

“ONE CHURCH” PT. 2

- *GROWING THROUGH SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT*
- *LOVING AND ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER*

Recap previous week: “One Church” Pt. 1

ONE CHURCH = One Purpose – One Vision – One Commitment – One Community – One Family

Pastor Ron spoke last week sharing **three** of the **five** elements that comprise our **ONE CHURCH COMMITMENT**:

- Serving in Ministry
- Giving Financially & Sacrificially
- Praying Without Ceasing

These elements are part of the core that makes our **ONE COMMITMENT**; a commitment that is expected from each of us that call Valley Chapel our church home. Today I will share the remaining two elements that complete the commitment.

Now, as I said, there are two remaining elements that complete this core commitment. One is *growing through spiritual development* and the other is *loving and encouraging one another*. Rather than talk to you about them individually, I will be addressing these points as one. I believe that growing through spiritual development and loving and encouraging one another are inextricably linked. When we are talking about our Christian faith and being a fully formed disciple of Jesus Christ, these two cannot be separated.

First thing we need to do this morning is a little clarification and some myth-busting. We mentioned a few minutes ago the elements of our One Church Commitment that Pastor Ron shared with us last week.

CLARIFICATION:

- **You can:** *be serving in ministry* -----→ **AND BE VERY FAR FROM GOD**
- **You can:** *give financially & sacrificially* -----→ **AND BE VERY FAR FROM GOD**
- **You can:** *pray without ceasing* -----→ **AND BE VERY FAR FROM GOD**

- **You cannot:** *grow in spiritual development* -----→ **WITHOUT GROWING CLOSER TO GOD**
- **You cannot:** *be loving and encouraging one another* -----→ **WITHOUT GROWING CLOSER TO GOD**

Growing as a “fruit-bearing” disciple of Jesus Christ, *aka growing in spiritual development*, requires love; AGAPE love (more about that in a moment). The overflow of this developmental process are the elements of **servicing**, **giving**, and **praying**. *Maturing Love* is the glue that binds this commitment together.

MYTH - BUSTING:

Common beliefs of many "christians":

FALSE BELIEF	TRUTH
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spiritual maturity is keeping the 10 Commandments.• Being a Sunday school teacher, ministry leader, and/or serving on my church board is a sign of spiritual maturity.• Regular (weekly) church attendance is a sign of spiritual maturity.• Memorizing Scripture will make me spiritually mature.• Being like "the Disciples" is only for pastors, missionaries, or ministry leaders and not really for all the other "regular" people of the world.• We can't be "like" Jesus; He was God and we are not, so all we can do is try hard and hope for the best...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keeping a set of rules isn't a sign of maturity nor does it ensure eternal salvation.• Selfish and immature persons can be found serving in church leadership and on church boards.• Regular church attendance can indicate healthy spiritual development, but doesn't guarantee it.• The ability of memorizing Scripture does not prove spiritual maturity; it proves good memory.• The "disciples" were ordinary men and women. The only difference in their abilities and ours to follow Jesus is/was their commitment to do it.• Not only does Scripture exhort us to "be like" Jesus (Eph. 5:1-2 "Be imitators of God..." 1 John 2:6 "...live your life as Jesus did." 2 Peter 1:3 "God has given us all we need to live a godly life."), but Jesus specifically calls us to "follow me." In other words...<u>be like Him.</u>

This is just a sampling of some of the more common Christian Myths that people will use to allow themselves to be excused from becoming the person that Jesus Christ died for. As the people of God, we cannot afford to be deceived and deprived of becoming fully transformed; fully redeemed...fully reconciled...and fully restored. This is what Jesus lived for, this is what Jesus died for, and this is what Jesus had planned from the beginning.

Romans 8:28-30 ²⁸ *And we know that God causes everything to work together¹ for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.* ²⁹ **For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.** ³⁰ *And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory.*

Ephesians 4:12-13 ¹² *Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.* ¹³ *This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.*

Full Reading of Ephesians Passage in Context

Ephesians 4:11-20 ¹¹ Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹² Their **responsibility is to equip God's people** to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. ¹³ *This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.* ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. ¹⁵ Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. ¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love. ¹⁷ With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. ¹⁸ Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him. ¹⁹ They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that isn't what you learned about Christ.

Ok.

We're making a commitment to grow in spiritual development; the goal being to **measure up to the full and complete standard of Jesus Christ** (ie., BE LIKE JESUS – 1 John 2:6 “walk as Jesus walked” – Christian). We will do this through loving and encouraging one another or **speaking the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ**. This is our One Church Commitment and it is by no coincidence, our Scriptural mandate.

I learned as a coach and a manager of people over the course of my adult vocational career that goals needed to be specific and measurable. When our goals are specific it is easier to agree on what we are striving toward. When goals are measurable we are able to adjust method and course as necessary, to ensure we attain the goals. So, with this understanding, let's identify five key areas necessary for the development of spiritual maturity.

- 1. Biblical Knowledge** – Jesus is our source of truth and the Bible is our primary tool of record to learn about Jesus. 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that “all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching...” Biblical knowledge, then, is one of our essential areas of spiritual development.
- 2. Godly Character** – Our goal is to become “like Jesus.” It seems then, the Spirit of His character is an area that we develop and measure. Consider these Bible passages in particular for goal setting; Matthew chapters 5-7 (The Beatitudes and Sermon on the Mount), 1 Corinthians 13 (The description and definition of Agape “Godly” Love), Romans chapter 12 (Christian Unity and Service), and Galatians 5:22-23 (Evidences of the Fruit of the Spirit). While there are other passages helpful in teaching us about the character of God, these are great summaries for where we can begin.

