

EDIFYING THE CHURCH

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, May 19, 2013

We are growing. Your faith and love are growing. We are growing up together. Christ's church is alive!

The number of Christians around the world has nearly quadrupled in the last 100 years. One-third of the world's population claims Christianity as their faith practice. The global Church is increasing at the astonishing rate of 69,000 per day!

This growth is not taking place because Christianity is popular. The Gospel message has never been popular. Yet, the appeal of Christianity is so strong that many are willing to suffer great hardships, because of their love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

The fastest growing group in the church today is Pentecostal. According to a Pew Forum Analysis (2011), Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians together total over 584 million people—almost 27% of the world's Christian population, or 8.5% of the total world population—the second largest communion of Christians in the world, twice the size of the non-Pentecostal Evangelical population, and about 11% of the entire Protestant population.

There are several classical Pentecostal denominations, including the Assemblies of God, the Church of God in Christ, the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) and the International Church of the Four Square Gospel. In addition, there are numerous independent and non-white indigenous churches that consider themselves "Pentecostal," "Neo-Pentecostal," or "Charismatic."

What defines Pentecostalism, however, is not a single structure, uniform doctrine or ecclesiastical leadership. Pentecostals share a particular Christian world-view, which includes:

- An emphasis on a transforming experience of being 'filled with the Holy Spirit.'
- A holistic world-view with God present in all events and causing all things to work together.
- A belief that knowledge is not limited to the realms of reason and sensory experience.
- A view of the Bible as a "living book" through which the Holy Spirit is always active.

"The Pentecostal world-view holds that ours is a world of miracles and mystery, where healings, prophecy and divine serendipity are woven into the fabric of everyday life," says Margaret Poloma (University of Akron, Department of Sociology).

Today, Pentecost Sunday 2013, we celebrate this global move of the Holy Spirit! Christ is building His Church. This fact is central to who we are and why we are here.

The Wheel of Discipleship that I have shown you depicts the essential components of a full Christian life. The Third Quadrant of the wheel (6-9 o'clock) represents your service for Christ, building up the body of Christ. We need not only to develop our devotional life and our connectedness with other Christians, we also need to serve the body of Christ, turning believers into disciples—we are all responsible to build up the church.

Ephesians 2 (ESV)

¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

The Church is a growing family—not in numbers only, but in spirit, in character, in effectiveness. In fact, a local church does not have to be large to be effective in its ministries and mature in character. But every church should be growing in some dimension, especially as “a holy temple in the Lord.”

GROW

Apostle Paul understood his responsibility to help the church grow, and disclosed his understanding of the power of spiritual gifts for just that purpose...

Romans 1

¹¹ For I long to visit you so I can bring you some spiritual gift that will help you grow strong in the Lord.

Though we are not all apostles, each one of us shares a similar responsibility...

1 Corinthians 14

⁴ A person who speaks in tongues is strengthened personally, but one who speaks a word of prophecy strengthens the entire church.

⁵ I wish you could all speak in tongues, but even more I wish you could all prophesy. For prophecy is greater than speaking in tongues, unless someone interprets what you are saying so that the whole church will be strengthened.

¹² Since you are so eager to have the special abilities the Spirit gives, seek those that will strengthen the whole church.

The “greater” quality of prophecy, as compared to a message in tongues, is simply that it is understandable by the audience and thereby strengthens them.

You are to grow, individually, and also to assist others to grow, just as Paul urged the church in Corinth...

2 Corinthians 13

¹¹ Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.

It's a mutual responsibility, so let's grow!

Each of us plays a part. As you give yourself more and more to this life of faith, others are encouraged to do the same, and you are better equipped to help them in the process...

Ephesians 4

¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

Paul was so consumed by this purpose, that it determined his choices and the course of his life...

Philippians 1

⁵ Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith.

The kind of growth I am speaking of is the development of faith and love in your life—faith toward Christ and love toward His people. The better you get to know God, the more these twin purposes will guide *your* life's choices...

Colossians 1

¹⁰ Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better.

Getting to know God better and better should be the aim of every activity of the church, because that's how we grow.

We need to grow in many ways, as we build on the foundation of our faith in Jesus Christ, just as Peter suggested...

2 Peter 1

² May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord.

(He added...) ⁵ In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.

⁸ The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Your usefulness and productivity in the Kingdom of God is directly related to this kind of spiritual growth.

Let's grow!

BUILD

You cannot grow on your own. You cannot grow by yourself. This is a family! In order to grow, you need help. In order to grow, I need your help...

Romans 14

¹⁷ For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ If you serve Christ with this attitude, you will please God, and others will approve of you, too. ¹⁹ So then, let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up.

My aim (and yours) is to maintain harmony in the church and build others up. This implies attention to others above my own desires...

Romans 15

² We should help others do what is right and build them up in the Lord. ³ For even Christ didn't live to please himself.

Be a builder!

But what *kind* of builder will you be? Casual? Sloppy? Indifferent? Or intentional?

1 Corinthians 3

¹³ On the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value.

Will your work as a Christian survive? Or will it turn to ash? The fire of Christ's judgment will make its value clear.

1 Thessalonians 5

¹¹ So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

The encouragement we are to offer is such that no one will give up following Jesus Christ, and no one will fall asleep or drift away from the faith. Instead, we should make the effort to build one another up.

Jude 20

²⁰ But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith.

Be a builder!

The church is to be a network of helping hearts and hands and minds, comforting and encouraging each other to keep on trusting Jesus Christ, no matter what!

You need the rest of us to run this Christian race well to the very end. And we need *you* to make it.

God, in His wisdom, has put us together for this purpose. He has given us the tools that we need. We just need to pick them up and enter into the work.

Every carpenter needs a hammer, and needs to know how to use it.

The Christian's hammer is the Word of God, the Bible. You need to have it and know it and use it well.

2 Timothy 3

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. ¹⁷ God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

This is how we help each other the most: with the Word of God. Not just quoting it, but exploring it together and learning it together and practicing it together.

The Assemblies of God provides many opportunities to do this, both formally and informally, individually and in groups, especially small groups.

Such small groups may include home fellowships, men's groups, women's groups, boys' groups and girls' groups, Sunday School classes, children's church, youth/student meetings, single adult fellowships, and so on. There are a multitude of curricula and guidebooks available to foster these "growth-groups."

Be a builder!

Vital groups involve interaction and personal inquiry! They provide multiple perspectives and mutual encouragement!

This is spiritual growth! This is spiritual building!

This is how we edify the church.