

Introduction:

The Barna Research polling states, “Americans are attending church less, more people are experiencing and practicing their faith outside of its four walls. Millennials in particular exhibit great skepticism and contempt toward institutions—particularly the church. Add to this the broader secularizing trend in American culture, a growing antagonism toward faith and the damage done by the pandemic. These are uncertain times for the church in the U.S. however, they can be times of opportunity if we work together to cultivate church growth.

I. Faithfulness Cultivates Church Growth vv. 4-6

1. I like us to look at the church in Ephesus. It was a good church. They were a wonderful church. They were in the process of maturing. Paul is addressing the subject of a united body. This unity is found in Jesus Christ, by the Spirit of God. We want unity in the truth of God for this is the best way of promoting unity. Divisions in Churches never begin with those who love the Savior and His church. We never want to cause division in the body apart from false doctrine.

2. So it is important for official members to take serious their commitment to their church...it is the Local Bible believing church. All members made a pledge at our commission of membership according to our church constitution that, “We agree, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church in spiritual knowledge, holiness and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spiritually. To sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines; to give it a sacred pre-eminence over all institution of human origin; by attending all the regular services of the church. When the doors are open your present is vitally important.

3. Today there is a real lack of faithfulness to the local church. It seems we understand how important it is to support local business, our local school and even our local sports teams. Yet when it comes to the greatest institution in our community it is often treated with disdain. The principle of the Local Church is mentioned in the Bible over one hundred times. The word "church" occurs 77 times in the singular form, and 37 times in the plural form in the Bible. All these verses are found in the New Testament.

4. In the New Testament, the word “church” comes from the Greek word “ecclesia”, which means “those called out.” It refers to a group of people who are brought together for some special reason. In the religious sense, the word refers to those people who have been brought together by God. We are commanded to take part in the local Church, if not for ourselves then for the aid and edification of others. Sometimes we have a tendency to waver in our faith; that's why we need a local church. In this world we will be hurt, taken advantage of, and abused. As a result, unless we are very careful, our hearts will be filled with bitterness, resentment, and

even hate. However, at church services we are to consider how to provoke each other unto love and to good works.

5. The church is absolutely essential to maintaining your walk of salvation and for the edifications of others. You cannot fulfill Christ's will in that regards if you choose church attendance like a Golden Coral Smorgasbord.--- In his very resourceful book "Releasing Your Church's Potential", Dr. Robert Logan remarked, "I believe that the enemy divides all people into two categories: those he can ignore and those he has to fight. I want to be one of those he has to fight." He continues on to quote a WWII bomber pilot: "If you're taking flak, you're over the target." This leads to point # 2...

II. Servitude Cultivates Church Growth

1. Servitude is subjection, submission and even slavery. Paul called himself a *doo-los* or bond slave to Christ. **Romans 12:1**. What do we surrender? Our talents and gifts. The gifted men (leaders) equipped the saints to do the work of the ministry. The work includes evangelism and edification. Edification can only be done one with another; the Greek word is "koinonia" it means fellowship. The church exists to carry out two foundational functions—evangelism (to make disciples) and edification (to teach them). By these two functions we can define the purpose of the church is to produce mature believers in Jesus Christ engaging them in local gathered community.

2. The apostle Paul amplifies this truth in his letter to the Church at Ephesus. He stresses the perfecting of the saints in verse 12. The word "perfecting" comes from a Greek root word the means "fully grown". People were made for fellowship therefore we need each other, and we need to faithfully come together to edify one another. We come together to serve Christ in the church and the community so we can win souls to the Lord and produce mature believers. These mature believers plug into the church and offer their gifts and talents to cultivate the growth of the church.

Application: Failure to understand your ministry and to recognize it as unto God is a major fault. Our ministry is not self-serving...it is unto God for others. It is not for personal gain. It is not a burden, rather it is something you really look forward to doing because the Spirit within you is driving you to do it. It is your passion. It is done unto the Lord.

What about you are you doing your ministry, a ministry unto the Lord with joy and desire? If we are to be an edifying church everybody needs to do their part in the body and keep the main thing the main thing... the message of the gospel through evangelism and the edification of believers.

Henry Ward Beecher once said, "The church is not a gallery for the exhibition of eminent Christians, but a school for the education of imperfect ones." He's right. The church is not a place for perfect people it's a hospital for people who know they're ill. You know the New Testament teaches us to possess a personal faith in Jesus Christ, it says nothing at all about a private faith. We need other believers, and other believers need us (Hebrews 10:24-25).

3. Let's enjoy and contribute to the strength and fellowship of a unified body of Christ by serving with the gifts God granted us. An effective church will demonstrate the good sense of love, fellowship, cooperation, caring and unity in the Holy Spirit as Paul mentions here.

Our lack of people is rooted in the apathy that exists among Christian people and it is the kind of coldness that steals the essence of Christian living and the attitude of serving. However we must also be aware according to scriptures that we are living in the time Jesus refers to as the Laodicea church where no good works are mentioned. There were two problems in this church: There was something wrong with their commitment. They were neither hot nor cold; Christ describes them as Lukewarm. They were suffering from what someone once called "the leukemia of non-commitment." Second, they were content, comfortable with what they had.

III. Character Cultivates Church Growth vv.13, 14

1. When we live carelessly, we fall into the snare that the devil puts out for us. Paul told Timothy keep, *tereo/* tay-reh'-o literally meaning to exercise watchful care over your own uprightness, keep yourself pure, meaning an honorable person. ---Proverbs 4:23

2. We all have enough sin of our own; we do not need to add to the sins of others. There are many ways we can do this. We can share in the sins of others by setting a bad example before them. Don't be a stumbling block your character count on the inside and outside. I Timothy 3:7. We can share in the sins of others by condoning what is wrong or by just ignoring them in their sin. We too can be guilty by association with those that walk in sin.

Illustration: Years ago a pastor was visiting the local druggist. He mentioned to him a man who was attending his church, and the druggist spoke very critical of him. "Why do you say that about him?" he asked. This man replied, "I know that man. He goes to your church. He has owed me money for six months and he has never paid a dime. I've got no use for him."

3. Another important way we protect the unity of the church is refusing to gossip about other members or staff. More problems are created in churches because of gossip than anything else. Warnings are found in Proverbs in 27 passages.

It doesn't matter if the information is true or not; if our sharing of someone's personal information is not to help or protect, it is the sin of gossip. When you protect the unity of our church by refusing to gossip, you obey the scriptures for a member as read this morning in Ephesians 4:3; 15- **Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

Conclusion:

1. We must work together as a body to expedite the great commission

2. Invite unchurched people graciously. A good place to start is with FRAN, an acrostic for friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors

3. Help make your church friendlier. The number one reason a visitor returns to a church is feeling welcome.