

An Oasis of Normalcy

ONE PURPOSE OF THE church local (in contrast to the church universal) is for its members to *edify* each other. This fifty-cent word is from the construction trade. When I buy a plot of land and hire someone to erect a dwelling on that land, the crew of carpenters come and “edify” my new house. An “edifier” is a house-builder—one who does not tear down, but builds up.

For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

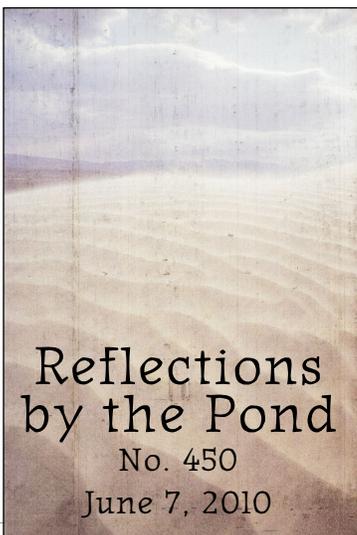
1 Thessalonians 5:9-11

Believers typically think of this in terms of encouragement, consolation, physical help, companionship, instruction or discipleship. Christians are to actively build

each other up, rather than tear each other down. But there is another, more subtle way in which the members of the body of Christ edify each other.

A healthy, Spirit-energized church is an oasis of normalcy in a desert of abnormality. Of course “normalcy” is a subjective concept, isn’t it. Most people consider themselves to be normal, and deem anyone behaving by a different standard to be abnormal. For the believer, however, there is a definitive standard for gauging normalcy—one which relies not on the vagaries of the human condition, but on the eternal standards set by a righteous God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its



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passions and desires.

Galatians 5:22-24

These qualities and behaviors are not exclusive to the church, nor are they evidenced consistently in every believer. Nonetheless, because they are itemized, defined and implemented by holy God, they represent those qualities and behaviors our Creator deems normal.



Every day we open the newspaper and read about people behaving in strange and frightening ways. Every day we watch programs on television that promote abhorrent behavior, all the while declaring it to be perfectly normal. But normalcy by the world's standards is always a moving target. That which was abnormal in 1968 was considered normal by 1988. That which was considered perverse in 1988 is considered perfectly acceptable behavior today.

But what God considered normal before the creation of the universe He still considers normal today.

He who walks righteously and
speaks uprightly,
He who despises the gain of
oppressions,
Who gestures with his hands,
refusing bribes,
Who stops his ears from hearing
of bloodshed,
And shuts his eyes from seeing evil:

He will dwell on high;
His place of defense *will be* the
fortress of rocks;
Bread will be given him,
His water *will be* sure.
Your eyes will see the King in His
beauty;
They will see the land that is very
far off.

Isaiah 33:15-17



There is a special yet unobtrusive way that the members of the body of Christ edify each other. We—both collectively, as a church, and as specific personalities within that body—give each other a place of psychological and emotional refuge—an oasis of normalcy in a world that is fast going mad.

When society says that teenagers that have libidinous, drug-induced lives are the preferred norm, we can balance against that the lives of teenagers we know in the church. When society says that the traditional family of man and woman with children is now passé, that men are unimportant to the rearing of children and that raising them by “parents” of the same sex is just as good (or even better)—we can balance the product of that philosophy against the product of the arrangement these crusaders consider obsolete.

When it seems like we are surrounded by people perpetually angry, people who are self-absorbed, unfeeling about others, uncaring

about the damage they wreak upon others, people lusting for power at any cost—when it seems like we stand alone in a barren and parched land, we can seek solace and encouragement from those who live not by the standards of this fallen world, but by the eternal standards of the one who is their Lord.

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not *just* please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.” For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

Romans 15:1-7

