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“Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father,” I Thessalonians 1:3

Progression

Lesson Aim: To call for church promotion which leads to spiritual advancement

L449. Date: April 1976. **Text:** Colossians 1:9-11; I Thessalonians 1:2-3, 6-10. **Topic:** Church Covenant; Grace: Growth In; Growth: Spiritual.

Covenant: “We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit . . . to promote her prosperity and spirituality . . .”

“ . . . Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen,” II Peter 3:18. That verse sets the theme for today's lesson. It expands that portion of the covenant which members of a Baptist church enter to promote the “prosperity and spirituality” of their church. A major prerequisite for promoting the church is the spiritual growth of her members.

What does it mean to grow in grace? (1) It might mean to grow in the understanding of the grace of Jesus Christ. (2) It might mean to grow in the capacity to express the grace of Jesus Christ in one's relationships with others. (3) Probably it means both. The Christian is to know the grace of the Lord in order that he might show grace to men in the name of the Lord.

How does personal spiritual growth strengthen the church? The church is people — saved, baptized, and covenanted people. The only way for the church to be strong is for the people who compose her membership to be strong. A man is weak or strong as the muscles of arms, legs, and back are weak or strong. Your church is as strong or as weak as you and the other members. Your spiritual growth strengthens your church.

The church is a body. It is not enough that each member give attention

to personal growth. Each should be concerned with the spiritual development of every other member. Such a “body ministry” is producing churches which are vibrant in service and aggressive in evangelism.

I. PROGRESS THROUGH INTERCESSORY PRAYER

Prayer is a vital part of the Christian life. Prayer for one another is a vital function of the members of the body. Prayer in behalf of others is called “intercessory prayer.” The Christian should pray for himself and his personal concerns; but when he prays for others and their needs, he enters into the highest levels of his prayer life.

Jesus Himself set the example of intercessory prayer. Jesus told Simon Peter, “. . . **I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not . . .**” 22:32. On the cross, He prayed for His executioners (Luke 23:34). He promised the disciples He would intercede to the Father for them that they might receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16). That ministry of intercession did not end when He ascended back to heaven. He is now believers’ “Advocate” (Intercessor, Helper) before the Father (I John 2:1). “. . . He has entered heaven itself . . . to appear in the presence of God for us,” Hebrew 9:24. There “. . . he ever liveth to make intercession . . . ,” Hebrews 7:25.

Alongside of Jesus, the Holy Spirit also makes intercession for believers. Since men know not what to ask or how to ask before God, the Spirit helps their infirmities by making intercession in a way no human could ever express himself (Romans 8:27).

As believer priests, Christians have access to approach God in behalf of one another. God has always heard prayers offered by one believer in behalf of human need (Isaiah 59:16). The Christian, however, has a special privilege of intercession.

The Apostle Paul set a wonderful example in praying for others. He prayed for people in Rome (Romans 1:9), Corinth (I Corinthians 1:4, 5), Ephesus (Ephesians 1:16), Philippi (Philippians 1:3, 4), Galatia (Galatians 4:19), Colosse (Colossians 1:3), Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:2; II Thessalonians 1:11), and for individual brethren besides (Philemon 4). Consider how much time the Apostle must have spent in communion with God as he interceded for others.

Intercessory prayer is the most selfless of all forms of petition. The petitioner asks nothing for himself. He may well be totally unprofitable from the answer to his petitions. Intercessory prayer is in the spirit of Jesus whose concern was not personal benefit but the good of others.

How much time do you spend praying for others? Do you have a list

which keeps current prayer needs before your mind? Prepare a little chart upon which you list an item for prayer, when you began to ask God for it, what Scripture promise you claimed for an answer, and a space to record when God gave what you asked. That will be a tremendous aid to your faith as you keep a record of answered prayer. Give much of your time to praying for others. Pastors, evangelists, missionaries, writers of literature, administrators of Christian enterprises, individual Christians, your local church, oppressed people of the world, sinners and saints in your community who are not part of your fellowship . . . the list is almost endless. Give yourself to the blessed ministry of intercessory prayer.

II. PROGRESS THROUGH SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

It is imperative that the child of God be “filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding,” verse 9. Each Christian needs dearly to ascertain the will of God, if he would be at his best in the service of God. Such knowledge comes through spiritual insight and understanding. The Christian needs to know many things, but the thing he needs most is to comprehend the work and will of God.

Knowledge of the will of God must precede a life that is pleasing to Him. Each Christian should be “filled” (made complete in understanding) with it. How can that be? He must keep on growing. Imperfection of the knowledge of God's will is corrected as one increases in understanding. That makes possible a life that is pleasing to God.

The knowledge needed in the believer is not the product of fleshly wisdom. That puffs up but does not build up the inner man (I Corinthians 1:20; 2:5, 6, 13; 3:19). The illumination of the Holy Spirit makes possible that wisdom and understanding which are needed. Wisdom is that condition in which the mind is not dependent upon unaided human intellect but is controlled and enlightened by the Spirit of truth. Understanding is the ability to see problems in the light of the wisdom which the Spirit confers. “Wisdom and spiritual understanding” are the gift of God, by His Holy Spirit, to the believer who is receptive to spiritual things.

You will grow in capacity to serve only as you grow in comprehension of spiritual things. The ideal of spiritual life is growth and fruit. Keep on growing spiritually, and your life will bless your church and honor God.

III. PROGRESS THROUGH A WORTHY WALK

A. Here is the Christian's goal: “. . . **Walk worthy of the Lord unto all**

pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God,” Colossians 1:10, 11. How would you like for your life to be worthy of Him whose name you bear and so please God in every way? It can! How? It will not be by barren orthodoxy of mere intellectual growth, but the knowledge of God will transform your character so that your life will be truly Christian.

