

EDIFYING THE CHURCH

Tommy Shaw

My topic is "Edifying the Church." Long ago when Solomon symbolically looked forward to our day, the day of the church, he pictured the church as looking "forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." He did this, I believe, because the church was to be in possession of the truth. The church still stands today because we have the truth, and this being the case, the edification of God's church, and the importance of that edification cannot be overlooked.

God has always intended that His people have proper teaching of His way, of His word. In the Old Testament economy, God made special plans for the instruction of His people in that day and in that time. And even as the centuries of that Old Testament arrangement were wearing on, the prophets were speaking of the new dispensation which was to come, of our time, and were telling of God's plans for teaching the people in this day. In Deuteronomy 18 and 15, Moses said that God would raise up a prophet that would be "like me," or like Moses, and "you shall hear Him" In Isaiah 54, the prophet said, "all the children shall be taught the ways of the Lord." In Isaiah 2, when the mountain of the Lord's house was pictured as being established, people talked to each other and said, "Let's go up to that house, and let's be taught of the ways of the Lord."

When the times had passed, the hands of God's clock had rolled over the slow centuries of the teaching of the prophets, and the fullness of the time had arrived, John the Baptist appeared to begin the leveling of the mountains, the filling in of the valleys, the making the pathways straight. All of these, symbolic pictures of the preparation of the hearts of men by the teaching to them of truth, so that when the Lord came, He would be received. Then the Lord did appear, and in His ministry, He set forth the principles that were to govern the citizens of this new kingdom.

He was attested to at the beginning of His ministry by no less than God the Father, who said: "Hear Him." The Lord left the apostles equipped to teach. He gave them powers through the Holy Spirit. He said in John 14 and 16, "The Spirit will bring to your mind the things that I've taught you." In John the 16th chapter, He said that not only will the Holy Spirit bring to your minds the things that you've heard me speak, but He will add to that store of information. He will give you things that you're not able to bear now. After that gospel had been received by the apostles, and had been preached, we find that the apostle Paul wrote to a church that had received that information and he said: "You've received that truth, you stand in that truth, you're saved by that truth, if you keep it in memory." He wrote to Timothy in II Timothy 2 and 2, and he said, "The things that you've heard of me, commit to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." And so it is evident that men must be taught the ways of God. And we cannot emphasize that too much.

It's necessary for the church to be taught. In Romans 14 and 19, "Let us therefore follow after things that make for peace and things wherewith one may edify another." I Corinthians 14 and 16, "Let all things be done unto edification." In the original language, the word "edify" means "to build up a house." It is used metaphorically in the sense of promoting the spiritual growth and development of the believers by teaching or by example. To edify then, is to build up, or enlighten, or educate, or improve the members of the body of Christ.

Today I'm going to mention two things in a general way that I believe that edification entails. First of all, systematic instruction. There can be no building up of the body of Christ without systematic instruction. The Truth is food for the spirit, and there can be no spiritual health and well-being in the body of Christ without God's word being fed to the church. Paul, in exhortation to the elders at Ephesus, spoke of that which "is able to build you up." The primitive church "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine."

The responsibility of teachers of the word of God is also emphasized. James 3:1, "My brethren, be not many masters knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation." *The*

Amplified Bible says, "Not many of you should become teachers, for you know that we will be judged by a higher standard and with greater severity. Thus we assume the greater accountability and more condemnation." The gist of the teaching here is, I believe, that a teacher should be careful of what he teaches from the pulpit, and also of how he lives, for his teaching and his influence has power over the destiny of others.

We have often heard of the preacher who does not live what he teaches. Someone told him, "What you do speaks so loudly I can't hear what you're saying." And then someone said of another preacher who could occupy the pulpit very well, speak fluently, hold the attention of the people while he was there, but his life didn't measure up to what he had to say: "When he is in the pulpit, I think that he should never get out, and when he is out, I think that he should never get in."

In Romans the 2nd chapter, verses 21 and 22, Paul speaks of the Jews who boasted of the Law and didn't keep it. They felt, he said, that they were guides to the blind, and light to them that were in darkness. But this is how he criticized them: "You therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? Thou that makest thy boast of the Law, through breaking the Law dishonorest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

Teaching others, then, is absolutely necessary if the church is to stand, and teaching others is a heavy responsibility that should not be entered into lightly by those who care to assume that position.

The second requirement of edification is a diligent attention to the ordinances and duties of God's priesthood. There is a great secret of success in training and edifying the congregations of the church, and that secret of success consists in having everyone of the members actively engaged in doing the duties that God has given us. It's a mistake to think that only a few people can edify the church. Now it may be true that when it comes to public teaching the number of those who can occupy the pulpit are greatly reduced. But edification does not consist of public teaching alone.

Paul expressed it like this in Ephesians 4:16, and this is from the *Living New Testament*, "Under His direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly, and each part in its own special way helps the other parts, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love." In Romans 12, verses 4 through 8 from the same translation, "Just as there are many parts to our bodies, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of it, and it takes everyone of us to make it complete for we each have different work to do. So we belong to each other and each needs all the others. God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well, so if God has given you the ability to prophesy, then prophesy whenever you can. If your gift is that of serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, do a good job of teaching. If you are a preacher see to it that your sermons are strong and helpful. If God has given you money, be generous in helping others with it. If God has given you administrative ability, and put you in charge of the work of others, take the responsibility seriously."

