

LESSON 5

STRENGTHEN

In this lesson, the spiritual strength of the local church is the primary concern. We are called to be interested and invested in Christ's church not only for our own growth and strength but for the spiritual growth and strength of the whole congregation. The ability to perform these responsibilities comes only from abiding presence and power of the Holy Spirit Himself. Only recipients of the grace of the gospel can act these out in truth and power. These are selfless, Christlike duties that each of us are called to exercise for Christ's glory and the joy of Christ's church.

#13

EDIFY ONE ANOTHER

So then let us pursue what makes for peace
and for **mutual upbuilding**.

— Romans 14:19 —

Therefore encourage one another
and **build one another up**, just as you are doing.

— 1 Thessalonians 5:11 —

Keyword: *oikodomē*
to build, construct, edify

Context: This responsibility occurs in contexts that call the church to selflessly work at strengthening the whole church by ministering God's Word to one another.

Everyone in the church is called to constructively care and contribute to the health and strength of the whole.

ONENESS

Etched into the very idea of the term is oneness. There is a fundamental sense of community in the concept. It is essentially one another oriented. As such, one's own wellbeing is wrapped up in the whole.

This responsibility is to be exercised in the pattern and likeness of Christ's love towards us. That which gave us birth, gives us life. This is a distinctively one-another-oriented concept. Our interest and investment in one another is not merely for our individual wellbeing, but for the wellbeing of Christ's Bride. The growth in view can be nothing less the spiritual maturing of the whole person.

DIVERSITY

Everyone has a part in this responsibility. Diversity is connected to the need for peace, which makes sense of the main passage (Romans 14:19).

The building up of the church is connected to peace. We are called in our relationships with one another to pursue that which we already have in Christ, that which He died for us to have. It is the responsibility of those who have peace with God to pursue "the things of peace" with one another.

LOVE

This responsibility is dictated by love and therefore is not self-directed. Even personal liberties are limited by this responsibility, so that love serves a higher purpose than liberty (Rom 14:20; cf. 1 Cor 8:9). The eye of liberty is fixed upon self while the eye of love is fixed upon another. Liberty can become a cover to assert self; love cannot.

Our speech is a very important starting point for edification. See Ephesians 4:15-16, 29.

“By praying with, and for each other; and by Christian conversation, about the experience of the grace of God, and doctrines of the Gospel, whereby saints may be useful in building up one another in their most holy faith; and so likewise by avoiding all filthy, frothy, and corrupt communication; all angry words and wrathful expressions, which tend not to profit, and are not for the use of edifying, but the contrary: moreover, edification is promoted by deeds, by acts of charity, or love; for charity edifies not by bare words but by loving in deed and in truth, by serving one another in love; for the spiritual body of Christ his church, makes increase unto the edifying of itself in love; and also by laying aside the use of things indifferent, when disagreeable to any of the brethren; for though all things may be lawful to be done by us, yet all things do not edify the brethren; and things which make for the edification of the body, as well as our own, are diligently to be sought after.”

John Gill

HUMILITY

The nature of this duty implies humility. The strong tend to look down on the weak and the weak tend to envy the strong. Both are pride—seeking to make much of self, failing to make much of Christ. See Philippians 2:3–4.

“There are many ways by which we might edify one another, if we did but seriously mind it; by good counsel, reproof, instruction, example, building up not only ourselves, but one another, in our most holy faith. We are God’s building, God’s temple, and have need to be edified; and therefore must study to promote the spiritual growth one of another. None so strong but they may be edified; none so weak but may edify; and, while we edify others, we benefit ourselves.”

Matthew Henry

WORK OF GOD

Consider 1 Corinthians 10:23.

QUESTIONS

Consider conversations you have had with others in the church. Did you edify the other person in your last conversation? The one before that? Before that? How can you improve?

Identify someone you will build up. How might you commit to build them up this week?

#14

ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

Therefore **encourage one another** with these words.

— 1 Thessalonians 4:18 —

Therefore **encourage one another** and build one another up,
just as you are doing.

— 1 Thessalonians 5:11 —

that we may be **mutually encouraged** by each other's faith

— Romans 1:12 —

Keyword: *parakaleō*

to call to one's side, console, comfort, strengthen, implore, exhort, urge

Context: This responsibility is always given for the spiritual strength and upbuilding of the local church. Its multidimensional meaning covers a spectrum of applications but always points back to our responsibility to induce one another with faith.

