

CHURCH GROWTH – OUR PART IN IT

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Romans 2:6,7 – “Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:”

How many want our congregation to grow? [Look for hands]

“Keep your hands up” ...

How many feel they have a part to play in this?

Some didn't raise hands?

Good, this lesson is needed then.

All in the church should have raised their hands – to **both** questions.

Some might have been reluctant, not sure.

“What do you mean?”

Or, “I'm not involved in church growth, so I don't have to answer”

This lesson is to show that **each member** of the Lord's church has an important and **necessary** role to play in the growth of the church.

Ok, first thing you might wonder about: In what **way** to grow?

If it's **our** church, we might want everybody to be wealthy and good looking.

I'm going astray here. You know it's not our church, right?

Let's look to the church instruction manual.

There's only one, the one God gave us - the scripture:

Acts 20:28 – “to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood”

It is the Church of God purchased by blood of Jesus

It's not our church to do with as we will, again from the scripture:

James 2:1-4 – “My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?”

It's wrong for us to have respect of persons in the church that Jesus died to establish. He died for all.

Lord wants a church unspotted from the world

James 1:27 – “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

Lords wants church Zealous of good works

Titus 2:14 – “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

All right then! That's the ticket! Let's grow in **workers!** You know, people that will Preach and Visit and Call and Invite others to come hear the good news. Workers that will Teach classes and Lead in prayer and Help on the Lords' table and make big financial contributions and Cook food for the 1st Sunday luncheons ... then I won't have to and I'll have more time to ... OOOOPS! Wrong again aren't we!

If that's our reason for wanting church growth, we won't get it:

James 4:3 – “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume *it* upon your lusts.”

It's not to take a load off us. If we sit here paying lip service to God, but in our hearts don't **want** to take time away from our worldly activities to work for Him, we're like this here:

James 4:4 – “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”
Adulterers – those who want to mix pure with impure.

Ok – CHURCH GROWTH – it's HIS church, to grow for HIM.

Well, we have a bigger, nicer building than we had. Good facilities, nice class rooms, pretty auditorium, good lighting, all to His Glory of course! Right? Ooops, I'm going astray here again. You know it's not the building, right?

Let's look to the church instruction manual, the Bible again:

Acts 2:41-47 – “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. ... And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

Added to church – It's the PEOPLE!

Church – Ecclesia – the “called out”

What does God want in a church? – First ingredient– people, lots of people!

2 Peter 3:9 – “but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

Not willing that ANY perish, ALL come to repentance

Where is salvation? In the church of course:

Acts 21:47 – “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

How many does the Lord want outside to perish? NONE

That means Lord wants HOW many in his church? ALL

But what about the quality of the people in the church?

We can have “rice” Christians, those who come for personal gain, be it a bowl of rice, or an entertaining emotional experience. Does He care about this? Again, the scripture tells us:

Eph 5: 27 – “That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

Holy, without spot or blemish

What part do **we** play in presenting the church, **ourselves**, holy and spotless to Christ?

Paul had a part to play, but he had to be encouraged in this:

Acts 18:9-11 – “Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”

The Lord has people all over who are tender hearted to God and wanting to find Him. The Lord takes care of His people. The Lord sent Paul to his people to preach Gospel. If we, like Paul, as a church teach the truth and have a desire to bring ourselves, holy and without spot before God, then the Lord will make sure His people find us and join us!

When we have visitors, do you think of this? Were they looking for God’s people? What did they see?

Did they see people not willing that any perish but that all be presented before God?

How do we show this? By our interest in them of course. Saying hello, making them feel welcome, asking if they need anything. Of course if we **aren’t** interested in them we won’t do this, but is that what God wants? – Remember, **He** wants **ALL** to come to repentance.

WE can get God on our side by making sure **WE** are His people and **FIT** company for others of His people. That’s a part **each** member of the church must play.

Ok, we want to grow, but who’s responsible? Minister? Elders? Men? Growth Committee, Greeters? Ushers?

No, if we want to grow as a congregation, then it’s the **congregation’s** responsibility to do so. Why is this? We’re a congregation of people with different abilities, personalities, qualities and experience. Again we look to the scripture and find this is the Lord’s intent:

1 Cor 12:12-18 – “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also *is* Christ. ... For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body *were* an eye, where *were* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *were* the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.”

We all have different roles to play, but we **ALL** are necessary to the body. There are things I, as an individual can do and things I can’t do. But collectively, as one body, all of us working together, there isn’t any thing necessary that **we** can not accomplish. This is the Lord’s plan – we **ALL** have something that we **MUST** contribute for the body to function properly. Remember the condemnation of the 1 talent man who hid his talent?

