

14. Developing Knowledge in Small Group Bible Studies

In our past few topics, we have been talking about Bible study and fellowship groups (apostles' doctrine and fellowship groups). We said that the purpose of small group Bible studies can be summarized by the statement: FLOCKS that are Praying and Praising from Acts 2:42-47. Today, we will be looking at the fifth purpose of Bible study and fellowship groups which is: Knowledge.

2 Peter 3:18 says, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen." In this verse, we see that Christians are to grow both in grace and in our knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Growth in grace" refers to our growth in spiritual maturity. An excellent summary of what it means to grow in grace is given in 2 Peter 1:2-11. In those verses, we see that:

- ◆ God has already given us all things that pertain to life and godliness through His divine power
- ◆ God has also given us exceedingly great and precious promises
- ◆ God says that we have become partakers of the divine nature (We have become partners with God because He has placed His divine nature in us)
- ◆ God tells us that we are to add virtue to our faith (Virtue speaks of moral excellence such as modesty and purity)
- ◆ God tells us to add knowledge to our virtue
- ◆ God tells us to add self-control to our knowledge
- ◆ God tells us to add perseverance to our self-control
- ◆ God tells us to add godliness to our perseverance
- ◆ God tells us to add brotherly kindness to our godliness
- ◆ God tells us to add love to our brotherly kindness

Then, 2 Peter 1:8 says, "For if these things are yours and abound, *you will be* neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." One very interesting thing that we see here is that true knowledge produces growth in godly character. In other words, we are not just to study the Bible to learn new facts. Instead, we are to study the Bible to transform our character and life.

One of the great problems in the lives of many Christians is that they have a lot of Bible knowledge but that knowledge has made no changes in their character. 2 Peter 1:9-11 then tells us, "For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." This verse shows us that if Bible knowledge does not develop godly character, something is drastically wrong and the person needs to make certain that he or she has truly repented and placed his or her faith in Christ.

This means that our goal when we use the word knowledge is not just knowing facts about the Bible. Instead, our goal is a transformed life. That is why the Great Commission tells us in Matthew 28:19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that

I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.’ Amen.” In the Great Commission, we have one command: Make Disciples. That command is to be carried out by three participles:

Going – We are to share the Gospel wherever we go.

Baptizing – We are to help those who place their trust in Christ identify with His body, the church.

Teaching – We are to teach them how to obey all things that Christ has commanded.

From this, we see that the purpose of gaining knowledge through Bible study in Bible study and fellowship groups is to teach one another how to obey all of the commands of Christ so that our lives are being transformed. Christ made the area of obedience a key near the beginning of His ministry, when He said in Matthew 7:24-27, “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.” Transformation comes in our lives as we both hear the Word and learn how to obey it. Discussing how we obey, and put into practice what we are learning, should be a key part of any Bible study.

Romans 6-8 teaches us about how we grow in our Christian lives so that we are able to obey what we are learning from the Word of God. Romans 6 gives us three key words:

Know – Romans 6:6

Reckon – Romans 6:11

Yield – Romans 6:13, 16

Romans 6:6 tells us, “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” In order to learn to obey what Christ has commanded us, we need to know that our old man was placed on the cross with Christ and crucified with Him. That means that we are no longer a slave to our sin nature. We have been set free from our slavery to sin and are now free to make choices.

Romans 6:11 tells us, “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The word “reckon” is an accounting word which means that we are *to recognize what is real*. This verse says that reality for the Christian is that we are dead to sin so we are no longer slaves to sin. This verse also says the reality for the Christian is that we are alive to God, and so, we have His power working in us, which gives us the power to obey the commands of Christ.

Romans 6:13, 16 tell us, “And do not present your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God. ...¹⁶Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness?” To “present ourselves to God” is to make a decision in our will. Each moment we present ourselves to God, or yield to God, we have the power to carry out the

commands of Christ. In contrast, each moment we try to do things in our own strength, we will fail (John 15:5).

One of the key things that we want people to learn in Bible study is that, as Christians, they do have the power to do what Christ commands as long as they are presenting themselves to God to do His will. However, when they stop presenting themselves to God, and try to do things in their own strength, they will fail. This failure is summarized in Romans 7:14-25. In those verses, count the number of times that the words “I”, “me”, “my” and “myself” are used. Then, read the verses again and see the problems that “I” trouble cause for the Christian.

In the first seven chapters of Romans, the Holy Spirit is mentioned four times (Romans 1:4, 2:29, 5:5 and 7:6). In contrast, Romans 8 mentions the Holy Spirit nineteen times. At any time we are yielding to the Holy Spirit, His power gives us the strength to do what the Lord has commanded us to do. That means that we can depend on our own strength and do nothing (John 15:5), or we can yield to the Holy Spirit and accomplish the Lord’s work in the power of the Holy Spirit (Philippians 4:13). We make the choice whether to try to do things in our own strength or whether we choose to yield to the Holy Spirit and do what we do in the power of the Spirit. This is one of the most important lessons all Christians need to learn, because it affects every area of our lives.

The Lord uses small group Bible studies to help Christians grow both in their knowledge of the Word of God and also in helping them learn how to apply what they are learning. Small group Bible studies also provide the encouragement that many Christians need to become obedient to the Word of God. May the Lord richly bless you as you help other Christians grow in their knowledge of the Word and obedience to the Word through small group Bible studies.