3. **Sanctified Heart/Mind** – The Bible exhorts us to “work out our salvation.” As we do this, it touches all parts of us; the key to this is the “heart” or “mind.” We’ve discussed it before, but the Bible knows of no distinction between heart and mind. Sometimes both terms are used together for emphasis, and at other times they are used interchangeably. The heart, or mind, includes the powers of understanding, reason, imagination, perception, observation, memory and judgment as well as the will, feelings, emotions, and the conscience. Since the image of God is to be restored in the human soul, the Bible is concerned with the sanctification of the whole mind. Spiritual development embraces the harmonious development of all our faculties to the glory of God. The apostle Paul writes to the Romans (12:2) and the Colossians (3:2) instructing them to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” and “set your mind on the things above, not on the things that on earth.” These are our instructions too as we work toward a sanctified heart and mind.
4. **Spiritual Discernment** – We’re told to be alert people, spiritually discerning people, throughout the New Testament instructions to the Church. Hear a sampling of these instructions from across the board; Jesus says, (**Matthew 10:16**) I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Paul writes to the Thessalonians and the Corinthians saying; (**1 Thessalonians 5:21-22**) Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil. (**2 Corinthians 13:5**) Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Peter and John also write to us about being alert and spiritually discerning; Peter warns, (**1 Peter 5:8**) be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. John writes; (**1 John 4:1**) Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. Finally the writer of Hebrews links spiritual discernment directly with spiritual development and maturity in God’s grace saying; (**Hebrews 5:13-14**) anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.
5. **Willing Obedience** – This is the last of our five areas and probably the most important. Not only is the desire to grow and develop in spiritual maturity important, the attitude we have in our motivation is paramount. Our reason for obedience should be rooted, growing, and bearing fruit from gratitude, worship and love of our God, Jesus Christ. Jesus said it in the most simple terms possible; “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments*” (**John 14:15**). Willing Obedience indeed...

These points, these five key areas, can be summarized as follows: spiritual development and maturity is living a life marked by right teaching and right living. The truth of the Bible, Christ-likeness or Christian witness, should be visibly demonstrated in every area of our lives: in our thoughts, our speech, our hearts, our work, our play, our families...all our actions. When we do this, we begin to demonstrate our progress toward “the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Jesus Christ” (**Ephesians 4:13**).

I mentioned at the beginning of this teaching that I would talk to you about *growing through spiritual development* and *loving and encouraging one another* as a single topic. Up to this point, I’ve mostly addressed the aspects of spiritual maturity; let me tie spiritual development to love now. First, you cannot grow spiritually, at least not in the ways of Christian Spirituality without love. Our spiritual development is in and

through Jesus Christ; completely. Secondly, the love we are talking about is not understood from the human perspective. The love we profess to know and be motivated by is God-love, or Agape love. Without Agape love, there is little to no hope for developing as a disciple of Jesus Christ. This is not my opinion; this is the teaching of Scripture. The apostle John wrote, “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:8). Jesus’ command to us is this; “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35). In each of these instances the love described is Agape Love, the same “love” found in the teaching of 1 Corinthians chapter 13. Paul explains in this chapter that no matter what else we can do – speaking with the tongues of angels, demonstrate gifts of prophecy, move mountains or raise the dead with our faith – if we cannot express love (AGAPE LOVE), we are spiritually nothing. This is why I say to you that spiritual development and loving encouragement of one another are inextricably linked; Godly love is at the heart of spiritual development and maturity.

What Paul describes to the Corinthian community are the ways in which godly love (AGAPE) is manifested; he provides a spiritual development and maturity manifesto. Spiritual maturity is characterized by patience, civility, lack of envy, humility, and control of our tempers. The spiritually mature person is not selfishly preoccupied with him or herself. He or she has denied self, taken up their cross, and following Jesus day by day. Paul tells us if we desire to grow in the knowledge and grace of our God, become spiritually developed, then we must “Follow the way of Love” (1 Corinthians 14:1).

In closing, let me say that this process toward spiritual maturity growing in the ways of agape doesn’t just happen. It takes effort on our part and discipline; this is why we’re called “disciples.” Fortunately, God has given us a great medium for moving us along in this process. Left to our own designs, we’d remain undeveloped or underdeveloped in the ways of our faith...not what God wants. So, God has given us community to train and develop us. People...shaping and sharpening one another into the beautiful god-creatures our Lord first imagined when He breathed His Life into us. We cannot complete this process alone. We need God and we need one another and this is why we commit ourselves to loving and encouraging one another as we grow and develop into spiritual maturity. Amen.

Mention Small Group Sign-Ups – John Bunn writes in this month’s *Light & Life, Deeper Path*; “Who do you Love? Do you love people who aren’t like you? Do you love the poor and oppressed? Do you love those who have socioeconomic status that differs from yours? Do you love people who don’t know Christ? Honestly, many so-called Christians don’t. Does your small group challenge one another in this area and hold each other accountable? When’s the last time your group talked about it? When’s the last time your group did something about it? The danger is that if we’re not careful and mindful of it, our groups can easily become inward focused. After all, it seems like the longer we’ve been Christians, the less we have in common with those who are not. The more prosperity we enjoy, the less we have in common with the poor. If we don’t intentionally concern ourselves with the things that concern God, we can easily find ourselves no longer caring.

Challenge to grow – Challenge to be involved in Sermon Based Groups. – end sermon–shift to communion.