

Walk Worthy

“Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.”

EPHESIANS 4:1-5:21

LESSON 7 – EDIFYING THE BODY – EPH. 4:12

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For the Edifying of the Body

- ▶ 11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,
- ▶ These are the verses we have been working through the last several Sundays, verses that show us how Christ has given gifts to the church in the form of ministers and elders who lead, protect, guide, and serve the church. These men have given us the written Word of God and they teach us the Word so that we might be equipped for the work of the ministry, that is, matured so that we might effectively serve God and each other.

For the Edifying of the Body

- ▶ Now we come to the last phrase in Ephesians 4:12 which tells us about the end result of the outworking of these gifts within the body. The work of the Apostles, Prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers is to bring the saints to maturity so that they might serve because in their service to God and each other the church is built!
- ▶ Even as Jesus tells us that He will build His church (Matt. 16:18) this is the formula He uses. This is His program. It is an equipped, serving Body that makes disciples, first through evangelism and then through the ongoing process of discipleship within the Body.
- ▶ In fact, we can go so far as to say that no matter what else a church is doing, no matter the evangelism programs, Bible classes, mission events, or even worship services, if the church is not being equipped (brought to maturity) for the purpose of humbly serving God and each other then the church is not being built. If we skip any part of this verse we miss God's purpose driving church growth.

Body Building

- ▶ What does the Bible say about building the Body? Church growth is the process of “edification”, translated from the Greek word *oikodome* which means literally “building a house.” And here it is the House of the Lord being built. Christ builds His Church using equipped, serving believers.
- ▶ The process, if we can call it that, is not the subject of any best-selling church growth book. It is not the emphasis of any program for reaching hundreds or baptizing millions. It is not a blip on the map of anything emerging from the latest fad driven mega mess purposeless seeker sensitive worship theme park. Then what is God’s program for growing His body?

Laying the Foundation

- ▶ We learn about church growth, remember this is not church expansion, in the terms of building a house. In our study we will see what the Bible teaches and break it down into three stages. These involve the laying the foundation, framing the building, and the finishing of the building. So let us look at how it should be done by the Book.
- ▶ **Laying the Foundation – Christ and the Apostles and Prophets**
- ▶ The foundation for true church growth, the means Christ uses to build His body, starts with the cornerstone, Jesus Himself. He is the anchor around which the foundation is built. And that foundation has already been laid and is complete. No new foundation needs to be laid, for it is the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets and the written Word of God that they received and recorded from the Holy Spirit. God's work through them gives us the foundation – the Word of God, Written and Living.

Laying the Foundation

- ▶ For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. – 1 Cor. 3:11
- ▶ Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. – Eph. 2:19-22
- ▶ Paul tells us then that we are to build upon that foundation. What is it that we build with? The gospel. The Word of God. We make disciples. That brings us to the next step in our building.

Framing the Building

▶ Framing the Building – Evangelists

- ▶ The house of God, as it were, is framed by evangelists. This is the work of preaching the gospel to the lost. It is a matter of being salt and light as an ambassador of Christ, working to reconcile the world to God. Paul refers to it as planting, watering, and harvesting. One may plant the seed, another water it, but it is always God who gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:7).
- ▶ The conversion of sinners is His gracious work. We do not persuade, convince, or argue people into accepting Christ. We are to plant the seed, sowing it everywhere we go, and we are to water the seed that has been sown by teaching and preaching and living the Word of God. Through this preaching God uses His Word to accomplish the purposes for which He sends it out – without fail, without exception. He is the One who gives the increase.

Framing the Building

- ▶ It is the Holy Spirit who convinces men of sin, righteousness, and the judgment to come (John 16:8). It is the Father who draws men to Christ, without which drawing they would never come on their own (John 6:44). It is the effectual call to new life through which the Spirit regenerating sinners (Rom. 8:30) and He continues to convict, comfort, and then as we repent and believe, He indwells us, sealing us for the Day of Redemption (Eph. 1:13-14).
- ▶ But notice what He uses in every case to accomplish these things. It is the Word of God. And that is where we work along side the Spirit to “impart grace to the hearers.” We spread the Word. We sow the seed. We preach. We teach. We encourage. We counsel. We speak the Word of God and the Spirit uses that Word to save sinners!
- ▶ Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). And Paul makes the point in Romans 10 that people cannot hear without a preacher, without you and me to proclaim the truth to them with our words and our lives.

Finishing

▶ **Finishing – Pastor-Teachers**

- ▶ Once converted, the process of making a disciple has just begun. This newborn believer now needs to be nurtured and taught the Word of God by older more mature believers. This is the finishing stage (that won't be finished until Jesus comes back – He is after all, the *author and finisher* of our faith).
- ▶ This is making the house habitable and comfortable. This is the role of pastor-teachers. They equip us to serve one another. They feed us and nurture us and protect us and lead us.
- ▶ In disciple making we are to teach each other all that Christ has commanded – again we are right back at the Word of God. And here the pastor is required, and even held to a higher standard of judgment because of this (James 3:1), to rightly handle the Word of God (2 Tim. 2:15). He must be careful and diligent for he claims to speak God's Words! He interprets and teaches the Word of God to those who he is entrusted with leading. And he will give an account to God for those in his care.

