

Grow Upward by Being Built Up

Աճիլ՝ Շինուած Քրիստոսի Վրայ

Galatians 5:13-17

This year our main theme is: “**Connected with God and Each Other.**” based on Colossians 2:6-7. Basically grow in all dimensions:

Connected: Grow downward by being “rooted”

Connected: Grow upward by being “built up”

Connected: Grow inward in faith “strengthened in the faith”

Connected: Grow outward as you “overflow with thankfulness”*

Last week we covered being rooted, growing downward. Those sermons help me evaluate my life while I am working on them. I pray they will challenge you as well to study, learn and grow in HIM.

Paul says: “**rooted and built up in him**” (Colossians 2:7)

Built up means growing upwards like a building where stones are laid on top of each other.

In the Old Testament, building the Temple was an extremely important task. **The Temple or the building itself became the center of worship.** Yet Jesus challenged this by becoming **the new temple of God.** He also became **the sacrifice, the only sacrifice offered** at the Temple. **He wanted his followers to be the new structure, the new building, not built by stones, but by living stones.** The church, the family of believers, us, you and me are the living stones of the new Temple.

Peter writes concerning this new structure:

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:4-5 ESV)

We are living stones. Yes, the dead stones of the Temple turned into living stones. Christ is the cornerstone of this building. Without Him, the building is doomed to collapse.

Peter used the same root word Paul did: “We are **built up**” (*oikodomeō*).

The meaning of the word in the Greek Lexicon is:

1. to build a house; erect a building
2. metaphorically: “**to promote growth in Christian wisdom, affection, grace, virtue, holiness, blessedness.**”¹

We are being built up as a spiritual house. Those living stones are laid next to each other. Those stones will be in relationship with each other to demonstrate Christian wisdom, virtue, grace, holiness. Those attributes will be seen only in the context of community and relationships. **Those living stones are in a relationship with the Cornerstone and with each other.** (Connected with God and each other). The evidence of this healthy relationship is seen **in the fruits of the body**.

Let me come to our passage, Galatians. I cannot cover it in one Sunday. So let us go step by step.

The first concept that Paul brings here the word freedom.

I love freedom, and in fact Sevan and I called our son’s name Azad (free)

Yet, when we abuse the freedom that we receive.

This is the issue faced by every criminal when released from prison: shall I use my new found- freedom to go and commit more crimes?

Freedom **from** restraint, if it is to be of any use, must be matched by a sense of freedom **for** a particular purpose.²

The freedom that Christ brings liberates us from sin, from the flesh, from the old life, from pagan life, or from Jewish laws.

“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”(Galatians 5:13)

When we are freed from the “flesh,” from sin; we are freed **to serve one another** through love: **Freedom to love**. Love here is choice: it is choice to serve and care for each other...

So, we grow upward when we are **built up in the Spirit**, which results in **freedom from the flesh to freedom to love**.

Living (walking) in the Spirit produces fruits. Yet walking in the flesh produces vices. There is a “war” going on between the flesh and spirit in our lives.

-What is flesh? We live in a body, in a flesh. Flesh is good and not bad. But in our context flesh represents the human fallen world, **where sin dominates**.

Eugene Peterson describes the flesh:

A life of passions and desires, a life of impulse and necessity, a life responding to signals from others, a life of captivity to internal compulsions.³

It is interesting that Paul did not say “**the fruits of flesh**”; I think flesh cannot produce anything good. The Spirit can produce fruits and not the flesh. Peterson further explains the **works of the flesh** according to Galatians 5.

