

Equipping the Saints For the Work of Ministry

Grow In Grace and Knowledge

INTRODUCTION:

- I. Two weeks ago we began a brief series of 5 lessons dealing with a theme based on a comment the apostle Paul made in his letter to the church at Ephesus.
 - A. This is where the apostle Paul talked about the need of every member of the body of Christ being equipped to perform the work of ministry.
 1. In our last lesson we said the work of ministry, in which every Christian needs to be involved, deals with two specific areas:
 - a. Christian needs to participate in **SOME WAY** to help share the gospel of Christ with those who are not Christians.
 - b. And every Christian needs to contribute in **SOME WAY** to ministering to the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ.
 2. However, to **DO** the work of ministry, **EVERY CHRISTIAN** needs to prepare ourselves to be an effective worker in the Lord's vineyard.
 3. Therefore, to **BE** an effective worker – to **DO** the work of ministry – we first focused on **WHY** it's necessary to be properly equipped to

do the Lord's work, and then focused on HOW we can properly equip ourselves to be effective in laboring for the Lord.

4. We even sang the song "*I Want To Be A Worker For The Lord*":
 - a. *I want to be a worker for the Lord, I want to love and trust His holy word, I want to sing and pray and be busy every day, in the vineyard of the Lord.*
 - b. *Chorus: I will work, I will pray, In the vineyard, in the vineyard of the Lord. I will work, I will pray, I will labor every day in the vineyard on the Lord.*
 5. Hopefully, we all MEANT those words as we sang them.
- II. I think we all agree that the growth of the Lord's church is completely dependent upon our efforts to teach the lost, and to minister to the needs of one another.
- A. However, none of this will take place until we first develop a genuine LOVE for the lost and for each other.
 1. Growth within the church of the first century was achieved through an intense evangelistic spirit, and by Christians showing genuine, heart-felt care and concern for one another.
 2. These two elements worked hand-in-hand to bring the lost to Christ, and to keep them there during the difficult times that would follow.

3. Sadly, far too little is being done in either area today. As a result, the church is not growing in many places, and even declining in others.
 - a. A church that puts forth an evangelistic effort to reach the lost, but which lacks a genuine loving concern for its members is doomed to failure from the start.
 - (1). While some may be converted through the valiant efforts of a few, they won't remain part of the local body for long because they probably won't receive the consistent nurturing every newborn child of God needs.
 - (2). At best, this kind of church will only remain stagnant in their numerical growth, simply replacing those members who drift away or die.
 - b. Likewise, a church that emphasizes a loving care and concern for its members, but which makes no efforts to take the saving message of the gospel to others is also doomed to die.
 - (1). As the members grow older, they may be drawn closer to one another, but they aren't drawing others to Christ through the preaching and teaching of the gospel.
 - (2). The average age of the members begin to increase, while the numbers of members begin to decline.

- (3). They simply become a congregation that literally loves itself to death.
 4. Remove either essential ingredient — an evangelistic zeal toward the lost, or loving care and concern for the redeemed — and church growth will simply grind to a halt.
- B. Why do we have problems with these two essential areas that directly impact church growth?
 1. As far as evangelism is concerned, many simply do not know enough about the Scriptures to effectively teach the lost.
 - a. Fortunately, this problem can be easily overcome.
 - b. It is possible for any Christian who is serious about personal growth to learn how to participate in SOME WAY in reaching the lost with the gospel of Christ.
 2. Regarding our lack of mutual care and concern for one another, perhaps the main reason why more are not involved in this effort is simply because we've become too preoccupied with meeting our own needs to give any thought to serving the needs of others.
 - a. We've become self-serving rather than other-serving, and we've allowed the cares and worries of this world to choke out those portions of the Word that speak of our loving our neighbor as ourselves.

- b. Fortunately, this problem can also be overcome by simply putting the needs of others before our own, and by lovingly giving of our time and energy to caring for one another — meeting the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- C. So, what do WE ALL need to do to overcome deficiencies in our OWN lives that would keep us from being an effective laborer in the Lord's vineyard.
 1. The answer to this is found in a statement made by the apostle Peter to Christians of the first century.
 - a. **2 Peter 3:18** – *"...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*
 - b. What does it mean to *"...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?"*
 - c. And how will doing this help THIS church to grow both NUMERICALLY as well as SPIRITUALLY?
 2. To answer these questions let's take a few a little time this morning understanding why growing in GRACE and KNOWLEDGE will help each of us be better equipped to do the work of ministry to the edifying of the body of Christ.