And yes we have a goal, remember:

Eph 5:27 - “That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

How are we working toward that? Again, from the Bible:

I Peter 2:1-3 – “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord *is* gracious. “

What must we as individual members of the church do?

- 1) Lay aside earthly things
- 2) Recognize we're babes at first, we need to grow, desire sincere milk of the word – study our Bibles to build our faith and hearts and souls.
- 3) Why? Because Lord is gracious and His word is good. A taste of His word has given us hope. More will make us grow – **unto salvation** as it says in the original text.

Why is so much of the New Testament written to those who have already obeyed the Gospel and been added to the church? Because we need it to grow, to be built up, as he says here:

I Peter 2:5 - “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”

As Lively or living stones we are built up a house – a church.

Upon one another, as any wall or structure is.

Who is left out? – No One – all are needed.

Who can afford to be weak, not hold up their share? – No one – All needed.

What is one is missing – a hole in the roof or walls?

Ask yourself, am I in the church? Then what role do I play in building up the church? We all have one! You are a part, an important part, of the body, put there by God for a purpose.

Fulfill it!

Again, what does God say in His Word?

Romans 12:1 – “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service.”
A living sacrifice – one that does not die.

What happened to bullocks Elija offered on Mt Carmel? – a dead sacrifice

Why a living sacrifice and not dead?

Our God is a God of the living

We want to live with him – for eternity.

Which will last longer a living sacrifice, or a dead one?

How can we make a “**living**” sacrifice?

Do something more for the church and less for yourself and the world – a sacrifice:

Call or visit an absent member, invite a friend, family member, or co-worker to our assembly, to our Saturday morning Bible studies. Put a little more in the collection plate if you can. God says it's our “**reasonable**” service. Considering what He's offering, do you feel inclined to bargain?

Right now we are shaping our hearts and minds to live with him in eternity.

The Lord recognizes we start as babes and have to grow.

We must recognize that as well – we NEED to grow and we grow through working, through exercising:

Hebrews 5:14 “But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

Remember earlier:

Romans 2:7 “To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:”

All of us, working together, doing what we can, holding each other up – this is that patient continuance in well doing that will bring us eternal reward.

And who are we working for? What does he want? As many souls as we can, partaking in the Gospel hope, growing in Spiritual qualities attractive to God suitable for eternal life with Him. To God’s Glory, to God’s Honor, for **our** immortality, **our** eternal life.

In this way we are like our Lord, being about our Father’s business:

Phil 2:4,5 – “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:”

A church united in goal and action by one thing – the mind of Christ

Luke 6:40 – “The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.”

A church striving to be like our master – striving towards perfection – completeness, having **all** the necessary parts – Faith, mercy, knowledge, compassion, obedience, long suffering – LOVE! Thinking of others better than ourselves.

Why should we strive?

Why should we patiently continue?

So we will obtain the promise – Glory, Honor, immortality, eternal life.

Abraham believed God.

Hebrews 6:14-15 – “Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.”

And it was counted to him for righteousness. He patiently endured, he received.

But that’s Abraham, what of us?

Hebrews 6:17-19 – “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which *it* was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;”

Folks, we are Abraham’s children and heirs of the promise

V19 – we have a HOPE an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast that will hold in ANY stormy wind.

That’s why we continue. That’s why we are a living sacrifice. That’s why we must GROW!

Let God summarize:

2 Peter 1:4-7 – “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.”

Escaping and putting aside corruption of the world.

Add Virtues, one at a time. This takes awhile – he’ll give us the time, if we are diligent. And the result?

2 Peter 1:8-10 – “For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither *be* barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.”

The result if we DO – we shall not fail. But if we DON’T?

If we **all** work as God intends to make our calling and election sure, we’ll be the church, a group of people who have heard the gospel call and answered. A church attractive to God, valuable to him, worth something, and one to which He will send His people.

But this hope, this promise, is **ONLY** to those who have been “purged from their old sins” and added to His church by answering the gospel call.

There is a God, we can be reconciled to him by repenting of our old ways of self and turning instead to God. By killing that old man of self and burying him in the waters of baptism where the blood of Christ will wash us free of sin, to rise to walk in newness of life, purged from our old sins, to GROW as God intended.

2 Peter 1:11 – “For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

If you want that entrance, you have to give up your old ways. And, you have to go **through** Christ. If you have not been baptized into Christ please come now as we stand and sing.

-Ed Kelleher at West Columbia church of Christ, May 8, 2011

- All scriptures projected on screen and read