

FIT FOR LIFE Ephesians 4:11-13

INTRODUCTION:

According to the August 17 issue of *TIME* magazine, Americans spend over \$19 billion per year in gym and health club memberships. That is just in this country. Worldwide, the market for fitness equipment exceeds \$44 billion. But even that is not the complete picture because that figure does not include all of the money that people spend on diet plans, weight loss programs, herbal supplements and other expenses for health and fitness. The pursuit of physical fitness is big business: really BIG business.

That is not altogether a bad thing. After all, the Bible teaches us that our physical bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit and it is appropriate for us to provide a well-maintained temple for God's Spirit. (I just happen to think He might appreciate a bay window in my temple.)

But physical fitness is not the most important thing. In I Timothy 4:8, the apostle Paul told his young protégé, Timothy,

...physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

So that begs the question: with all the billions we spend on physical fitness, prescriptions, dietary supplements, health care, insurance and a host of other efforts to enhance and prolong our physical lives, are we even remotely as concerned about our spiritual fitness? We certainly should be because no matter how much we spend, our physical bodies are going to die. As Daryl Bolen reminded us during our revival, we all have an expiration date stamped on our bodies. Our physical bodies will die but our souls can live forever.

During 2009, our theme for the year was "Little is Much." For 2010, our theme will be "Fit For Life." We are going to set out to learn to be fit to live life now and equipped to live eternally.

To introduce this theme, I want to share some perspectives that may help us to become spiritually fit. And the first perspective is this: if you are a Christian, you are a part of the Body of Christ.

I. **YOU ARE A PART OF THE BODY OF CHRIST**

In I Corinthians chapter 12, starting in verse 12, the apostle Paul writes these words that should help to give us a clear picture of who we are:

¹² *The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*

¹⁴ Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it

Paul says that our physical bodies are an illustration of the church. Some people want to illustrate the church with some kind of an organizational chart that shows different levels of authority and different layers of responsibility. But when Paul drew a word picture of the church, he described an organizational chart that looks like a human body.

- Jesus Christ is the head and the head is in charge of the rest of the body.
- Everyone else is like a part of a physical body. In a physical body, every piece is a part of the whole and every part is important. All of the parts are not identical. They have different functions and different roles to play but each is intended to function and all are important to the well-being of the whole.

The first symptom we had of Sandy's stroke was that a part of her body had stopped responding to the direction of the head. Her left arm and hand, her left leg and foot, no longer did what her head was telling them to do. They just hung there limp and lifeless. And despite various therapies, different surgeries and a range of treatments, those parts of her body remain unresponsive to the head.

I've never been a part of a church where there were not unresponsive members. Some are like spastic limbs in open rebellion to the head,

flailing about doing their own thing. Others are simply lifeless and a drag on the rest of the body.

And while I have never been a part of the church without unresponsive members, that is not healthy and it is not normal for the Body of Christ. In the Body of Christ, every member is to be a functional, active part of the body and any member that is not is a symptom of some sort of disorder or unhealthiness.

When you consider your membership in Clay City Christian Church, please do not think of it as having joined some club, some organization or some association. Think of yourself as a part of a body where every member has a function to fulfill for the good of the whole.

II. GOD WANTS CHRIST'S BODY TO BE BUILT UP

Now, the church is not your club or your society or your fraternity, it is the Body of Christ. And it is important to know that God wants Christ's body to be built up. In fact, in Ephesians chapter 4, starting with verse 4, Paul wrote these words about the Body of Christ:

⁴ There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸ This is why it says:

*“When he ascended on high,
he led captives in his train
and gave gifts to men.”*

*⁹ (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹ It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, **so that the body of Christ may be built up** ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

Paul says that the reason Jesus gives spiritual gifts to people in the church is specifically so that God's people will be equipped to do acts of service in order that the Body of Christ may be built up. God does not intend for Clay City Christian Church to be a 98-pound weakling. He does not intend for this Body to waste-away on life-support just forestalling its inevitable death. God intends for this Body of Christ to be robust, healthy, growing and maturing. Toward that end, He insures that we are equipped

with the people we need who can equip us to grow and become stronger as a functioning body.

Last June, ABC News broadcast the story of 16 year old Brooke Greenberg. Most 16-year old girls have a driver's licenses. Most 16-year old girls like to go out and party. Most 16-year old girls have grown during the entire course of their lives. However, not this one. Brooke Greenberg is old enough to drive a car but she is not tall enough to drive one. In fact, she has never grown at all during her life, and doctors are wondering why.



Brooke has two older sisters and a younger sister, all of whom have no problem growing up. In this picture, they are Emily, aged 22; Caitlin, aged 19, Brooke at age 16; and Carly, aged 13.

Doesn't your heart go out to Brooke and her family? The dreams they must have had for her when she was born are all dashed because she hasn't grown up.

How many Christians and how many churches are just like that? Too, too many, I'm afraid. Way too many churches and way too many church members are like little Brooke Greenberg: stunted in their growth, arrested in their development, perpetually small and immature. Our Father has bigger dreams, bolder plans and a healthier future for us than that. God wants the Body of Christ to be built up to become spiritually stronger and numerically larger.

Healthy Christians and healthy churches grow. So let me ask you: what is keeping Clay City Christian Church from growing? Is it our organization and administration? Is it our preaching and teaching? Is it our music and worship? We know it is not Jesus' fault that we are not growing. And we know that there are churches in our area that are growing so we cannot use our location as an excuse. Let's get diagnostic here and figure out why we are not growing and then let's address the problem and begin to fulfill our Father's dreams for this church.

And along the same lines, if you are not growing spiritually, why not? Is it the preaching and the teaching you are receiving? Is it a lack of personal Bible study, devotional time and prayer? Is it misdirected priorities? What is it that is keeping you from becoming the robust, spiritually fit person that your heavenly Father intends for you to be? We want to help you address that this year, too.

God want Christ's body to be built up and that means that every member of the Body needs to be growing in Christ. In Ephesians 4, Paul says that

we grow as we serve. So let me encourage you to find a place of service in the church and start working for the Lord.

III. THE MEASURE OF OUR FITNESS IS THE IMAGE OF CHRIST

If I were to decide that I wanted to be physically fit, I might be better motivated if I had a goal. Maybe I could get a poster of some very fit person and make it my goal to look like that one day.

What is the measure by which we are to evaluate our spiritual fitness? In Ephesians 4, Paul says it is the image of Christ.

I'm not impressed if you are simply more spiritually fit than I am. That's not much of an achievement. You are not to evaluate yourself in comparison to the person seated next to you. Nor even in relation to the most spiritually mature person you know. The gauge of your spiritual fitness is: how do you measure up to Jesus? He is the standard by which you will be evaluated.

And you will be evaluated one day. You know that, don't you? One day, when you have passed from this life into the next, you will stand before the God of the universe and you will be judged not by any human standard, not by your good intentions, not by your mother or father or sister or brother but by the measure of the maturity of Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION:

December and January are the busiest months for retail sales of new exercise equipment because people make a resolution to get fit. But March and April are the busiest months for resale of used exercise equipment as people fall off the treadmill and fall back into their old habits.

It ought not to be our goal to spiritually fit for a moment, for a month or even for a year. It ought to be our goal to be fit for life. Will you make that your goal as we stand and as we sing?

INVITATION: #561 – *"I Would Be Like Jesus"*