

## Edification

Written by Frank Garner

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Most of us take very seriously the verses in 1 Corinthians 14 that direct us to edify the church. We are instructed to teach in a way that edifies the congregation (verses 3 and 4). We are told to teach or prophesy clearly so that all present may understand. Later we are encouraged to excel to be the best we can be. The purpose is "to the edifying of the church" (verse 12). Paul brings the matter to summation in verse 26 when he says, "Let all things be done unto edifying." Clearly, our singing, prayer, teaching, and the observance of the communion service are to be done in an orderly fashion to the best of our ability in order to edify the church.

Since edification is important, what exactly does it mean? Vine says edify means to build. He elaborates by saying edification is "promoting the spiritual growth and development of character of believers, by teaching or by example." Further explanation compares the building of a house or edifice with edification. One Greek word translated edify suggests patient labor in the process. Viewing these

definitions, it is my thinking that we often misunderstand edification and how we are to edify the church and those around us.

In 1 Corinthians 10:23 and 24, Paul gives us some insight into edification. He is writing about the liberty we have in Christ. His basic topic is idolatry and eating things offered to idols. He expresses clearly that he could eat such meat knowing it was provided by God for food. However, if one was offended in his eating such meat, he would not eat it because "all things edify not." It was lawful but not expedient. If someone were offended at his eating, he would be tearing down not building up, not edifying.

What does this tell us? Edification is an action of self-sacrifice. We can edify by not being offensive to people. We may have to refrain from something even if we have the freedom to do it, in order to keep from offending someone. As Paul puts it, "Let no man seek his own wealth." We need to make sure the exercising of our rights does not tear down someone's faith.

Next, let's look at Romans 14:17-19. Paul is again talking about eating meats. He again points out that if we offend a brother by exercising a personal liberty, we are not walking charitably (verses 14 and 15). He then states the "kingdom of God is...righteousness, and peace, and joy." When we exercise these things, we are "acceptable to God, and approved of men." In verse 19 he states, "Let us therefore follow after things which make for peace, and things wherewith one

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may edify an-other."

It seems to me that if we wish to edify others, we need to exercise righteousness, peace and joy. Certainly, these things will build up all people around us. Our example will build character in people we influence. We must choose to do those things that will edify and not tear down.

Another application of edifying can be seen in 1 Corinthians 8:1. "Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth." We all have knowledge about God's Word. We can be determined to exercise our knowledge and "teach those people a few things." But, Paul's statement clearly shows us that our knowledge is to be tempered with charity. If it is not, we can possibly tear down more than we can build. If we wish to build, to edify, we must be motivated by love for our fellow man. "Charity edifieth." If we are motivated by charity, we will edify by righteousness, peace, and joy. We will think of the other person before ourselves. We will be a teaching example of God's Word.

Another important part of edification is in our conversation. In Ephesians 4:29 and 31, we are told that our speech can build up or tear down. Corrupt communication (bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking) will destroy the strongest house, home, or congregation. The things we say should be designed to build up, to strengthen, to edify. If our speech does not edify those around us, then we "grieve the Holy Spirit of God."

In conclusion, I hope we have learned that edification includes much more than formal teaching or other exercises in the formal assembly of the church. We are to edify with our lives. The influence of our love, forgiveness, good works, and righteousness is an important part of edification. If we truly edify those around us, we will be as Christ described in Matthew 5:14-16: "Ye are the light of the world... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Let it be said that the people we touch and the places we go are better because we were there.

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