

Partners, part 2 of Growing Strong in Jesus
July 13, 2014

Some years ago I read in the newspaper of a con that was being used in the area. Someone would call a church or business on the phone and pretend that an order of cleaning supplies or office products was ready to be shipped. They just needed a verbal okay. They pretended that they were the usual company and this was the usual order. If the person said "Yes", "Okay", or "I guess so", they would ship out the products and bill the business two to three times the regular price.

Several months after I read that article the phone rang here at the church. When I answered it, the man on the other end pretended to have our usual order of cleaning supplies ready to ship. Little did he know that I was the only one who works here and was familiar with the supplies and who supplied them. So I kindly told him no thanks.

I was aware of the con and was able to recognize it when it occurred. In that same way, Jesus wants your faith to be well-informed so you can recognize Satan's schemes. We learn about Satan's schemes, and many other things, in the Bible. Jesus wants you to be well-informed about the Christian life. Your growth depends on it.

In this series we are looking at the very first Christians. They put their faith in Jesus for forgiveness of their sins. They were baptized into Jesus' name as a public demonstration of their faith in Jesus. They repented of their sins and they started living in obedience to Jesus as Lord. What we are focused on in this series is the four other things that became important to them. Doing these four things set them on the path of growth that Jesus expected of those He planted in His kingdom. Our key passage is Acts 2:42.

Acts 2:42 (NIV) They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Last week we considered the first of these four devotions, they devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching. I suggested ways for you to grow in your understanding of the truths, doctrines, and teachings of the Christian faith. To grow we need purposely pursue to have a well-informed faith.

This morning we are going to look at that second devotion. They devoted themselves to the fellowship. The New Testament part of the Bible was written almost entirely in Greek. The Greek word here is *koinonia* and means "to share in" something. (**Greek: *Koinonia* = "to share in"**) It is most often translated as fellowship in this verse, but is translated elsewhere in the Bible as partnership, sharing, and participation. *Koinonia* is not a religious word. Any kind of group who have something in common is a fellowship.

When applied to the church this word refers to us sharing in Jesus. Our faith in Jesus is what makes us a fellowship. We are a fellowship of Christians. We are partners together in Jesus. As such, we share in the Holy Spirit. We share in the Kingdom of God. We could translate this as devotion to the group or the church, a people not an organization.

These first Christians were devoted to each other as partners in Christ. Look at what this identity as partners enabled them to do in response to the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:44-47a (NIV) All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.

Partnering with other Christians played a key part in their growth as Christians. Your growth as a Christian will not happen if you isolate yourself from other Christians. Instead, your growth will depend, in part, on partnering WITH other Christians. You can choose to be a loner. But you will not become a spiritually strong loner. You will only grow strong as a Christian by living in partnership with other Christians.

Last week we looked at a devotion to learning the truths of the Christian faith. But that alone will not feed your growth. You can't become spiritually mature by just reading your Bible. Books can't teach you everything. You can't become proficient at riding a bicycle by reading a book. You can't become a good skier by watching a video. You must try these activities over and over, learning from your mistakes.

The same is true of much in the Christian life. You can learn the truths from the Bible. But you practice living those truths in partnership with other Christians. So you will limit your growth to the extent that you hide yourself from others. For example, you can't become loving, patient, compassionate, or humble in isolation from other Christians. These are all qualities you learn to live as you try to live them towards others.

Some of you here hide yourself from others. You may or may not be a member of this church. You attend regularly. But you don't participate in Bible Studies or ministries where you might be encouraged to share the real you. You come, but you limit your interaction with other Christians. Thereby you limit your growth and the growth of the rest of us.

The writer of the book of Hebrews knew this. He writes...

Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV) And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another...

How many times have you read or heard this passage and the only message you got was, "Go to church on Sundays"? If you come on Sunday just to come on Sunday, you've missed the point. We don't get together just to get together. Note that the reasons for coming together are to help each other grow. He writes that we spur one another on toward love and good deeds. We are to encourage each other in our faith, hope, love, and obedience.

Sure, we worship on Sundays, but you can worship at home. The person who says, "I don't need to go to church to worship God. I can worship God on my boat." That person is right. You can worship God on your boat. You can worship God while camping or hunting or doing yard work or watching TV or as you enjoy a meal with your family. You don't have to be here on Sunday to worship. And I sure hope this isn't the only time in the week that you worship God.

Worshipping together is beneficial. A friend of mine who pastors another church attended a conference in another state in March. Later I asked him how it was. The first thing he said was not about the topic or any of the nationally known speakers. The first thing he mentioned was how grand and inspiring it was to be a part of several thousand church leaders singing God's praises together. I have to admit, I have been in such settings on occasion and I know exactly what he means.

But it isn't just the volume that gets to me in those large worship experiences. It is the reminder that I am partners with many others in Christ Jesus. Even here, worshipping with you, I am reminded that I am not alone as a follower of Jesus. I am partners with many others in serving Him. And I find that encouraging.

You can't get that same sense by singing God's praises on your own out in your yard. Worshipping together reminds us of how large the Kingdom of God is.

Sure, you can worship on your own, and I hope you do. But there is growth you will miss out on if you are a loner Christian. You can't spur other Christians on toward love and good deeds as well out there on your own as you can in here. There is something about being with other Christians that builds up our own love of the Lord like nothing else does.

So I encourage you today to partner with other Christians. **Join a church and become an active part of spurring one another on to love and good deeds.** Join a Bible Study group in your church. Engage in serving together on a committee, a team, in the choir, or in the nursery. Get to know something of all the members in your church so you can pray for them. Treat Sundays as a reunion of your partnership.

We are seeking people to live in devotion to our partnership. We invite you to join Emmanuel Baptist Church of Gambrells. We are seeking people to partner with us in worship, education, proclamation, ministry, and obedience to Jesus.

In this partnership you will be helped to grow in Jesus. As partners we care for each other, help each other, encourage each. **Together we are *Changing Lives with Christ***.

If you want to grow strong in Jesus it will not happen by going the Christian life alone. Devote yourselves to a partnership with others who love Jesus.

I have three tomato plants in my garden. One is full grown, running out the top of the tomato cage. The middle one is about three quarters grown and already has little green tomatoes. But the last one is less than half grown. While the first two were putting out new growth this third one just sat there. I was as careful transplanting is as the other two. I gave it as much attention as the other two. Yet it continues to disappoint me. It is weak and unfruitful, more susceptible to chipmunks, bugs, and diseases. It's lack of growth is a disappointment to me.

Jesus has planted us in the Kingdom of God. Jesus expects us to grow and keep on growing. So we should want to grow. We should want what Jesus wants.

Jesus loves us too much to be content with our immaturity. Jesus wants us to grow strong in faith, in hope, and in love. Jesus wants us to learn humility, patience, and perseverance. Jesus wants to develop in us compassion, kindness, and gentleness. He wants us to stand against the influences of the world.

Are you still growing? Or are you disappointing Jesus? Take the steps to grow strong in Jesus. Jesus died for you to be saved from hell. Anything He expects of us is not too much to give. He expects us to grow in mature as His followers.

Invitation

Those of us who are Christians have in common our faith in Jesus. We have chosen to believe in Him as our Savior. We have been baptized into His name. We are turning away from sin and turning to live in obedience to Him. Are you ready to join us?