Absolute holiness and sincere love are the goals toward which the growing Christian moves. A complete, whole-hearted resolve to please God in all things will bring fullest meaning and greatest joy to a child of God. Knowledge is never imparted as an end in itself, nor simply to satisfy curiosity. It is given that one might live a life which pleases God.

“Walk worthy of the Lord,” the Apostle admonished. “Walk” refers to one's entire manner of life. It means one's ambitions, motivations, thoughts, words, actions, attitudes, and every aspect of living. Neither the standards of the community or one's personal ideas should govern conduct, the understanding of what pleases God. Thank God for those who have a God-centered motive in all of life. What kind of life is worthy? It is a life which is fruitful in every good work and increasing in every good work, sustained by the knowledge of God which grows from day to day.

B. How does the Christian reach his goal? The method is three-fold (I Thessalonians 1:3, 6). (1) He does the “work of faith.” Christian belief is a faith that works by love (Galatians 5:6). Work comes from true faith; it is an indication of it (James 2:26). Energetic faith, active faith, faith which brings forth effort loves the Christian toward a fruitful life.

(2) He does the “labour of love.” “Labour” refers to difficult, painful, laborious effort. It is work which has become a burden. Christian love keeps on at work even when the work is heartbreaking; love is self-sacrificing. Unwearied love keeps the Christian busy for Christ.

(3) He exercises a “patience of hope.” Steadfastness of hope expresses itself in patient endurance. That is a man who is unswerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety, even by the most distressing circumstance. Joyful expectation, full of confidence, keeps the believer busy for the Lord.

C. What ability enables the believer to walk worthy to please God in everything, and to be fruitful in every good work? Let Paul answer:

“Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power . . .”

Colossians 1:11. Can you imagine being empowered by the glorious power of God? That is the Christian's birthright. Strong at all points with strength worthy of the power manifested in God's glory is almost beyond comprehension. That is the normal Christian life. That is God's expectation

of each of His children. God provides the ability; the believer provides the availability.

IV. PROGRESS THROUGH CHRISTIAN WITNESS

“You were an example to all who became believers.” That was what Paul wrote to the Thessalonian believers. What a compliment! How many Christians do you know who are patterns or models for new converts? That is what God expects of each believer.

A spiritually mature person is always a pattern. He does not want to attract attention to himself; spiritual maturity attracts of itself. The new convert should follow the example of his teacher so that he may become an example for others to follow.

Spiritual prosperity cannot be kept a secret. Paul said the Thessalonians had become “ensamples” (examples) to newer converts. Consider the implications of that statement. The Thessalonian Christians had trusted Christ within a year of the time that Paul wrote those words. They were already examples to believers in other areas. Paul was in Thessalonica only a few months. Persecution drove him away. The believers looked to God, and He led them to spiritual manhood. It was because of their spiritual growth that they became examples.

The ultimate purpose of spiritual growth is to glorify God by producing other converts to Christ. An evangelistic ministry extended from Thessalonica. Those growing Christians “sounded out” the Word of God through surrounding provinces. Their witness was so powerful and emphatic that Paul likened it to a trumpet blast or a roll of thunder. It was a loud and unmistakable proclamation, going on in recurring waves. Behold what one church can do when she grows in grace.

V. PROGRESS THROUGH PROOF OF CONVERSION

Is your Christian allegiance showing? It should. In Thessalonica everyone knew how the Christians had “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,” I Thessalonians 1:9. The change was so radical that none could deny their allegiance to the living God whom they served. Their lives were once marked by superstition and sin. They became devoted to ministry in the name of God. They turned from fear of many false gods to loving service of the one true God. Real Christian allegiance will show.

Spiritual growth and dedicated service will have a far-reaching effect upon the believer. While he serves the Lord upon earth, he keeps looking for

the Lord to appear from heaven. Daily service will be sanctified by daily expectation. Daily watchfulness for the return of the Saviour is a spiritual exercise that brings great blessing and daily comfort. Some have complained that many Christians are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good. The growing Christian will have his ministry centered upon earth while his expectation and hope is in heaven. He will be filled with joyful anticipation while busy ministering in Jesus' name.

The more spiritually minded and mature a believer becomes, the more precious and real the return of the Lord Jesus will be to him. The more he knows of Jesus, the more he will desire the personal appearing of Jesus. Spiritual growth and hope of His return go hand in hand. Is Jesus personally real to you? Are you waiting with desire for the day of His return? What are you doing to make Him real to others?

As a member of a Baptist church, you are obligated to “promote its prosperity and spirituality.” Today's lesson comments have set forth five ways by which you can do that. (1) Pray daily for your church, her members, her ministers, and her ministry. (2) Grow in personal relationship with and knowledge of the Lord Jesus. (3) Live a life which is worthy of your profession of faith and which will please the Lord in all its aspects. (4) Share your faith in Christ in dear and unmistakable terms in order that the unconverted may hear. (5) Give proof, by your actions, of your conversion to Christ.

The church whose members follow those five Biblical guidelines will experience great prosperity in material and spiritual realms. Be a faithful member of the Lord's church.

Questions

1. How does one receive the grace of God?
2. What does it mean to grow in grace?
3. What is intercessory prayer?
4. How can you share in intercessory prayer?
5. How can you know God's will?
6. How can you walk worthy of the Lord?
7. What does I Thessalonians 1:3 mean to you?
8. What does Colossians 1:11 mean to you?
9. How can you be a better witness for Christ?
10. How can you show that you are truly converted?