BODY:

- I. From **2nd Peter 3:18** we learn that there are two critically important areas where every Christian needs to grow — to grow and mature in GRACE, and to grow and mature in the KNOWLEDGE of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
 - A. Growth as an individual Christian is not an option. It is a command!
 1. Earlier in this same letter, Peter said: **2 Peter 1:5-7** – *"Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, love."*
 2. After listing these areas of personal growth for the Christian, Peter concluded: **2 Peter 1:8** – *"For if THESE THINGS are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the KNOWLEDGE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST."*
 3. However, before we can *"grow in the GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,"* "THESE THINGS" mentioned in **2 Peter 1:5-7** must be in us and abound!

B. So, to be effective in reaching the lost and edifying one another in love, we need to focus our personal growth as Christians in two specific areas – GRACE and KNOWLEDGE.

1. WHY?

- a. Grace WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE will prevent us from effectively convicting the sinner, and may even lead some to wrongly conclude there is really no need for a change in their life.
- b. In the same way, knowledge WITHOUT GRACE can make us appear as "holier than thou," and turn many away from the message of forgiveness.

II. How do we acquire a balance of grace and knowledge?

A. Developing a gracious and loving attitude toward others can only come when we truly see ourselves as the Lord really sees us – *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way..."* **(Isaiah 53:6).**

1. In **Luke 18:9-14**, Jesus spoke a parable to *"some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others."*
 - a. He contrasted a Pharisee who confessed sins of which he was not guilty, and who boasted of his devotion to God, to a lowly

tax collector who stood afar off, would not even lift his eyes to heaven, smote himself on the breast, and humbly prayed,
"God be merciful to me a sinner!"

b. Jesus said, *"this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

2. When we look at those around us who are living in sin, we need to say to ourselves, "there, but for the grace of God, go I!"
 - a. If it were not for God's love and grace, we would be no better off than the most wicked of sinners.
 3. It is only after we truly see ourselves as sinners who still need God's grace that we can lovingly and graciously reach out to others who have the same need.
 - a. Only then will we not be afraid to reach down to even the lowest levels of humanity, because we will see ourselves as no better than they, and understand that Christ died for them as well.
- B. To develop a *"knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* we need to learn all we can from the pages of God's holy Word.
1. **1 Peter 2:2** – *"As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby."*

2. Unfortunately, many never progress beyond this point as Christians.
 - a. In **Hebrews 5:12-14** the Hebrew writer strongly rebuked those who had not matured: *"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the Word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."*
 - b. Spiritual maturity, and the knowledge that comes with it, can only be achieved through the intake of "solid food" (which involves a level of Bible study beyond "first principles"), through constant "use" (or putting into practice the things we learn from God's Word), and through regular discernment between right and wrong.
3. It is certainly true that we cannot teach what we do not know.
4. Nor can we lead others to *"the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* if we haven't made it an integral part of our lives.

C. When we have grown "*in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,*" church growth will follow. Why?

1. To answer that question, let's go back to the passage in **Ephesians chapter 4** where the apostle Paul lists SEVERAL REASONS why growing in grace and knowledge contributes to the growth of the body of Christ.

III. As we have stressed from the beginning of this series of lessons, the growth of the church – especially the local church – will come ONLY when certain specific things happen.

A. FIRST, the growth of the church requires the "*equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*" (**Ephesians 4:12**)

1. As you may remember, Jesus Christ gave GIFTS to the church (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors [elders], and teachers) for the purpose of providing the MEMBERS of the church with the tools they need to do the work of ministry.
 - a. This is the MAIN focus of MY work as an evangelist and teachers – to equip YOU, as SAINTS, to be able to perform the work that is needed to bring about growth.

2. The work YOU, as SAINTS, are to perform is the work of *"ministry."*
 - a. As we mentioned last week, the work of *"ministry"* encompasses the concept of service and servanthood.
 - b. It means serving the needs of others, whether those needs be taking the message of the gospel of Christ to them, or serving to satisfy the physical (material), emotional or spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

2. But the work of service and ministry can't be performed by a few, while others sit on the sidelines and observe.
 - a. Everyone who is a *"saint"* is to be *"equipped... for the work of ministry."*
 - b. A saint who does not *"minister"* IN SOME WAY is a saint who is not doing their work.

