

## 5. As Each Christian Grows, So Grows the Church

As each member grows spiritually, the church also grows. 2 Peter 1:5-7 is a spiritual and moral recipe for individual member growth, "5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love."

Following the recipe 2 Pet 1 saves us from hell and gives us heaven. Growth starts with effort. "For this very reason, make every effort," Peter said in 2 Peter 1:5. The directions are clear and easy to follow, so make every effort to add them. You will grow, and the church will grow. Paul was very clear on how when a member grows we all grow in Eph 4:14-16, " 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

### **To Your Faith**

Faith is like flour to a cake, for without it, there can be no Christian at all. Heb 11:6 teaches, "6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." Jesus gave us the starting place in Mark 16:16, "16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." From the starting point of faith and obedience to the gospel, a Christian makes every effort to grow. As Christians grow, the church grows.

### **Add Goodness**

Where the NIV uses the word *goodness*, other versions use *moral excellence* or *virtue*. From these words, this passage gets the name *Christian virtues*. The willingness to be good morally is necessary for Christians to grow. We must try hard to be good, avoiding temptation as in Matthew 26:41: "41 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." Christians can backslide and turn from good to sin. Paul warned in 1 Cor 15:33-34, "33 Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.' 34 Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God." Paul also gives a prescription that we might know what is goodness in Eph 5:8-10, "8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9(for **the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth**) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord." To test what is goodness, one must turn to the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God, according to Rom 12:2, "2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will."

### **Add Knowledge**

Add to goodness, knowledge. Knowledge is the seeking to know. In the case of Christian growth, it is the knowledge of God's will. Paul taught in Col 2:2-3, "2 My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Also, he taught in Eph 5:17, "17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." Christians must try hard to gain knowledge of the will of God. As each member grows stronger in the knowledge of the will of God, the church will grow stronger.

### **Add Self-control**

To grow, Christians must add self-control. Self-control is man's responsibility in relation to what he learns from God's will. Some things we must do; some we must not do. Paul included this constraint of one's self when he preached to Felix. Acts 24:24-25 reads, "He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. 25 As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, 'That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.'"

Felix's fear came from the knowledge that we all must come to: to be spared from the judgment of God, we must grow in self-control. Paul included self-control as one of the fruits of the Spirit in Gal 5:22-23, "22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." For the church to grow spiritually, members must have self-control.

### **Add Perseverance**

To grow, churches and individuals must try hard to stick to it. Paul summarized the case for perseverance in 1 Cor. 15:58 where he says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord." This passage connects the work of the Lord to the continuing efforts of individual Christians.

### **Add Godliness**

In the building up of the church, godliness is the highest attainment. Originally, *godliness* was *God like ness*. Peter calls this the *divine nature* in 2 Peter 1:3-4:

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Imagine a congregation where all the members are fully participating in the divine nature.

### **Add Brotherly Kindness**

Brotherly kindness is the core of congregational love and unity. In Eph 4:1-2, Paul emphasizes our treatment of one another, "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." The bearing of one another's burdens fulfills the law of Christ, according to Gal 6:2, "2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." This is the same attitude spoken of by Christ as the sum of the Law and the prophet in Matt 7:12, "12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." Commonly, we call this the Golden Rule. Can you imagine the strength of a congregation where all the members practice it?

### **Add Love**

In 1 John 4:7-8; 11-12, John explains the essence and nature of true Christian love:

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. . . . 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

### **Strong Members in a Strong Congregation**

Productive Christians are those who possess these qualities in increasing measure. As Christians produce, so does the congregation. Peter calls people who lack them ineffectual and unproductive. Peter continues in our text, 1 Peter 1:8-9, "8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins."

These things make our calling and election sure; and if we do them, we receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom. Peter concludes our text in 1 Peter 1:10-11, "10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." As each Christian grows, so grows the church.