

5. Developing the Ministry of Each Christian – Part 1

Ephesians 4:15-16 says, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” In these verses, we see that it is the plan of God for every person that becomes a Christian to learn how to work effectively to do his or her share of the ministry.

In earlier topics, we have talked about the fact that the early church met in small groups for four purposes. Acts 2:42 says, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” As the new believers grew in their spiritual lives, these small Bible study and fellowship groups provided a structure for every Christian to learn how to serve the Lord and become a functioning part of the body of Christ. Here is an example of why it is so important for every leader to become a servant leader, so he can serve others by helping them develop their ministry. This also shows why it is important to help every Christian become a part of a Bible study and fellowship group.

One of the primary ministries, of every Bible study and fellowship group leader, is to show each Christian in the group how to become a functioning part of the body of Christ. Some of those in the group will be growing rapidly in their spiritual lives, while others in the group may be having more struggles. However, each person in that group has something to contribute to the other members. 1 Corinthians 12:22-23 says, “No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty.”

Here, Paul is making a comparison between our physical body and the body of Christ, the church. We do not see our internal organs, like our heart or our lungs, but they are very necessary to the function of our physical body. In the same way, some Christians will not have a public ministry everyone can see, but they are equally important to the church. They need to be developed for the ministry God has designed them for, because God has designed every Christian to have a ministry. 1 Corinthians 12:18 says, “But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.” God has prepared every Christian to have an important ministry, whether or not that ministry is seen.

These verses also tell us that the weaker parts of the body are just as necessary as the stronger parts of the body. The weaker parts of the body are to be developed along with the stronger parts. The stronger parts of the body are to help the weaker parts of the body learn to function effectively. 1 Corinthians 12:24-25 says, “But our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.” Here, we see that all of the members of the body are to have the same concern for the development of others that they have for their own development.

In order for each person in the Bible study and fellowship group to have the same care and concern for others that they have for themselves, they must be growing in their relationship to one another. 1 Corinthians 12:26 says, “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.” Here, we see that, in many ways, a group of Christians is like an extended family where everyone is greatly concerned for the rest of the family. They suffer together, and they are to rejoice together.

Philippians 2:1-4 gives us the attitudes we want to develop in the Bible study and fellowship groups to make it possible for this kind of a family concern to develop. Those verses say, “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

In these verses, we see several things that are the result of healthy spiritual growth in Bible study and fellowship groups. The group:

- becomes like-minded
- loves one another
- are of one accord
- are of one mind
- are concerned for the interests of the others

These attitudes do not happen automatically. First, to be like-minded means to think the same way. Romans 15:1-5 says, “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.’ For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus.” To become like-minded means that we learn to become other-centered rather than self-centered.

Second, we want to help those in each Bible study and fellowship group learn to really love one another. Christ spent three-and-a-half years working with the disciples to help them learn to function as a team. Then, the night before His crucifixion, He gave them a new commandment. John 13:34-35 says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” One of the goals of a Bible study and fellowship group is to help the group members learn to love one another as Christ loves them.

Third, we want to help each Bible study and fellowship group become of one accord. The word translated “one accord” means *to be together in feelings, desires, passions, and affections*. This means that we want to help the group learn to really become united with attitudes and desires that

cause them to help one another in their spiritual growth.

Fourth, we want to help each Bible study and fellowship group become of one mind. To “be of one mind” means *to be in agreement*, because they have the same purpose in life. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Our purpose as Christians is to do all to the glory of God. As a Bible study and fellowship group grows in their relationship with the Lord, and with one another, they will become more and more focused on bringing glory to God in all they do.

Fifth, we want to help each Bible study and fellowship group learn to become concerned for the interests of others, not just their own interests. Philippians 2:3 tells us that this happens as Christians learn to set aside selfish ambition or conceit and replace it with a humble attitude that causes us to esteem others better than ourselves. This development of godly attitudes is the true evidence that the group is growing in their relationship with the Lord and with each other.

This also helps us to understand why it is important to develop a structure where each Christian can grow in their relationship to Christ and learn to minister to one another. The two verses that we used to start this topic, Ephesians 4:15-16, say that Christ is the head from whom the whole body is joined and knit together by what every joint supplies. The purpose of church structure is to provide a structure that will make it possible for the whole body to be joined and knit together so that every part will learn to supply what God has created each person to supply to the body.

Ephesians 4:16 says this is what makes it possible for each part to learn to do its share. Here, we see that church structure is really for the purpose of helping every Christian to learn to function as an effective part of the body. This verse points out the fact that a healthy church will be a church where every single Christian is learning to serve the Lord, not just the dynamic people. This is a key because, when every part is working effectively, God says that it produces growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. One of the greatest things this reveals is the fact that the stronger parts are helping the weaker parts to grow in love.

One phrase that was used to describe the early church was, “See how they love one another.” That was true because every Christian was learning to function as a part of the body. The stronger Christians were helping the weaker Christians learn to take root in the love of Christ. This was helping every Christian move from fear to love. As 1 John 4:18 says, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” May the Lord richly bless you as you help others in your church really take root in the love of Christ.