United Together For Growth in Christ

Read II Peter 3:17-18. Q: How do we do that? How do we *grow* in grace?

- There are *lots* of good Biblical answers to that question, and *lots* of varied angles we could take in answering it faithfully. But our focus today is on God's plan for his people to grow *together*.

- **Illustration: "Must Grow 3 Together"**
  (Just as many plants ***cannot*** be fruitful alone, so Christians ***cannot*** be fruitful alone either).

I. Pictures of Believers Being United Together In the New Testament:

A. FLOCK *(Sheep United Under One Chief Shepherd; I Peter 5)*

1. **Q:** What do we call a sheep who is ***not together*** with the other sheep?

B. FAMILY *(Siblings United Under One Head; I Timothy 3:15)*

1. **Q:** What do we call a family member who is ***not together*** with the family?

C. BODY *(Different Parts United In One Body; I Corinthians 12)*

1. **Q:** What do we call a body part that has been ***separated from the body?***

2. By God's design, **it is *within* the distinct community of *the visible Church* that *Christians grow from babes in Christ* to *being mature in Christ.***

   (1) On our own, we grow dull, ineffective, and un-useful. But together we are continually *sharpened* and *kept vigilant* in the faith. **(Proverbs 27:17)**

Transition: What are some of the biblical characteristics of this *"togetherness"* to which we are called?

II. *Within the membership of a particular church*, while *perpetually* (1) *centered in Christ* & (2) *grounded upon his Word*:

A. We Do Not Neglect Meeting Together (Hebrews 10:23-25)

Q: *According to the Bible, how do we hold fast our confession, grow in love, and grow in good works?*

Q: When should we meet?

1. We Meet Weekly On the Lord's Day (the Christian Sabbath) **(Deuteronomy 10:12-13)**

   a) This should be a *non-negotiable commitment of every Christian*. Why? Because God said so.

(1) Consider: *Jesus did not die so that we could break the Sabbath. He died for our Sabbath breaking.*

(2) The neglect of the Lord's Day is one of the first and most sure signs of *spiritual drift.*

b) It is *through* the gathering of the saints in worship on the Lord's Day that the Lord most powerfully nourishes our souls, strengthens our faith, and renews our minds in truth.

(1) It is *through* the gathering of the saints in worship on the Lord's Day that the Lord equips us for the work of daily ministry in our homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods during the week.

(2) Lot's of people think they can invent their own substitutes for this. That is false.

(3) God does not promise to bless your plan for the Christian life. He promises to bless his plan.

2. We Meet With Frequent Regularity In One Another's Homes and In Public Spaces **(I Peter 4:8-9)**

a) As Christians we are called to showing hospitality, pursue fellowship, engage in diligent biblical study, seek out and welcome new people, etc.

b) We cannot wait to find the time for these things. By faith, and in obedience to the Lord, ***we must make the time for them,*** and make other things work around these higher priorities, rather than letting other priorities push these things aside.

(1) *"If you want to change the world, invite someone to dinner."* —Josh Burnson

B. We Serve One Another In Christlike Love (Mark 10:45)

Q: What does it mean to serve one another?

To serve is to deploy your time, energy, talent, resources and/or care for the benefit of another.

We do this:

1. Sacrificially: Joyfully Sharing All Earthly Goods **(I John 3:16-18)**
2. Humbly: Considering Others More Significant Than Ourselves **(Philippians 2:3)**
3. According To the Gifts God Has Given Us **(I Peter 4:10-11a)**
4. Always For God's Glory. Never For Our Own. **(I Peter 4:11b)**

C. We Bear One Another's Burdens (Ephesians 4:2)

Q: What does it mean to bear another person's burden?

To mercifully absorb the deficits which are present in another person's life, either because of their

circumstances, their inexperience, their weakness, or even their failings.

We do this:

1. By Sympathy (Romans 12:15)
2. By Overlooking Offenses **(Proverbs 19:11)**
3. By Bearing Tenderly With One Another's Failings **(Galatians 6:2)**

D. We Encourage One Another & Build One Another Up In Love (I Thessalonians 5:11)

Q: What does it mean to encourage someone/to build them up?

To apply the truth of God's Word to someone in such a way that quiets their fears and discouragements, dispels their doubts, and fans into flame their confidence in God's character and promises, as well as their recognition of God's renewing work in their own heart and life.

We do this:

1. By Speaking the Truth To One Another in Love **(Ephesians 4:15)**
2. By Striving To Strengthen the Souls of Our Siblings in Christ **(Acts 14:22)**

E. We Exhort & Rebuke One Another When Necessary (Hebrews 3:12-13)

Q: What does it mean to rebuke someone? Is it mean to do this? Is it unloving?

To offer needed and biblically accurate words of correction to a fellow believer, sometimes with sternness and warning, but always with gentleness and love.

We do this:

1. With the Right Heart **(Matthew 7:1-5)**
2. With the Right Words **(Proverbs 15:28)**
3. With the Right Goal **(Galatians 6:1)**
4. With Persistent Prayer (James 5:16)

F. We Apply God's Plan of Discipline In the Hope of God's Goal: Restoration

Q: How is the subject of church discipline typically viewed in the modern evangelical world? Why do you think this is the case?

1. We already discussed the first step of church discipline in the previous section. But what do you do when you have gone to another person and they have refused to listen? **(Matthew 18:15-20)**

a) "If your brothers sins against you…"

(1) **Step 1:** Go to the person privately and in love.
If they listen, you have gained your brother. If not…

(2) **Step 2:** Go to the person with one or two fellow witnesses in love.
If they listen, you have gained your brother. If not…

(3) **Step 3: "**Tell it to the church" — Which we understand to mean, tell it to the elected representatives of the church, biblically defined as elders. The elders are then to go to that person, likewise pleading for them to recognize their sin and turn from it in repentance.
If they listen, you have gained your brother. If not…

(4) **Step 4:** "Let them be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" — Which means, a professing Christian who is continuing in sin and refusing to turn from it in genuine confession and repentance, is to be removed from the membership of the church and treated as if they are an unbeliever, not yet having been truly converted to Christ.

2. Q: What are the goals of church discipline? Broadly speaking, there are three.

a) The glory of God.
(Protecting the name of Christ against misrepresentation)

b) The protection of the Church.
(Just as infection is prone to spread, so sin is the same.)

c) The rescue and restoration of the sinner.
(Those persisting in sin show by the fruit of their lives that they stand in need of Christ.)

III. CLOSING: *Why does the Bible continuously exhort Christians to finish the race, to not grow weary in doing good, to fight the good fight to the end, to not give up, etc.?*

A. Because there is a very real danger that people may start well, but not finish well.

1. Our belief in the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints should NEVER produce presumption or apathy in our walk with Christ.

a) The genuineness of our faith is not affirmed by presumption and apathy.

b) It is best affirmed by our earnest endeavor to put into practice all those good things our Lord has given to us and commanded of us for our good and his glory.

(1) And one of the most important things God has given to us and commanded of us for our good and his glory is our steadfast participation with other saints in the life of the Church.

(2) It is as we are united together in Christ, stirring one another up to love and good works, that we are strengthened by God to victoriously fight the good fight until the very end.