

Walk Worthy

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

EPHESIANS 4:1-5:21

LESSON 8 – THE CYCLE OF CHURCH GROWTH– EPH. 4:12

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Church Growth

- ▶ In the coming days we will continue on in Ephesians 4 and look at the results of proper church growth. In other words, we will see that the Bible tells us to expect when the church is actually and truly growing. What does a growing church look like? What does it do? But before we get there, we need to take one more look at verse 12 and work to define the cycle of true church growth.
- ▶ All that we have learned the last few weeks can be summed up in a cycle of activity that gives us evidence that a church is alive, healthy, and growing. When members of the church use their gifts (both individually and corporately), the saints are equipped to do the work of the ministry and thereby edified in the body. And in truth, it is part of the job description for pastors to oversee the growth of the Body.

Church Growth

- ▶ If a church is not growing as it should be then the pastor is the doctor who by the Word of God with the Holy Spirit's help, makes the diagnosis and prescribes the treatment and cure to the ailment. Instead, too often, the pastor is just the CEO and as long as the church is making and spending money there is no evaluation, no check up, and no worries about the true condition of the body.
- ▶ If the church was your body, wouldn't you want to know if there was a deadly disease present, even if your body was dressed in nice clothes driving a nice car and being envied by other people? And yet so many churches are not truly growing. They are expanding, getting obese when it comes to budgets, bodies, and buildings, but there is no maturity, no stability, and no depth.
- ▶ And no one is concerned because as long as we are entertained and as long as we feel good about church then there is no need to change how we are doing anything. As long as my needs are met then I am content. Yet that is frightening, isn't it? It should be!

Evangelize

- ▶ What is this cycle? What does a healthy, growing church look like and live like? A healthy growing church will:
- ▶ 1. Evangelize.
- ▶ Evangelists, and indeed all believers, preach the gospel at every opportunity. This is how the lost are saved and how people are added to the church. It is how the cycle of growth begins, with new birth, with re-creation, with the conversion of sinners. If there is no evangelism in and out of the church, then the church really cannot claim to be a church! For the church exists to exalt and worship and serve God while taking the gospel to the world.

Evangelize

- ▶ Do you evangelize? Does our church?
- ▶ This does not mean that an evangelistic sermon at church means that we have met the obligation you know. It means that there is to be a way of life, a walk, an attitude of evangelism in everything that we do.
- ▶ If we are not constantly thinking about how to witness to those who need to hear the gospel, if we are not burdened for the lost, then perhaps we need to ask ourselves if we even understand the gospel ourselves.

Equip

- ▶ 2. Equip.
- ▶ Pastor-teachers and mature believers teach and equip in the church, discipling one another as we mature and learn and grow. Is the church body being equipped? It is being nurtured to maturity?
- ▶ Too many sermons are preached that do not equip. They inform. They teach. They convict. They motivate. They inspire. They challenge. But do they equip? Do the sermons preached by your pastor feed you, nourish you, and equip you when it comes to bearing fruit, overcoming sin, and glorifying God?

Equip

- ▶ I am disturbed by the number of people I meet that claim to know Christ and yet live like the world. You would never know they were a follower of Christ unless they told you and were adamant that this was not a joke!
- ▶ But this is a symptom of a greater problem. People in too many pews are not being equipped. Listen to this carefully – too many people in our churches do not know how to live the Christian life! All they know is what God can do for them. Their faith is focused on what God can do or has done for them instead of what they can do and should do for Him! Their faith is about fixing their marriage, their kids, their finances, or some other problem that needs attention. God, for them, is not a Sovereign Master, He is spare tire to be used when we have a blow out on the highway of life.

Equip

- ▶ This kind of selfish faith is not saving faith. And it is evidence of a church that is not being equipped. And since equipping the saints is the basic duty of every pastor then an unequipped church should truly think about whether their pastor should be their pastor. I don't say that lightly.
- ▶ On the other hand, most of the pastors I know who have been fired from a church were fired when they tried to equip the church, but the "church" wanted nothing of it!

Esteem

- ▶ 3. Esteem.
- ▶ New converts learn to esteem others by doing the work of ministry and service, imitating older, more mature believers. If a person claims to be a Christian for any length of time and their focus is still on themselves instead of on others then not only have they not been equipped, but they are quite ignorant of God's Word and His purposes for the church!
- ▶ The Christian life, if presented truthfully, is a life of suffering, sacrifice, and service. At first glance we think these are all bad and demeaning things. But in truth, it is a privilege and honor to suffer for Christ. It is a duty to sacrifice for God and each other. And it is a requirement that we serve each other if we are truly His children! After all, God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Esteem

- ▶ How do we esteem others? Does our attitude and actions and words about others demonstrate that we are being equipped at church or do they identify a need for repentance and renewal in our faith?
- ▶ A church that does not suffer, sacrifice, and serve is not growing, and possibly is not even a true church. No matter the number of people present, this is a non-negotiable. Proud, covetous people cannot claim with a straight face to be a Christian, because to follow Christ is death to self and life poured out for others. If you are #1, you are killing your church.

