

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Pastor/Teacher

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## PERFECTING THE SAINTS

The Apostolic Church was devoted to bringing every believer to full maturity in Christ. Maturity in turn, will produce stability in faith. This cannot simply be accomplished by adopting some sort of *program* for discipleship. We see all around us today churches that are numerically thriving because of their user-friendly appeal, their emphasis on multiple programs, and a lively, up-beat contemporary worship experience. Listen to the words of Edmund Clowney, “The work of Christian nurture will languish without a passion for holiness like that of Paul. Churches may attract outsiders by being ‘seeker friendly’. Then, when surveys show that new members are dropping out, another minister is added to guard the back door by following up on non-attending members. Through that experience, many churches have recognized that training in discipleship has to be the regular ministry of the church to its members. The great missionary apostle saw church growth as growth in grace, wisdom and fruitfulness, i.e. growth in Christ (Col. 1:9; I Thes. 3:11-13).”<sup>1</sup>

### I. THE PURPOSE OF NURTURE: GROWTH

The church is the Body of Christ. He is the Head. The Body is to grow and mature into His likeness. Concerning this growth the Apostle says three specific things:

A. The Body’s growth is from Christ.

AUXOSOMEN, to grow, increase “in all things” – TA PANTA, in respect to all things or in every way, totally and completely.

B. The Body is in union with Christ. This union is underscored by Paul in the following way:

1. “Fitly jointed together.” SUNARMOLOGEO, CF. Eph. 2:21, an architectural metaphor.

2. “Compacted.” SUMBIBAZO, to bring together, to unite, to hold together, a physical metaphor. It refers to a body united by bone, muscle and ligaments.

3. “Every joint supplieth,” EPICHOLOGIA, a technical term describing the provision of various needs a husband is obligated to make for his family. Here the idea is that the Head provides for all of the needs of the body (comp. Phil. 1:19).

C. The Body’s function under Christ. The body, functioning under the authority of the Head, and in vital union with the Head promotes its own growth. “Corporeal growth is not effected by additions from without. The body itself elaborates the materials of its own development. Its stomach digests the food, and the numerous absorbents extract and assimilate its nourishment. It grows each part according to its nature and uses. The head does not swell into the dimensions of the trunk, nor does the ‘little finger’ become ‘thicker than the loins’. Each has the size that adapts it to its uses, and brings it into symmetry with the entire living organism. And every part grows.”<sup>2</sup> James Boice make this helpful observation, “There is another aspect of this that is also worth considering. I have been writing of Christlikeness on the personal level as involving each individual member of the church, and this is important. It is how the church matures. Yet it is also true that in this great passage of Ephesians, dealing with maturity, Paul is thinking not so much of individual believers as of the church as a whole. He is saying that just as there is a growth in maturity for the individual, so also there is a growth in maturity for the church corporately. I think this means that, as the church goes about its business in this world, God works in it to develop one aspect of the character of Jesus Christ in a particular way here and another aspect of the character of Christ in a special way there, so that the entire church in every place is necessary to manifest the full character of the Lord.”<sup>3</sup>

### II. THE GOAL OF NURTURE: MATURITY

We have noted time and again the Trinitarian nature of this particular epistle (cf. 1:17; 2:18; 3:14-16). “The goal of the triune nurture of the church is found in God himself. It is to know the Lord, to do the Lord’s will, and to be like the Lord.”<sup>4</sup>

- A. Nurture In Knowing the Lord. Knowing the Lord refers to much more than simply to have some information about Him. It is a saving knowledge and profoundly personal (II Tim. 1:12). Faith begins with the truth of God that replaces the darkness of error, faith assents to that truth, in contrast to the illusions of unbelief that rest on error; saving faith commits itself to the true God in trust that replaces the idolatry of unbelief. This trust defines faith, for the demons know the facts to be true – and shudder (James 2:19).<sup>5</sup> The fear of the Lord, we are told in Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10, is the beginning of knowledge. This knowledge is the basis for wisdom. To grow in our knowledge of the Lord is a growth in wisdom. Mature saints are wise ones.
- B. Nurture in Doing the Lord's Will. Notice how the knowledge of the Lord teaches to wisdom and expresses itself in doing the Lord's will (cf. Heb. 5:11-14 mature believers are those who "by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil). Likewise, in Romans 12: 1-2 transformed minds are the key to finding and doing the Lord's will.
- C. Nurture in Being Like the Lord. A Christ-centered gospel is a life-changing message. We do a grave disservice to children in particular, if all we do is seek to build their self-esteem and regulate their behavior by instruction that often merely consists in a series of repeated admonitions to be good. Morality, in and of itself, does not bring either repentance or new life. The Gospel of God's grace in Christ instructs us to know *how* we are forgiven and *why* our lives must be shaped and directed by the Gospel. Maturity in Christ comes with devotion to Christ and obedience to His word.

**CONCLUSION:** Unfortunately many Christians think that if they attend their church faithfully and abstain for worldly ways, i.e., live a good clean moral life, then God is pleased with them. The Lord Jesus Christ is not honored with such thinking. He is honored when believers are mature. An immature moral church-going Christian does not honor the Lord. He does not develop in Christlikeness. Real maturity and growth go hand in hand with Biblical preaching. "The problem in our day," writes Robert Raymond, "which give rise to highly questionable church growth methods, is two-fold: On the one hand, *we are seeing a waning confidence in the message of the gospel.* Even the evangelical church shows signs of losing confidence in the convincing and converting power of the gospel message. That is why increasing numbers of churches prefer sermons on family life and psychological health...On the other hand, *we are seeing a waning confidence in preaching as the means by which the gospel is to be spread.* As a result, preaching is giving way in evangelical churches to multimedia presentations, drama, dance, "sharing time," sermonettes, and "how to" devotionals. Preaching is being viewed increasingly as outdated and ineffective. Business techniques like telemarketing are now popular with the church growth movement. Churches so infected also look to the multiplication of programs to effect their growth. They sponsor conferences and seminars on every conceivable topic under the sun; they subdivide their congregations down into marrieds and singles, single parents and divorced, "thirty-something" and "twenty-something," teens, unemployed, the child-abused and the chemically dependent, attempting to arrange programs for them all. And once a person joins such a church, conventional wisdom has it, the church and the minister must meet his every felt need. Accordingly, ministers have become managers, facilitators, and motivators—everything but heralds of the whole counsel of God—and this all because they have lost confidence in the preaching of God's Word as the primary means for the growth of the church and the individual Christian."<sup>6</sup> Jesus tells us that God will sanctify (synonym for growth and maturity) His people by the truth, the Word of God. This means that the preaching and teaching of the Scripture must take center stage in the life of the church. This process involves more than mere instruction. God uses hardship and even suffering to nurture His children (Heb. 12:7-12) but principally He uses His Word. We need to heed the counsel of the Apostle in I Cor. 2: 1-5 and not the strategies of so many in the church growth crowd if we would honor the Lord in growth and maturity of His church..

#### ENDNOTES

1. E.P. Clowney, *The Church* (IVP, 1995), p. 140.
2. John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (T & T Clark, 1883), p.193.
3. J. M. Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Baker, 1997), p. 149.
4. Clowney, p. 143.
5. Ibid.
6. R. Raymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nelson, 1998), p.882.