The word for encourage is *parakaleō*. It occurs 109 times in the Greek New Testament. In its original use, the word meant "to call in," and from this meaning all other meanings follow.

USES

In the English Standard Version, this word is translated variously as, "to appeal" (Matt 8:5), "to beg" (Matt 8:31), "to implore" (Matt 14:36), "to plead" (Matt 18:29), "to entreat" (Luke 15:28), "to invite" (Acts 8:31), "to apologize" (Acts 16:39), "to ask" (Acts 28:20), "to exhort" (Luke 3:18), "to urge" (Acts 9:38), "to instruct" (Titus 1:9), and "to comfort" (Matt 5:4), "to encourage" (Acts 14:22). Three basic classes of meaning represent its range of use in the New Testament: (a) to entreat, (b) to exhort, and (c) to comfort.

NOT FLATTERY

"AM I MY BROTHERS KEEPER?"

"We should communicate our knowledge and experiences one to another. We should join in prayer and praise one with another. We should set a good example one before another. And it is the duty of those especially who live in the same vicinity and family thus to comfort and edify one another; and this is the best neighbourhood, the best means to answer the end of society. Such as are nearly related together and have affection for one another, as they have the greatest opportunity, so they are under the greatest obligation, to do this kindness one to another."

Matthew Henry

DIFFICULTIES

“The world can be a tough and unfriendly place, as we all know to our cost. It is easy to get hurt by it. In addition, bereavement can be a very painful experience. We are also prone to fear when we think of Christ’s coming to judge. These emotions can tear us apart. We can become dispirited and depressed. But God means his church to be a community of mutual support. ‘Comfort one another’, Paul writes (4:18, rsv); *encourage one another, and build each other up* (5:11). All three are, of course, expressions of that yet more basic command to *love each other* (4:9). Moreover, the word ‘one another’ or ‘each other’ (*allēloi*) emphasizes the reciprocity of Christian care. We are not to leave it to an élite of professional comforters or counsellors. These have an important role to fulfil, of course, but supporting, caring, encouraging and comforting are ministries which belong to all members of the Body of Christ.”

John Stott

SOURCE

In the context of 1 Thessalonians 5:11, they were to encourage one another by way of the gospel—a reminder of God’s sovereign grace, Christ’s work on the cross, His defeat of sin and sorrow, darkness and death, and His promise that we will live with Him together. In principle, our words of encouragement should use Scripture. We should talk to one another intentionally seeking to encourage one the other, using God’s Word.

“They were to bring these glorious truths
and these bright prospects before their minds”

Albert Barnes

In addition to verbatim Scripture, we can offer words of encouragement by using and applying biblical wisdom, principles, and sound doctrine.

“How, then, is this fundamental ministry of comfort, encouragement and upbuilding to be exercised? Doubtless in many ways, ranging from the simplicities of a smile, a hug or a squeeze of the hand to the costliness of patient listening, sympathy and friendship. Yet here in 1 Thessalonians we need to come back to Paul’s emphasis on ‘these words’ (4:18). True, the Thessalonians’ problem of anxiety in the face of bereavement and judgment was a personal and pastoral one. But the solution Paul gave them was theological. The true pastor is always a good theologian, and what makes a pastoral counsellor ‘Christian’ is his or her skilled application of the Word of God.”

John Stott

COMFORT

Matthew 5:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:17–18; 2 Corinthians 1:3–6; 7:6–7

STRENGTHEN

Acts 14:21–22; 15:32; 1 Thessalonians 3:6–7; 2 Thessalonians 2:15–17

STIR UP

Colossians 2:1–3; 4:7–9; 1 Timothy 5:1; Hebrews 10:24–25

EXHORT

1 Thessalonians 2:11–12; 2 Thessalonians 3:11–12; Titus 1:9; Hebrews 3:13

URGE

Titus 2:6, 15

#15

BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

— Galatians 6:2 —

Keyword: *bastadzō*
to take up, lift up; carry, bear, support, sustain a burden

Context: Those who have the Holy Spirit within, animating their crucified lives in Christ, bearing the fruit of the same Spirit, these same recipients of grace are to live and love in acts of grace towards one another for the glory of Christ and the good of His church. There is no greater burden than sin. Yet we are called to bear for one another even those burdens caused by sin.

