
Words of Truth

Are All Things Supposed To Be Edifying?

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In the fall of last year I had a biblical discussion with a person that maintained that everything we say or do must be edifying to others. To prove his point, he used this Scripture: *"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. Let all things be done unto edifying"* (I Corinthians 14:26). When I asked him if he understood the context of that Scripture, he said the context didn't matter. He maintained that everything must be edifying. He did not give this Scripture, but used wording similar to Paul's wording here: *"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not"* (I Corinthians 10:23).

I spent considerable effort trying to pursue an opportunity to discuss the context and meaning of the two passages quoted above, but the person with whom I was having the discussion would not hear it. Since then, I have thought of the many times I have heard people make statements and implications that everything must be edifying to others. Other Scriptures such as these come to mind too: *"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another... Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers"* (Romans 14:19 and Ephesians 4:29). We will touch on others as we engage in our study of this subject matter as well.

Generally, people tend to think that the word edify means something along the line of building up and encouraging others. Generally, people think to be edifying you have to remove anything that could bring a person down. So, what does it mean to edify? Should anything said or done that does not positively encourage a person be avoided? Let's enter into a study of these things.

Does Edification Mean Positive Encouragement?

The word "edifying" as translated in I Corinthians 14:26 (KJV) means: "architecture, i.e. (concretely) a structure; figuratively, confirmation:—building, edify(-ication, -ing)" (Strong's #3619). I have always understood this and have thus made my practice of using the word of God to edify since the word of God is able to build people up (Acts 20:32). However, the word of God is not always "positive" as many would define that term. So, let's consider

that for a moment. If I use the word of God, in a way that might offend or upset someone, is that a failure to edify?

Paul told the congregation in Corinth this: *“Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but **we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying**”* (II Corinthians 12:19). Therefore, telling a person or group of people that because of their divisions you are glad you were not the one baptizing most of them is edifying (I Corinthians 1:10-17). Telling a person or group of people that they are too carnally minded to learn (I Corinthians 3:1-3) with all that implies (Romans 8:5-8) is edifying. Telling a person or group of people to stop following men (I Corinthians 3:4-23) and all that implies (Galatians 1:10) is also edifying. Telling a person or group of people that they are puffed up and essentially threatening them is edifying as well (I Corinthians 4:14-21). Since Paul did all things to edify the Corinthian congregation we must conclude that disciplining erring saints (I Corinthians 5:1-13), shaming brethren in error (I Corinthians 6:1-8), recalling people’s sinful pasts (I Corinthians 6:9-11), correcting errors on matters of liberty (I Corinthians 6:12-13, I Corinthians 8:1-13, and I Corinthians 10:25-33), teaching against fornication, marital errors, and divorce (I Corinthians 6:14-7:40), and many other sins are all edifying. Do you get the point?

Pointing out that someone is ignorant is not the opposite of edification (I Corinthians 15:34). We cannot redefine God’s terms. Edification is not done through sugar coated candy phrases. If edification requires such fluff then all of the prophets, teachers, Apostles, evangelists, and even Jesus Christ are sinners. For they certainly did not preach fluff (Joshua 24:14-28, I Samuel 15:1-35, Jeremiah 2:13-28, Matthew 23:1-39, Acts 7:51-53, Romans 2:1-29, Galatians 3:1-3, III John 1:9-11, etc.). Additionally, when we study terms we have to keep them in their context as I did with Paul’s words to the Corinthians.

Context DOES Matter

When a person runs to a passage in Romans chapter fourteen it is most often out of ignorance. Romans 14:1-15:7 and I Corinthians 10:23-33 deal with matters of authorized liberties. Things we are permitted to do, given a choice in, but are not matters of the faith. In those things we can and should sometimes give place to the desires of those weaker than us for their edification. Such are not without limits either though (I Timothy 4:1-5).

Conclusion

Yes, all things are to be done to edification. Comfort and edification (I Thessalonians 5:11-14) must exist within congregations of Christ. As we saw in the letter to Corinth, edification includes reproof and rebuke (cf. II Timothy 4:2 and Titus 1:10-14). We cannot redefine edification to exclude what God includes!