

A Body Builder **Ephesians 4:25 – 5:2**

Introduction

Like many of you, I have watched the Olympics this summer. Whether it is the summer Olympics or the winter Olympics, whenever they are on I find myself sitting down to watch sporting events that I would never sit down to watch at any other time. Incredible dramas. Incredible stories about people who have worked hard for years to chase a dream! People like ...

- Simone Biles and Suni Lee with beautiful floor events to capture medals, followed by the heartbreak of falling off the balance beam – both of them!
- Katie Ledecky becoming the American woman with the most swimming medals.
- Noah Lyles winning the 100 meters in a photo finish by leaning his torso farther than the silver medalist did, and amazingly getting a bronze in the 200 meters despite a COVID diagnosis that impacted his breathing.
- Kristen Faulkner, who was an unlikely winner in the 158-kilometer road bicycle race. She made the team only as a replacement rider in case something happened to one of the other riders.

I especially loved the human-interest feature where Elmo (of Sesame Street fame) got convinced the Olympic Men's Rowing team to sing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" with him. What's better than an Olympic gold medal? Singing with Elmo!

Today's text reminded me of the Olympics – briefly. For shortly after I was inspired, I remembered that the image I had is not an Olympic sport after all. But more on that in a minute.

This is the fourth of six sermons in a series that seeks to answer the question "Who Am I?" My goal in this series is to help each of us understand and confidently affirm our identity in Jesus, so that ...

When I say, "I am a Christian," what does that mean? Who am I?

So far in this series we have defined ourselves as:

- Christians who are built on firm foundation of faith that sustains us through the storms of life
- Christians who sink their roots down in the affirming love of God
- Christians who are only one part – but one very important part – of the Body of Christ

When I originally drafted this sermon, my working title was "Who am I? An Edifier." I didn't like that title when I drafted it, and I still don't. I mean, what's an edifier?

"Edify" is a church-y word used mostly by people who went to seminary. It probably isn't a part of your everyday vocabulary. But when the Bible uses it, edify means ...

... to build up the Body of Christ and individual believers in their faith, knowledge, and obedience to God through teaching, exhortation and righteous living.

In other words, an edifier is a body builder, someone who builds up the Body of Christ. Which brings me back to the Olympics. Bodybuilding itself is not an Olympic sport, largely because of the widespread use of steroids. But I think the picture is still a good one for us to think about as we answer the “Who Am I?” question.

Who Am I? I am a Body Builder for Jesus. I am someone who builds up the Body of Christ.

And I do that by ...

#1: I BUILD THE BODY OF CHRIST BY PRIORITIZING MY RELATIONSHIPS

Look at verses 25-26:

Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, (Ephesians 4:25-26)

Two examples here: speaking truthfully and getting angry. Both are related to what comes out of our mouths, teaching us that:

Building the Body of Christ requires us to control our tongues and control our tempers.

Why? Because uncontrolled tongues and tempers destroy things. And as Christians we are called to build up, not tear down. The Epistle of James calls our tongues:

The tongue is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire ... (James 3:6)

Whether spoken in anger or used to mislead, words are living creatures. Once you speak them, they live forever. You can't take them back.

- Oh, how often we wish we could grab them and shove them back down our throats! Right?

In his book *The Youth Builder*, Jim Burns talks about the importance of building up young people with affirmation and trust. What he says about criticism applies to every age group: For every critical comment we receive, it takes at least nine affirming comments to balance out the negative effect in our life. Most young people receive more critical comments a day than encouraging ones.

- That's generous. I've always heard that a child can never erase the impact of a critical comment.

Joseph Telushkin, author of *Words That Hurt, Words That Heal*, lectures throughout our country on the powerful and often negative impact of words. He often asks those in his audience if they can go 24 hours without saying any unkind words about or to another person. Invariably a small number raise their hands indicating that they can but there is nervous laughter from most and even a few will call out, "no!"

- Telushkin responds: "If you can't answer 'yes' must recognize that you have a serious problem. If you cannot go 24 hours without drinking liquor, you are addicted to alcohol. If you cannot go 24 hours without smoking, you are addicted to nicotine. Similarly, if you cannot go 24 hours without saying unkind words to or about others, then you have lost control of your tongue."

Many people have a serious problem in this area! That's why it has no place in the Body of Christ. It kills relationships. Remember,

Who am I? I am a Body Builder for Jesus Christ.

#2: I BUILD THE BODY OF CHRIST BY PURIFYING MY ATTITUDES

Look at verse 31:

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

Apart from its impact on the Body of Christ, do you realize the impact these things have on your own body?

Bitterness has been medically linked to glandular problems, high blood pressure, cardiac disorders, ulcers, and even mental illness.

