First we **Love God**. This is the first and greatest commandment (Matthew 22:37-38). Spiritual coaches:

prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God ... (Ephesians 4:12-13).

Worship and Prayer are the way we love God. The phrase, "we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God" describes people coming together to meet a conquering hero. When we worship and pray, we put everything else aside to show our love and affection for the greatest Victor of all: Jesus Christ. Worship is not a spectator sport or concert. Prayer is not personal reflection. They are the way we love the Father, Son and Spirit. You and I can't stop worshiping. We are always worshiping. The question is, "What or Who are we worshiping?" Make a commitment this summer to the spiritual exercise of weekly worship and daily prayer to Jesus Christ.

The second phase of your exercise plan is to **Grow in Grace**. Paul goes on:

to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all... *become mature*... Ephesians 4:12-13

Maturity means more ability and responsibility, more discernment and depth. This doesn't happen instantly or automatically. Yet, Paul says if we do not grow in grace we will fall victim to the clever schemes and temptations of our culture.

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. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. Ephesians 4: 14-15

Imagine a boat filled with babies heading into a hurricane. It's an unthinkable tragedy. And yet when believers surf through the new waves and fads of this culture with barely a Sunday School understanding of the Bible, they are defenseless against the deceitful schemes of those who drag them away from Jesus. We offer all these Growth Groups and microchurches so you can grow in grace and become more mature. Paul says,

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. Ephesians 4:16

Growth Groups and microchurches are the connecting links in the body of Christ. Every disciple must connect with others through a Growth Group or microchurch. We need each other to grow. My wife drew up the exercise plan for me but still I didn't go...unless she went. I needed that at first. I often still do. Frankly it's more fun to exercise with someone. We smile or grimace at each other across the gym. We encourage and hold each other accountable. Do not pass up the opportunity to get into a Growth Group or microchurch with believers who will challenge you, stretch you, encourage you, laugh with you and even cry with you as you mature and grow in grace.

Finally, our spiritual exercise plan tells us to **Share with Others.**

to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all ... attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:12-13).

The goal of spiritual exercise is to become like Jesus – individually and together. One thing is true about Jesus: *He Shared!* He shared the Good News through His preaching, he shared His healing power with the sick, He shared His bread with thousands and ultimately He shared His life with us and for us until there wasn't any left. If all we do is sit in worship services and sit in Growth Group meetings and don't share we will not be like Jesus. Do you have a ministry? Do you have a mission? Does your Growth group have a ministry and a mission? Every one of us *can* do this. The question is, "Do you want to do this?" Something changed the day I decided to go to the gym on my own. I finally discovered the value of exercise. My vital signs are improving. My energy is up. My body feels better. I no longer *have* to do this. Now I *get* to do it.

Spiritual Growth is an issue of the heart. No one can do it for you. You have to want it from within. This is where the real battle is won or lost. Thankfully, we have an inside ally – the Holy Spirit. When you finally discover there's an intimate, deep, relationship with the God of the Universe waiting for you, then you will take the first step. And when you do, the Spirit will help you take the next step and, eventually, go the distance. You'll discover you don't *have to* do it. You *get to* do it.

Paul Brand was a child of missionaries, born in Tamil Nadu, India. He lost his father at the age of 15. He studied surgery in London and healed those wounded during the Nazi Blitzkrieg. Dr. Brand pioneered groundbreaking techniques in hand surgery and in the treatment of leprosy in India. After retirement, this Christian missionary doctor looked back and summarized his life:

I remember well when I was at my physical peak. I was 27 years old and had just finished medical school. A group of friends and I could climb (mountains) for hours. For some people, when they cross that peak, for them life is over.

I remember well my mental peak, too. I was 57 years of age and was performing groundbreaking hand surgery. All of my medical training was coming together in one place. For some people, when they cross this peak, for them life is over.

I'm now over 80 years of age. I recently realized I'm approaching another peak my spiritual peak. All I have sought to become as a person has the opportunity to come together in wisdom, maturity, kindness, love, joy, and peace. And I realize when I cross that peak, for me, life will not be over; it will have just begun.²

You don't have to wait until you are 80. Let your life begin now.

² Steve Moore, "A Graceful Goodbye," Leadership (Summer 2002), p. 42.