

Edification

To “edify” means to build up or strengthen. In the New Testament, it often refers to the promotion of spiritual growth among Christians. The church is to edify, or build up, every member in the faith (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Can you imagine a baby that never matures beyond milk? He would suffer from severe malnutrition and eventually die. The same is true with spiritual babies. They must progress from milk to solid food to stay healthy. In fact, the Hebrews writer condemned those who were not maturing in the faith and called them to deeper devotion. He wrote, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil” (Hebrews 5:12-14). Notice the contrast between milk and solid food, child and mature. Spiritual development is essential to the well-being of Christians. We must grow in the faith (1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18).



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Edification occurs primarily through education. It is accomplished through the teaching of God’s Word. For instance, when Paul gave his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, he said, “And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). Notice that “the word of his grace” was the source of their edification. They would be built up by studying and applying the scriptures to their lives. Thus, edification is the result of information that leads to transformation!

1 Corinthians 14 offers more insight into first century worship than any other chapter of the New Testament, and it is remarkable how much emphasis is put on edification. Paul uses the word seven times: “upbuilding” (v. 3), “builds up” (v. 4), “builds up” (v. 4), “built up” (v. 5), “building up” (v. 12), “built up” (v. 17), “building up” (v. 26). In fact, that last verse forms a strong summation of Paul’s whole point about the assembly — “Let all things be done for building up!” Hence, our worship is not just vertical, but also horizontal. We gather to extol God and to edify the church. This is done through activities like singing, praying, and hearing sermons, all of which are instructional, and by our general fellowship.

Perhaps the best place for edification is our Bible classes. Such classes provide a unique opportunity for growth and development. They allow for deeper dives into scripture and a chance to ask questions and discuss ideas openly. Christians who are committed to maturing in the faith will take advantage of Bible classes. Growing comes from knowing!

Sadly, many churches are bad at building up but excel at tearing down. Their services lack emotion, the sermons are always negative, there is no real sense of community, and members walk around on eggshells waiting for the next issue to arise. They “stir up one another” alright, but it is certainly not to “love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24). If this sounds familiar, something is seriously wrong where you attend and needs to be fixed. After all, the church is either edifying or dying!