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God's Portrait of a Growing Church

Ephesians 4:7-16

Introduction

1. How does God grow a church?
2. Almost every preacher and every church library has a number of books on 'Church Growth'.
3. All of these books point to different things which the author's consider necessary within a church's dynamic if it is to grow.
4. However, no one knows better how to make our Lord's church grow than the Lord Himself, and those inspired by the Holy Spirit to instruct us.
5. Here, in our text this evening, Ephesians 4:7-16, the apostle Paul provides us with God's plan for church growth.
6. In these ten verses, he paints a portrait of those aspects which if put into place and practiced faithfully will help any body of Christ grow and reach lost souls.

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I. Essential for Growth

A. CHRIST'S GRACE (vv. 7-10)

"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." (Ephesians 4:7, NASB95)

1. Each of us has been given grace, according to the measure of Christ's gift.
2. This grace is not for us to keep to ourselves but, for the benefit of the whole body, all of us.

Slide 3**B. GIFTED LEADERSHIP (v. 11)**

“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11, NASB95)

1. Apostles

- a. Those twelve men chosen by Christ to be with Him, to preach and to have authority to heal and perform miracles (Luke 6:13-16).

“And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles: Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James and John; and Philip and Bartholomew; and Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot; Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.” (Luke 6:13–16, NASB95)

- 1) Judas Iscariot would take his own life after betraying our Lord (cf. Matthew 27:5).
 - 2) Following our Lord’s ascension but prior to Pentecost, he was replaced by Matthis (cf. Acts 1:26).
- b. Christ, Himself, would add Saul, who came to be known as Paul to this number (cf. Acts 9:15).
- c. These men were witnesses of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22; 1 Corinthians 15:8).
- d. Rendered infallible by the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13).

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.” (John 16:13, NASB95)

2. Prophets (Acts 11:27; 13:1; 15:32; 21:9,10)
 - a. Men like Agabus (Acts 11:27; 21:9,10), Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32).
 - b. These individuals spoke by inspiration of the Holy Spirit of what was to come.
 - c. They along with the apostles were Christ's *foundational gifts* to His church, given to get her established.
 - d. These two groups along with their unique endowments did not exceed beyond the apostolic age.
3. Evangelists
 - a. One who announces or preaches the gospel, the good news of Christ.
 - b. Philip was an evangelist who, following the persecution of Stephen, was prominent in preaching the gospel to unevangelized parts of the world — Samaria (Acts 8:5), Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:35), Azotus (Acts 8:40)
 - c. Timothy — exhorted by Paul to fulfill the work of an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5).
4. Shepherds and Teachers
 - a. Pastor — from the Latin (*pastor*) — herdsman
 - 1) Greek (*poimen*) — shepherd
 - 2) Shepherding was a function of the elders (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-2)

“shepherd the flock of God among you . . .” (1 Peter 5:2a, NASB95)

“. . . shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” (Acts 20:28b, NASB95)
 - b. The title of shepherd suggests two things:
 - 1) Tender care and nurturing — a kind word here, a gentle prod there.

- 2) Resolute strength and protection of the flock.
- c. Both the shepherds and the teachers are to make feeding the sheep a top priority — as our Lord charged Peter three times by the Sea of Galilee (John 21:15-17).
- ❑ The focus of all these gifts (apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds & teachers) is upon the Word of God — its teaching and communication.

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II. Means of Growth: Discipleship (v. 12a)

“for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12, NASB95)

A. THE BIBLICAL MODEL

1. Evangelists, shepherds and teachers are to prepare God's people for works of service (ministry).
2. To equip is to make someone completely adequate or sufficient for something — to furnish completely, to be fully qualified.

3. **Works of Service**

Christians

Evangelists, Shepherds, Teachers

B. THE BOTTOM LINE

1. Every Christian should be involved in some kind of service.
2. Jesus taught this both by word and deed at the Last Supper (Luke 22:27; John 13:4-5)

“For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.” (Luke 22:27)

“Jesus . . . got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.” (John 13:4-5)

3. One congregation had over the entrance to its auditorium, “Enter to Worship, Leave to Serve,” while another had in its bulletin, “Every Christian A Minister.”
4. Another congregation, not far from us, has signs at the exits of their parking lot which say, “You Are Entering The Mission Field.”
5. Whether our service is seeing after the orphans and widows (James 1:27), contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality (Romans 12:13), “admonishing the unruly, encouraging the fainthearted, helping the weak (1 Thessalonians 5:14) or “doing good to all people” (Galatians 6:10), we can all serve or minister.

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III. The Goal of Growth: Maturity (vv. 13-14)

“until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;” (Ephesians 4:13–14, NASB95)

A. MATURITY

1. The mature believer is steady, focused.
2. A fine educational institution is known for the quality of students it

produces.

3. A mature church is known for the elevation of its people (Acts 2:46-47a)

“Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

4. The maturity of which Paul speaks has three goals:

- a. “Unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God” — **the church comes to enjoy unity**
- b. “A mature man” — **it becomes more spiritually mature**
- c. “The measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” — **more like Jesus Christ in all His fullness** (cf. 1:23; 3:19)
 - 1) “which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (1:23)
 - 2) “filled up to all the fullness of God” (3:19).

B. IMMATURITY

- 1. The immature believe is fickle, unstable, gullible.
- 2. He or she is easily influenced by the latest book, preacher or fad.
- 3. Paul described such believers as “children” who are . . .
 - a. Like a ship that is “tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine.”
 - b. Led astray by “the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.”
- 4. A church composed of such people is one that Satan can easily destroy.

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IV. Medium of Growth: Truthing In Love (vv. 15-16)

“but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ” (v. 15)

A. TRUTHING IN LOVE

1. “Speaking the truth in love” is from a participle which literally states, “truthing in love”.
2. It carries the idea of maintaining truth in love both in speech and life.
3. As each of us speaks and lives out the truth of Christ in love we “grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, Christ” (15).
4. Christ is the Source of our growth as well as the Aim and Goal of our growth.
 - a. He is the one who causes us to grow.
 - b. He is the one that we seek to become more like in our growth.

B. EVERY MEMBER DOING HIS/HER PART

1. Every member of the body is joined by being carefully fitted together.
2. We are held together by means of every supporting ligament — this happens as each of us does his or her part.
 - a. What happens if a member of your physical body no longer does it's part (i.e. thumb, ligament, eye, kidney, lung, liver, heart)
 - b. Other parts may attempt to compensate.
 - c. There are some parts without which the body cannot function.
 - d. But when each part does it's job, the body functions at optimum performance level.
3. The outcome of each member doing his part is “the growth of the body” — spiritually and physically.
4. The church builds itself up in love.

Conclusion

1. If something stunts the growth of one of our children, we become concerned.
2. Oftentimes it is malnourishment, sometimes it traces to another cause.
3. When the growth of the body of Christ is stunted, we should likewise be concerned and look for the reason.
 - a. It may be that those given responsibility for equipping the saints aren't doing their part.
 - b. Or it may be that individual members aren't doing their part.
 - c. Or it may be a combination of both.
4. The goal should always be to ask ourselves "what can I do to be more of the person God wants me to be?"
5. What do you need to do today?