- B. SECOND, according to the apostle Paul, the growth of the church will be achieved by our coming *"to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect [complete] man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."* **(Ephesians 4:13)**
 1. *"Unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God"* can ONLY be achieved through an intense study of God's Word.

- a. This is how we become "*perfect*" (complete), attaining the "*stature of the fullness of Christ.*"
2. **2 Timothy 3:16-17** – The apostle Paul told Timothy: "*All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*"
 - a. Notice how knowledge of Scripture is able to make a man "*complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work!*"
 - b. When we undertake a diligent study the Scriptures, we will learn all we need to know "*for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*"
3. Going back to Paul's letter to the Ephesians – when we have a thorough knowledge of the Word of God, several things happen:
 - a. A knowledge of God's Word promotes a "*unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.*" (**Ephesians 4:13**)
 - b. We will no longer be like "*children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine.*" (**Ephesians 4:14**)
 - c. We will know the truth, and with that knowledge we will be able to speak "*the truth in love*" – we will be able to lovingly speak the truth to those outside of Christ who have never

heard the gospel, as well as to those within the body who need our encouragement and nurturing. **(Ephesians 4:15)**

- C. FINALLY, according to the apostle Paul, the growth of the body of Christ – especially the local congregation – comes about when *"every part does its share."* **(Ephesians 4:16)**
1. Paul says when *"every part does its share"* this *"causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."*
 - a. Unfortunately, for many, Christianity has become much like a spectator sport, in which only a few are actively struggling against the forces of wickedness while the rest watch from the safety of the grandstands.
 - b. However, the Lord intends for EVERY CHRISTIAN to do their part in the work of service.
 - c. Because it is ONLY when *"every part does its share"* that the body of Christ grows and is capable of edifying and uplifting itself in love.
- D. When we examine the character of Christians of the first century, it is easy to see why churches sprouted up everywhere and grew into strong, healthy congregations.
1. These saints were INVOLVED in the work of ministry – no one sat on the sidelines.

IV. Just look at some examples of the PRO-ACTIVE approach these first-century Christians took.

A. They prayed – for themselves and for one another.

1. Look at all the examples:

- a. Beginning with the day of Pentecost: **Acts 2:42** – *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*
- b. When the apostles were threatened and beaten for preaching Jesus Christ, and told by Jewish authorities to remain silent: **Acts 4:24-31** – *...they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, 25 who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: 'Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? 26 The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ.' 27 "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. 29 Now, Lord, look on*

their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, 30 by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

- c. When Peter was arrested by Herod and thrown into prison, we're told: **Acts 12:5** – *...constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.*
- d. The apostles prayed for their brothers and sisters in Christ: **2 Thessalonians 1:11-12** – *Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, 12 that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*
- e. But the apostles also asked their brothers and sisters in Christ to pray for them: **2 Thessalonians 3:1-2** – *Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be*

glorified, just as it is with you, 2 and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith.

2. These first century Christians relied heavily on prayer because they understood the POWER of prayer.
 3. They also understood they could not successfully do the Lord's work WITHOUT God's help – and so they prayed.
 - a. They understood it was the Lord who had given them their success, and they constantly prayed for His intervention.
- B. Not only were these first-century Christians pro-active in prayer, they also loved one another and cared for one another.
1. Learning to love one another with a pure heart fervently came easy to these Christians, and there are several reasons why.
 - a. First, no one considered anything they possessed as their own, and they willingly shared it with other Christians who were in need.
 - (1). **Acts 4:32-35** – *Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. 33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. 34 Nor was*

there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

b. Second, they worked at maintaining unity.

(1). **Ephesians 4:1-3** – *I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

c. And third, they learned to forgive one another, just as God in Christ had also forgiven them.