Finishing

- ▶ This part of the process is what we studied two Sundays ago – the equipping of the saints. Using the Word to enable the church and empower them to live the life Christ has called them to live – so in reality they can walk worthy of the calling with which they have been called.
- ▶ And this is a part of the job that never ends. As long as we remain in this fallen body on this fallen earth we need to be built up. It is the building up of one another, the edification of Body of Christ, that forms the true focus of church growth.
- ▶ To close out our study today let us look at the stages of building in another light. This hopefully will help us get a good mental picture for how church growth really works. Here we will break it into 6 stages:

Death

- ▶ 1. Death – John 12:23-25
- ▶ Church growth starts with death. It is our death. In one way it is the fact that we are born dead in sin and incapable of loving or obeying God. In another sense it is that we are called by the first word of the gospel to repent, to die to self. It may also be noted that the growth of the body is possible in the first place because of the death of Christ on the cross. So any way we look at it, true growth starts with death.
- ▶ But Jesus answered them, saying, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

New Birth

- ▶ 2. New Birth – John 3:3
- ▶ From death comes life! This is the new birth, being “born again”, regenerated, brought to life, raised from the dead. It is entering into life eternal. The Spirit accomplishes this as He wishes when He wishes for His purposes. But without the new birth there is no life and no salvation and therefore no growth. That which remains dead does not grow or bear fruit, it is useless and will only be gathered and burned in the judgment.
- ▶ Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Hunger and Thirst

- ▶ 3. Hunger & Thirst – Matt. 5:6
- ▶ One thing we know about a newborn is that it takes them no time at all to learn how to express themselves when they are hungry or thirsty! And one mark that Jesus gives us that demonstrates our new life after being born again is that we hunger and thirst after righteousness.
- ▶ In the Be-Attitudes this “blessed are” means that if we are spiritually alive and have been saved then we will have a basic need, a craving in fact, for being right with God. It is like hungering and thirsting. It is fundamental to life. For without hunger and thirst we would surely die a quick death.
- ▶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Satisfaction

- ▶ 4. Satisfaction – Matt. 7:7-11
- ▶ A result of hunger and thirst, when the need is met, we are satisfied. The term in Matthew 5:6 is that when we hunger and thirst after righteousness we will be filled and the word filled means satisfied. Our need will be met. So part of what proves we are alive and growing is hunger and thirst that is fulfilled and satisfied.
- ▶ Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

Nourishment

- ▶ 5. Nourishment – John 6:35-58
- ▶ And as we hunger and thirst and are filled and satisfied we gain nourishment for growth. We have energy to burn and we burn it is bearing fruit. We must note that a dead body cannot be hungry, fed, satisfied, or nourished. For a dead body does not even know what hunger is. But as we are alive in Christ, a new creation in Him, we do hunger and thirst for righteousness, we are filled, we are satisfied, and we are nourished. We benefit from partaking of the Word of God.
- ▶ A malnourished Christian is a believer who is starving to death while sitting at a full to overflowing banquet table. It is there for the taking. The trouble is, too many pastors are failing to feed the flock. They are giving them cotton candy – pretty fluff that is worthless when it comes to true nourishment. These pastors should instead be feeding the flock on the milk and meat of the Word of God.
- ▶ “As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”

Growth

- ▶ 6. Growth – John 15:1-17
- ▶ Growth, bearing fruit, maturing – this is a part of life, it is living. If we do not grow, we are dead. If we do not bear fruit, we are dead. If we are not hungry or thirsty, we are dead. But the seed that falls on good ground sprouts into plants that bear measurable and useful fruit.
- ▶ I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

Church Growth

- ▶ Think of it this way – as those God has called and equipped fulfill their role and equip the saints for service to God and each other then we grow. And as we grow the church is built. This is why we can say with assurance that church growth is not church expansion. For adding more people to the roll proves nothing about the growth of the church. The church is not being built if people are not growing. And if people are not being equipped to serve and serving, then they are not growing.
- ▶ And a “church” full of dead, stagnant, lukewarm, backslidden professors is not really a church at all. Christ builds His church. If it isn't being built, it isn't His church.

Hebrews 12:1-2

- ▶ Let us conclude then today with Hebrews 12:1-2: Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
- ▶ When nourishing the souls of men, ministers must always remember the importance of not introducing any false teaching or misleading doctrine. According to Scripture, false teaching is poison to the growing believer. We must be fed truth without apology, and our contentment must be with Christ and Christ alone.
- ▶ “Jesus is all the world to me, my Light, my life, my all.” To finish the race, our endurance is found also in Him. He is the Author and Finisher of our Faith. He started it. He will bring it to completion. Trust Him. Grow and bear good fruit!

Next week

- ▶ Lesson 8 – The Cycle of Church Growth – Eph. 4:12