In the church, the Lord has designed and sets before the world the most perfect pattern of human life, humility, and love. The one anothers pour the highest form of love into its most practical expressions. In a very significant way, each of the one anothers is an express service of Christ-centered love.

Our text may be translated, "One another's burdens, you must keep bearing, and thus fulfill the law of Christ." The word for "burdens" speaks of hardships typically regarded as burdensome and even exhausting. More than weakness is being expressed here.

SYMPATHY

This calls for sympathy. Nathaniel Vincent (1638-1697) wrote:

Love breeds sympathy when our fellow Christians are in misery. It makes us fear lest harm befall the Church of God. When the Church is actually under affliction, it causes us in that affliction to be afflicted. Love is the great law of Christ, and Christian sympathy is a fulfilling of it. ... Love easily melts the heart of a saint into sorrow when other saints are in sadness and calamity. Nay, [it is] ready to put on compassion when it sees any in misery. This sympathy of love is a real thing and shows itself in a forwardness to relieve and help. Love enlarges the heart in prayer for the distressed Church of Christ and all His members. It makes us, as we observe the Church's languors [i.e. afflictions], ready to faint and die away ourselves.¹

We are obligated to suffer with one another. It is our Master's heart and will that His subjects bear one another's burdens—this is the law of His royal land.

It is a call to endeavor to alleviate heavy burdens. Our love must practically extend a caring hand to the one another's under the various ills and evils of the present life. Afflictions and sorrows are not to be carried in isolation. We are not independent or self-sufficient people. We live by grace alone and depend on God, who strengthens us even through the providential grace of His church.

The meaning conveyed by the text, suggests a way of life. We are to "keep bearing" one another's burdens, and thereby we live in fulfillment of Christ's law of love. This love is a living principle—indeed, there is nothing "occasional" about Christian love.

SUPPLICATION (PRAYER)

¹ Free Grace Broadcaster, *Love One Another* (Chapel Library, n.d.).

SERVICE

SOLIDARITY

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

That we are to “bear one another’s burdens” does not mean that we are to burden one another.

There are many things for which you are personally responsible that cannot be taken off of your shoulders. To help a couple through an occasion of marital difficulties is to bear one another burdens. But this does not remove the personal responsibility of the husband to die to himself in love to his wife; or the wife to deny herself in submission to her husband. To help a father by watching his children for a night does not relieve him of his responsibility to father his children. He alone must bear that responsibility. The church cannot bear that responsibility either.

Those who are spiritual and bear the most burdens often say the least. But even here, we must be careful to not dismiss the danger of pride. For there can be a fine line between humility and self-sufficiency. To not ask for help when you should can be just as self-centered as asking for help when you shouldn’t.

God is sovereign and there is not one trial that we bear that is purposeless.

Surgeon

Let the first application of this passage be to yourself, and do not be eager to apply it to your neighbor, from whom you want to draw something. You have begun by violating the spirit of the text, not only by not bearing your brother's burden, but also by thrusting upon him your own burden without taking his in exchange. I say this because I have often found that men naturally draw this inference: "We are to help one another. Therefore, please help me." The proper inference would be, "We are to help one another. Where is the man whom I am to help?" Is not that the most logical conclusion from the text? Yet such is the selfishness of our nature that we begin right away to say, "This text is a cow; I will milk it." Not, "This text gives me something to do, and I will do it," but, "This text gives me a chance of getting something, and I am going to get it." If you talk like that, it proves that you are out of gear with the text and have not entered into the spirit of it at all.²

The law of Christ has no likeness to economic law. It does not recommend a producer and consumer model, namely that there are those among us who are producers of comfort and those who are consumers. Or that only some are marked out as burden-bearers, while others nicely benefit from them but bear no burden in return. Nor is it a conditional reciprocating formula: "if you scratch my back, I will scratch yours."

When applied to each saint in the church, the members of the church willfully attend to needs of one another while maintaining personal responsibility in the strength that only God can provide.

² Charles Spurgeon, *Galatians* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013).