(1). **Ephesians 4:31-32** – *Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*

- C. Not only were these first-century Christians pro-active in prayer, and loved and cared for one another, they were willing to sacrifice everything for the Lord and for their brothers and sisters in Christ.
1. These saints clearly understood that to be a disciple of Christ meant being willing to give up everything to follow Him.
 - a. **Luke 14:25-33** – *Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, 26 "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. 27 And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. 28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it — 29 lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, 30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of*

peace. 33 So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

- b. But for people who understood that everything they had belonged to the Lord anyway, they didn't think of themselves as giving away THEIR possessions – they were simply giving to someone else what the Lord had allowed them to enjoy temporarily.
- c. Therefore, it was not uncommon for these saints to first give of themselves to the Lord's work, then give of their financial resources.
- d. In fact, when a famine occurred in Judea and severely impacted the members of the church in Jerusalem, the saints in Macedonia (the northern part of modern-day Greece) dug deep in pockets to give to their brothers and sisters in Christ in Jerusalem, whom they had never seen, and who lived more than a thousand miles away.

(1). **2 Corinthians 8:1-4** – *Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3 For I bear*

witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, 4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

- D. Another pro-active step these first-century saints took to make sure that everyone did their part in the work of ministry is that they encouraged women to do their part as well.
1. While being careful not to teach or usurp authority over a man (**1 Timothy 2:11-12**), women of the first century actively participated in teaching others the gospel of Christ (such as Priscilla and her husband Aquilla teaching Apollos - **Acts 18:26**), and were even jailed for their efforts.
 - a. **Acts 8:3-4** – *As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. 4 Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.*
 2. Women also played OTHER key roles in the growth and development of the church:
 - a. Women did good works and charitable deeds.

(1). **Acts 9:36** – *At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.*

(2). Tabitha apparently made tunics and garments for those who couldn't afford them.

b. Women prayed for special needs. When Peter was miraculously delivered from having been arrested and imprisoned by Herod, we're told:

(1). **Acts 12:12** – *...he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.*

c. Women served the church in other capacities and often accompanied the apostles to serve them any way they could:

(1). **Romans 16:1-2** – *I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, 2 that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.*

(2). **Philippians 4:3** – *And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel,*

*with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers,
whose names are in the Book of Life.*

- E. And finally, these first-century Christians were pro-active in spreading the Gospel of Christ.
 - 1. Because these Christians were completely committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, they felt compelled to share the good news about the death, burial and resurrection of Christ to others.
 - 2. As a result, the church grew from 3,000 on Pentecost (**Acts 2:41**), to about 5,000 a short time later (**Acts 4:4**), to multitudes of both men and women (**Acts 5:14**), to multitudes being multiplied (**Acts 6:1**).

CONCLUSION:

- I. Now do you see why churches sprouted up everywhere and grew into strong, healthy congregations during the first century.
 - A. These saints were INVOLVED in the work of ministry – no one sat on the sidelines
 - 1. The reason they were so successful is because:
 - a. They prayed not just for themselves but for one another as well.
 - b. They loved and cared for one another.

- c. They were willing to sacrifice everything to become a disciple of Christ and were willing to sacrifice financially to take care of their brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - d. They encouraged women to do their part in the Lord's vineyard.
 - e. And they spread the Gospel of Christ to a lost and dying world.
2. And the reason they were able to do all these things is because they had grown in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
 3. And because they had grown in grace and knowledge, they were fully equipped to do the work of ministry (the work of serving others) — a work in which each and every member was doing their part for the growth of the body.
- B. If you're wondering what you can do to be more involved in the work of ministry – of sharing the gospel with others, and of caring for the needs of others – then you won't want to miss the next two lessons.
1. We're going to talk about the fact that everyone has God-given gifts – God-given talents and abilities – that you could be using.
 2. And we're going to help everyone discover some gifts you may not even realize you've been given.

- C. In the meantime, perhaps the question we need to ask is this: Are you growing in grace and knowledge?
1. Are you: *"Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, love."* **(2 Peter 1:5-7)**
 2. Spiritual stagnation is not only harmful to the church, it's the most spiritually devastating disease that can strike at the heart of even the most faithful Christian.
 3. We ALL need to be active in the work of the Lord – working every day in His vineyard in one way or another.
- D. However, to be a worker for the Lord there are a couple of prerequisites:
1. First, you need to make sure you ARE a worker for the Lord in HIS vineyard – you need to come to the Lord in complete faith and obedience, repenting of your sins, and be baptized into Christ and be added by the Lord to HIS church.
 2. And second, if you have done that, then you need to set aside anything that is going to keep you from faithfully serving the Lord and the Lord's people.