Edify

- ▶ 4. Edify.
- ▶ The church is built and grows and matures so that it can with confidence do its main work (which is seen in the next step). But first, we need to see that a church that is really growing is a church comprised of people who are obedient to the Word of God – that is, they look and act like saints instead of sinners (not that they are perfect, but they imitate Christ).
- ▶ Too often today people think the church should be full of sinners – meaning people who actively sin often. Yes, we are sinners. Yes, we will sin. But sin should not be tolerated or excused. It should be forsaken, confessed, and repented of immediately!

Edify

- ▶ In reality, a church that is growing is a church that looks more and more like Jesus. They are being sanctified. Transformed. Revived.
- ▶ If a church claims to be growing and cites numbers as proof then we really should just dismiss their claim. The Bible tells us more about the numbers of those who left Jesus than of those who followed. Beside that, growth is not about numbers. It is about faithful obedience, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, and building the Body up.
- ▶ Ask any person right now how big their church is and someone will make a judgment – as soon as an answer is given someone will make up their mind and jump to a conclusion about how healthy that church is. Is this not true? Seriously. I mean it.

Edify

- ▶ Let me tell you about two churches and you tell me what you think. These churches are across the street from each other. Both were founded in the around the same time. Both are from a historically reformed and evangelical tradition in their denominational affiliation. One has around 200 people in attendance every week. The other has 14.
- ▶ What conclusions did you just jump to?
- ▶ Which church is growing?
- ▶ Which is truly being edified and equipped?
- ▶ Hopefully you will say that you do not have enough information to make a decision. But many who drive past on Sunday morning would say that one is growing and the other dying! All that to say, when it comes to edification, numbers do not automatically equal growth.

Evangelize

- ▶ Now remember where we started on this point in our cycle? The church is built and grows and matures so that it can with confidence do its main work which is seen in the next step.
- ▶ 5. Evangelize.
- ▶ So here we have the cycle of church growth: Evangelize, Equip, Esteem, Edify, and Evangelize.

The Purpose of Our Church

- ▶ In answer to a question about the purpose of the church, one of our elders years ago wrote this statement:
- ▶ The purpose(s) of the church can be understood as the immediate, intermediate, and ultimate purposes that follow: The immediate purpose of the church is to evangelize the lost. The intermediate purpose of the church is to stimulate one another to love and obedience. The ultimate purpose of the church is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.
- ▶ Evangelism is not inviting someone to Mainstream Fellowship Church in order to get them into an environment where the talented pastor may elicit from them an emotional response for Christ. Telling people the truth about themselves (Rom.3:20,23,5:12), the truth about God (Isa.53:4; 1Tim.1:15; Heb.2:2-3,12:29; 1Pet.3:18), and the reason for the hope that is evident within you with gentleness and reverence (1Pet.3:15, Heb.6:17-20; Titus2:13-14) is evangelism.

The Purpose of Our Church

- ▶ Living your life in a manner that evidences the power of God in obedience to Christ is evangelism (Mat.5:14-16; 1Cor.2:3-5; 1Pet.3:1-2,16). Communicating God's message of mercy to sinners by virtue of the atonement of Christ is evangelism (1Cor.2:1-2).
- ▶ Secondly, the verse that often gets left out of the great commission is verse 20; after baptizing them, we are to be “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mat.28:20).

The Purpose of Our Church

- ▶ The intermediate purpose of the church is to teach and rouse one another to love and obey God. This involves teaching, learning, sharing, and fellowship. The early church was “continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship” (Acts 2:42). Hebrews exhorts us to “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near” (Heb.10:23-25).

The Purpose of Our Church

- ▶ We are to meet not only the spiritual needs but also the physical needs of the church (1 John 3:17; 2Cor.8:3-4, 13-15, 9:12; 1Cor.16:1-3; Acts 11:29-30; Rom.15:25-26). We are to use our spiritual gifts to equip one another and build up the church (Eph.4:12), and we are to admonish and teach every man with all wisdom “that we may present every man complete in Christ” (Col.1:28). We are to nurture one another to maturity. One day, there will be no more lost people to evangelize and no more immature Christians to teach, admonish, disciple, and nurture. We will all be glorified; “we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2).

The Purpose of Our Church

- ▶ The ultimate purpose is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. This purpose of the church began at creation and will never end. We are to live “to the praise of His glory” (Eph.1:12). We are always to be rendering a proper opinion of God. Our worship is to be reverential, sincere, and pure. Jesus taught that “the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:23). We assemble together to worship Him, praise Him, sing to Him, and pray to Him.
- ▶ The church is commanded to “let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col.3:16).

The Purpose of Our Church

- ▶ Similarly, the church is commanded to “be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord” (Eph.5:18-19).
- ▶ We are to meet with God in corporate prayer. The early church was continually devoting themselves “to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42).
- ▶ The immediate, intermediate, and ultimate purposes of the church are all commanded by the Lord in Scripture; no church should stress one to the neglect of another.
- ▶ Amen.

Next Week

- ▶ Lesson 9 - Five Results of Proper Church Growth – Eph. 4:13-15