

Every aspect of the church serves the purpose of growth. The mission of the church is growth. In Matthew 28:18-19 Jesus commissioned His disciples to go into all the world to teach, baptize, and teach and by this method, the church grows. In fact, this is the only God-given way by which the church grows. Further, the unity of the church leads to growth. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). In addition the teachings of the church ought to result in growth. In 2 Timothy 2:2 Paul wrote, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." The passing on of God's message of salvation from generation to generation is clearly for the growth of the body. Though we do not normally think about the organization of the church in these terms, yet it also serves the purpose of growth (Ephesians 4:11-12). These examples should serve the purpose of pointing out the varied areas of the church nurtures and fosters growth.

It is often the case that some members of the church ask, "How can I help the church to grow?" To answer this question, consider the elements of church growth as found in our text of Ephesians 4:16 which says, "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." Our great God has given these element to us but let us never forget the purpose of each element is church growth.

"Every Joint"

The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23) and is comprised of a diversity of members (1 Corinthians 12:12ff). Within the book of Ephesians, Paul addresses the saints of Ephesus who were comprised of Jews and Gentiles (chapters 2-3), men and women (chapter 5), and servants and masters (chapter 6). Like most congregations, there was a vast difference within the membership in Ephesus. However, under the graceful watchfulness of the Savior, they could be one body "fitly joined together and compacted" as Paul instructed.

Within our text, Paul begins by writing, "from whom." In this text, "from" means out of and the "whom" is Christ as we see in the previous verse. Christ is the sole source by which every joint can be fitly joined together and compacted. He provides life for the whole body which is the church, and He provides what is needed for the various member to be joined one to another. "Fitly joined together" is one word in the original. It is only used here and in Ephesians 2:21. In that passage, Paul is drawing a figure from a building which is closely fitted together. In our text, he speaks concerning a body which is also closely fitted together. Though the figures are different, the lesson is the same concerning the Lord's church. "Compacted" adds another dimension. It means to unite, to knit together, or gather together at the joints. "By that which every joint supplieth" is the goal or aim of a congregation.

Since Christ is the sole source, the figure is similar to the lesson of the vine and branches. Jesus said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). Any branch severed from the vine is without life. And, any member of the body who is severed from Christ is not "fitly joined together and compacted" with the rest of the body. Just as the head provides for the rest of the body, the various members of the body must be "fitly joined together and compacted" to receive the provisions of the head. Thus, all members depend upon the Head.

As in a physical body, all members have a work and a function within the body. The various members of the head do their various work. The eyes see; the ears hear; and the tongue tastes. In addition other member function as well. The hands touch; the knees bend; and the toes help with balance. So it is in the church. The toes may not seem to be as important as the eyes, but who wants to loose a toe, yea, even a little toe? If you are a Christian, you a member of the body, and you have a work and function within the body. If you do not know what that work or function is, then it is high time you find out.

The various roles of the members of the body do

not necessarily involve social equality. We live in a time when social equality is all important. However, even in our world that constantly cries out for such, it does not exist and will not ever exist because there will always be a need for a boss to boss, a leader to lead, and a commander to command. Thus, no social equality. The head must be the head and do the work of the head. The various parts of the body cannot function as the head, collectively or individually. So it is in the church. "There is neither Jew nor Greek...bond nor free...male nor female..." (Galatians 3:28) does not imply social equality. A scripturally organized church has elders to lead us in the spiritual affairs of the church. They are not better than the rest of the members. Their work and function is that of leadership and guidance.

"Encouraging Energy"

A second element of church growth is encouraging energy. "Effectual working" in our text is one word in the original, and we get our word energy from it. Thus, "fitly joined together and compacted" provide a vital force of labor. When every member of the body works and functions together, the body can accomplish much. This is no news to the winning athlete. He or she exercises daily in order for the various parts of the body to work in a coordinated manner to be a effective athlete. This is exactly what took place in Nehemiah's day. The walls of Jerusalem were built, but why and how was this accomplished? "...for the people had a mind to work" (Nehemiah 4:6). Clearly, there was a coordinated effort on every persons part in order to accomplish the building of Zion's walls.

The ultimate source of energy comes from Christ, and the mutual working of the members encourages one another. In other words, each member gets his or her encouraging energy from Christ, but it is often through the other members of the body. John's work encourages Bob, and Bob's work encourages John. Christ's encouragement comes by means of one another just as the head's signals come through the neck, through the torso, to the legs to tell them to run, but that is not the

end. The legs signal back to the head through the torso and neck that they are running. You see the encouraging energy is reciprocal in nature.

With this in mind, there are many lessons to be observed. One member cannot do the work for all the members. If he or she even tries to do such, they become discouraged and disheartened. Many of us have seen it numerous times and even experienced it ourselves. So the question becomes, “Are you doing your work?” Also like a body, there must not be friction or grating between members. When there is a problem, the whole body suffers. If a problem exists in the physical body, it hurts, and we find a physician to help us find a reasonable solution. So it should be in the spiritual body of Christ. Being “fitly joined together and compacted” demands growing together. There is something wrong with the body when the arms grow faster than the legs. If growth is properly accomplished, then the part that is growing encourages the parts that are not.

“In the measure of every part” means each member functions properly in its own area of labor (i.e. accomplishes what it was designed to accomplish). In the physical body, the shoulder does what it was designed to do, and the hips do what they were designed to do. Elders ought to do the work God has given them to do. Deacons ought to do the work God has assigned to them. And preachers and other members the same. This works! But when preachers do the elders’ work, and elders do the deacons’ work, and deacons do the members’ work, then the members do nothing.

“Edification in Love”

In our text Paul by inspiration continues, “maketh increase of the body.” In other words, the properly functioning body grows. The whole body is “fitly joined together and compacted.” The members of the body are supplying one another. Every part is producing encouraging energy. And every one is doing the work he was called to do. The results: “maketh increase of the body. Notice growth is from within with the head nourishing the body, and members nourishing one another.

By inspiration Paul adds this last thought in our

text: “unto the edifying of itself in love.” “Edifying” literally means the act of building such as a house or other structures. Remember the wise man who “built his house upon a rock” and the foolish man who “built his house upon the sand” (Matthew 7:24-27)? Jesus used the same word that Paul used in our text. Paul, however, used it in a figurative way to mean spiritual growth and the promotion of such. Brethren and friends, this is construction and not destruction. When every member does his or her part, then the body is building itself in love.

In Colossians 3:14 Paul notes that love is “the bond of perfectness.” It is the muscles and ligaments that tie the members together. Without love, the body could not be “fitly joined together and compacted.” Without love, the members of the body could not supply one another. Without love, there is no encouraging energy. As Paul wrote in 1Corinthians 13:1-3, without love, “I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. Without love, “I am nothing.” Without love, the greatest gifts “profiteth me nothing.” Love binds the body together. It begins with God’s love, and it radiates with our love for one another. Brethren, we are a body. We are Christ’s body! And if we are ever going to accomplish the work of a body, it will only be accomplished in love — love for God, His word, His Son, and His people.

What is the key to church growth? Every member doing his or her part. When members do not do such, then the body is ill and in need of a Physician. Are you helping the growth of the church by doing your part in the work of the church, or are you hindering her growth by not doing your part?

This tract is condensed from a lesson presented at the
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“*I Know*”

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I Know...

How I Can Help The Church Grow

by
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