- One leading psychiatrist wrote, "90% of all people receiving mental health treatment could be discharged immediately if they would learn how to release their bitterness and anger."

The Gospel Herald is a Christian publication originating from Canada. They have been publishing a monthly magazine for 77 years now. A recent article contained this story from a medical professional in Toronto:

I had a patient whose health was good. He was sturdy and strong. His heart rates and blood pressure were fine. Then his father died, and he got into a prolonged legal dispute with his sister about their father's will. The case went to court, and the sister won.

From that day on, the man could think of nothing more than the lawsuit and his sister. He talked about it, he thought about it, he filled himself with it, to the point it became an obsession. And each day, he grew to hate his sister more.

Before long he began to have difficulty with his heart and blood pressure. Next, his kidneys bothered him. Before many months, complications killed him. It

seems obvious that he died from bodily injuries brought on by powerful emotion. I believe the man killed himself, death by bitterness.

That poison infiltrates the whole body. Make that body with a capital “B” – the whole Body of Christ.

My dad's side of the family swore by the healing power of a smelly substance called “black salve.” I have no idea the proper name for it. But if we got any kind of open sore that was at risk for infection, dad would put black salve on it. Mom opted for Neosporin or A&D ointment. Dad was all about the black salve. “It sucks the poison out,” he would say.

- Don't you wish God had black salve to help get rid of the poison attitudes that kill us?
- He does. The portion of our text that is chapter 5 tells us:

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us **as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.** (Ephesians 5:1-2)

The best cure for the poisons that kill is to bring them to the cross and confess them as sin. There the fragrant offering of Christ cleanses you – it draws the poison out. Confess them as sin, for they are. They are killing you and they are damaging to the Body of Christ that you are called to build.

#3: I BUILD THE BODY OF CHRIST BY PRACTICING FORGIVENESS

Look at verse 32. The first two points are hard: Controlling your tongue and purifying your attitudes. But once you know and fully understand what Christ has done for you, this third point should be easy:

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)

I'm on the receiving end of God's forgiveness and kindness. I know what that feels like. And I know how important it is.

Nothing builds the Body of Christ better than the combination of kindness, compassion and forgiveness. If ever there was a magic pill, this is it.

One day an elderly man came into the office of Pastor Warren Wiersbe, then pastor of Moody Church in Chicago. He wanted to know if Pastor Wiersbe would perform a wedding for two people who had been married once before.

“Before I bring my fiancée in,” the man explained, “I wanted to explain this wedding to you. Both of us have been married before—to each other! Over thirty years ago, we got into an argument. I got mad, and we separated. The longer we were

separated, the madder I got. Then we did the most stupid thing possible. We got a divorce. I guess we were both too proud to apologize.

Well, for the last 30 years we've lived alone, and now we see how foolish we've been. We recognize how our bitterness has robbed us of the joys of life, and we have forgiven each other. The love we once had has been rekindled. Now we want to remarry and see if the Lord won't give us a few years of happiness before we die."

This 32nd verse is a great one to post on your bathroom mirror so that it is one of the very first thoughts you have each morning! Memorize it. And practice it. It is good for your soul and it builds the Body of Christ.

APPLICATION

When I was a kid growing up in St. Marys, my dad took my brother and I to the gymnasium of Crestview High School in Rockford, OH. There we met Paul Anderson, who at the time was known as "The Strongest Man in History."

In 1955, at the height of the Cold War, Anderson was invited to the Soviet Union for a head-to-head weight lifting competition with Alexey Medvedev, the Olympic champion. The Russian champion matched his Olympic record with a two hand press of 330.3 pounds.

The Russians laughed as Paul Anderson stepped up to the bar. He looked nothing like a chiseled Olympic champion. The commentator called him "a great ball of a man." Anderson had the bar set at the unheard of weight of 402.5 pounds, more than 70 pounds more than the Olympic record. The laughs changed to all-out cheers as Anderson pressed that weight overhead.

In Rockford that night, Anderson impressed us with some amazing strong man feats. I remember him hammering a nail with his bare fist and raising a table loaded with eight men onto his back – which was nothing. At the time he held the Guinness World Record for back lifting more than 6,200 pounds.

Once he had our attention, he told us about his faith in Jesus Christ. The strongest man in the world was working to build up the Body of Christ that night.

And not that night only. That appearance at Rockford OH was one of more than 500 such appearances he did every year for almost 30 years to raise funds for a Christian youth home for troubled teens, where one of the primary principles taught is the spiritual component of faith in Christ. That home is still going strong 60 years later.

You

You are a Body Builder for Jesus. That's WHO YOU ARE!

Amen.