It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive loveless sex, a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage, frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness, trinket gods, magic-show religion, paranoid loneliness, cutthroat competition, all-consuming-yet-never satisfied wants, a brutal temper, an impotence to love or be loved, noisy arguing, small-minded and uneven pursuits, a vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival, uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions, ugly satire of community. I could go on.⁴

Our building is not a solo building, the bodies of individuals, or relationship with each other. Speaking of relationships, do you realize that in the fifteen sins in the list (Gal. 5: 19-21), eight of them have something to do with the **breakdown of relationships**? Freedom is lived out in relationships. We are freed to love. We are freed to care, and caring for each other is not a luxury; it is a biblical command. As the writer of the Hebrews says: **But exhort, (encourage) one another every**

day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:13)

This list of sins can be categorized as such:

1. **Inappropriate sexual behavior:** sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality
2. **Misplaced worship:** idolatry, sorcery.
3. **Broken relationships:** enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy
4. **Alcohol problems:** addictions, drunkenness, orgies

Paul is cautious. The church had serious problems of “*devouring*”, or “*biting*” each other: **But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another (5:15).**

I learn from Jesus how he faced the flesh. He faced the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Romans, Pilate, all kinds of oppositions that wanted to eliminate him. Jesus did not lose his focus.

All that flesh can do is to trap us to fall in it. Jealousy, sexual addictions, or any kind of addictions; idolatry, wrong kinds of worship, all these sins make us slaves of our desires and ego. We think we are liberated; indeed we are slaves of our self.

So where is the solution?

N.T. Wright says:

The alternative is to allow the power of God’s spirit to direct your life. If you want to fulfill the law, supremely through obeying the central command of love, **this can only happen by the spirit.** As so often in Paul, ‘flesh’ and ‘spirit’ are in opposition to each other. This isn’t a matter of the material world against the non-material. Many of the ‘works of flesh’ could be practiced by a (wicked) disembodied spirit. It is, rather, **a matter of where your true identity lies, where your deepest motivation comes from, and where the power that rules your life is really found.**⁵

What is our identity? Who rules you? Are you free from the flesh? Are you walking in the Spirit? Are you growing upward building up the body of Christ, and bearing the fruit of the Spirit? Those are questions that one has to face and tackle with.

During my vacation I saw a movie called "All Saints." It is about a church in a rural area in Tennessee. The church lost its congregation for different reasons. So the regional leadership of the church decided to close the church and sell the property so they can use the money for missions. In order to do this, they sent a young pastor with his wife and son. What a job! You are there to close a church. The local congregation was not happy about this but hey had a large mortgage to pay- around \$800,000. One day, the pastor found Christian immigrants who came from Burma and who were looking for local church to join. One of their lay leaders became friends with the young pastor; he brought many families to the church. Suddenly the church was full of locals and immigrants.

One day the pastor had a vision. The church property had some land with good quality soil. The immigrants from Burma were farmers. This young pastor thought this could turn everything around. He tried to sell this new vision to the head council, the bishops. They were hesitant in the beginning. Eventually, they accepted provided they have six months to save their debt. So, the pastor, the local families and the immigrants worked very hard in the farm. Unfortunately, it was a very dry season. So they did the impossible for irrigation. Finally, the crop was ready for the harvest. Suddenly a severe rain came and flooded the crop. Everyone came to church field to help, neighbors who were not Christians, everyone was helping. Yet, the storm was severe and the harvest was ruined.

This young pastor got so sad and raised his voice to God. "Did I hear you right? Did I impose my will on you?"

It was Sunday and he gave his last sermon before shutting down the church. He said: "God heard our prayers. We became a community. Look around, from Burma, local white church members, neighbors who came to help and were not necessarily Christians, we learned to worship and serve together. We became a community." And you know, someone donated large amount and debt was covered. All Saints functions until today. The point is: can we become a community?

It does not matter what past one has had. The past is erased by the grace of God. I was touched by the love in this community of believers. They were freed to LOVE, to love each other.

Next Sunday, we will take the fruit of the spirit.

* The idea to Grow in different directions is taken from "Deepening Your Roots" by Brian Bill.

1. Greek lexicon, Blueletterbible.org
2. N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone Galatians* p 69
3. Eugene Peterson, *Traveling Light*. P 167-168
4. *ibid* p 149
5. N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone Galatians* p70