And so all Christians should edify. All Christians should contribute to the building up of the body of Christ. And any act that is well performed in obedience to God's will is, to some extent, an act of edification. If we need anything today, we need people who will examine their lives to see if what they do is edifying the church, is building up the church.

We shouldn't be like the crooked man that all of us have read about. "There was a crooked man, who had a crooked smile, who made a crooked fortune in a very crooked style; He lived a crooked life, as crooked people do, and when he died it turned out, his sons were crooked too." Today in the church we're having problems on the moral scene, and people wonder why, and the wonderment need not exist because we're failing to edify by the things that we do.

In I Corinthians the 8th chapter, the word for "edification" is used, but is translated "embolden." and one of the commentators comments on this passage and says Paul is using the word with pathetic irony of the action of a brother in teaching another brother who had a weak conscience, causing him to compromise his scruples. Encouraging a brother to violate his conscience was wrong, and he was failing to edify. He was failing to build up, and Paul uses the word in this place to emphasize this fact.

But we turn to the public teaching. We know that the teaching of God's word is meant for men to do. In I Corinthians 14 and 34, Paul said, "Let your women be silent in the churches for it hath not been permitted unto them to speak." Macknight, I believe, sums up our position, when he says that they're not even to ask questions, even on a pretense of learning something, lest it be used as a handle for entering into disputation with men.

And so men are to teach publicly. But men that teach must be faithful men, or trustworthy men, according to II Timothy 2 and 2. Elders were to be "apt to teach," or skilled in teaching, and that requires a knowledge of God's word, and God's word becomes familiar to us only by diligent study.

Along with the development of teachers in any community of saints, there should also in that community, grow a love for the knowledge of truth. The teachers are better able to teach, and occupy the pulpit with more vigor, more enthusiasm when there grows in that community the ability to quote, to interpret, to divide correctly the word of God.

Our Lord was familiar with the word. At twelve years of age, the Bible says that He advanced in wisdom. He quoted it often. When He met the devil, He quoted God's word. When He appeared to His fellow townsmen, the Bible says: "He opened the Book and found the place." If we can't quote, we could, like the Lord, be able to open the Book to the place that we're looking for. His sermons often refer to Old Testament Scriptures, and on the cross He quoted part of a Psalm of David. And we too, are told to be diligent in our investigation of God's word that we might be workmen that "needeth not to be ashamed."

Today we have instant coffee, and instant tea, and instant potatoes, and a lot of other things that can be prepared instantly, but we have no instant teachers or preachers. We need to be able to interpret the Bible. We need to be able to open the hearts of others, just as Paul opened the heart of Lydia and her household. That is, we need to be able to remove mistaken conceptions, and that requires a knowledge of the Word acquired through diligent study.

We have, in I Corinthians 14, the great example of the apostolic church carrying on its worship. Here, very plainly, we are told how the public teaching is to be done. There are those today who would say that this part of God's word applies only to the first century church and to the time when men were inspired directly by the Holy Spirit. But all gifts necessary for the building up of the church proceed from God, whether these gifts be natural gifts or whether they be supernatural gifts, and the regulation of these gifts that God has given is the same, whether they are natural or supernatural. And that point is important. The regulation of the gifts that God has given to men is the same whether the gifts are natural or supernatural!

And so, I Corinthians 14 is the great plan for the conduct of the worship of the church today. If this chapter does not apply today, we do not know how to proceed when the church comes together to worship God. But it does apply. And since it does apply, it tells us how the edification of the church should be carried on.

In verse 16, "How is it then brethren, when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation." Notice Paul said, "Everyone of you hath something to do." In verse 31, "For ye may all prophesy one by one that all may learn and that all may be comforted." If any part of God's word applies today, this certainly does. And if it applies today, if this God-given system is applicable in our day, then it should be used. It was used in the beginning. It was used to build up the church then, and I believe that there is no system superior to this God-given system.

Do you think that the sons of Aaron, who had been selected for that high and holy calling in the days of yesteryear were privileged? Do you believe that they were selected to be priests, to be washed and anointed and properly robed, so that they might enter into the dimly lit sanctuary to serve the almighty God? Do you believe that God jealously protected the office that these priests held? Then today, you must also believe that the priesthood that is comprised of members of the church is a much higher calling, a much holier calling, than that of Aaron's day. And when any man today stands in an assembly of the church, and he sings or he prays or he occupies the pulpit, he does so as part of the royal priesthood consecrated to the worship of God. It is a high and holy calling.

I, for one, would protest anybody taking from me the privilege that I have of serving God as a

priest in His house, and in performing the things that He would have me to do. And so it is with all of us who are qualified, and have been made recipients of this high and holy office. We should never let anyone take from us the important obligation and duty and privilege that we have of edifying the church of Christ and building it up.

Well, what's the purpose of it all? in Psalms 129 and 1, the sweet singer of Israel said: "For the Lord taketh pleasure in His people." And in Ephesians 5 and 27, Paul said: "That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." With the truth and the proper application of that truth, the church stills stands.