

THE HARVEST OF GROWTH, TRANSFORMATION, AND BUILDING

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 3:6b, 17-18; Rom. 12:2, 5; Eph. 4:22-24; Rev. 4:2-3; 21:10-11, 19a

As we have seen in the last chapter, **1 Corinthians 3** covers the matters of **growth**, **transformation**, and **building**. The same items can be seen in the book of **Ephesians**. Ephesians 2:20-22 and 4:12-16 are related to **growth**, **transformation**, and **building**.

THE GIFTED ONES PERFECTING THE SAINTS

The gifted persons mentioned in Ephesians 4:11, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers, are for the perfecting of the saints (v. 12). The gifted persons themselves are **not the direct builders** of the churches. They are the **perfecters**, perfecting the saints. As the result of their perfecting work, the saints will be qualified and equipped to function as members of the Body to build the churches directly. Neither the Lord Jesus nor the gifted persons such as the apostles and evangelists build up the churches **directly**. Rather, the **members** who have been perfected, that is, equipped and qualified to function, build up the churches directly.

PERFECTED BY GROWING IN LIFE

What does it mean to perfect the saints? In my early ministry I thought that perfecting the saints meant to give them some ability or spiritual art, so I trained people in this way. Eventually, I learned that this was not the proper training. Ephesians 4:12 speaks of the perfecting of the saints. Verse 13 mentions a full-grown man. Verse 14 speaks of being no longer little children. Verse 15 tells us to grow up into Christ in all things. All these verses are related to the matter of growth. To perfect the saints means to help them grow into a full-grown man, to be no more little children, and to grow up in all things into Christ. According to the context in Ephesians 4, to perfect the saints is simply to help them to grow. As living members of the Body of Christ, the saints need to grow.

The same is true concerning the human body. When a child is born, he is complete with all his organs. He has ears, eyes, a tongue, lips, and all the other members. It is unnecessary and even impossible to add more organs to a baby; organically speaking, he is complete. Whatever organs the parents have, the baby also has. Still, although he is complete organically, he is not complete in his function and ability. Thus, the baby needs perfecting. To perfect him means to cause him to grow. After growing for a year, he will be able to walk. After another period of time, he will begin to speak. He was born with two feet and a mouth, but he lacked the ability to walk and speak. The more he grows, the more he is perfected. In other words, he becomes equipped and qualified. Although the baby has all the necessary organs at birth, he needs the

proper amount of growth before the ability of these organs can be manifested. For example, a baby's eyes are not very useful immediately after birth. Although the baby has eyes, their ability to function is limited because of the lack of growth. With the proper growth, the eyes begin to function after a short time. The seeing organ is present at birth, but the seeing ability develops with the growth.

What then does it mean to perfect the saints in the church? It does not mean to add something to them. We should not and in fact cannot do this. Rather, we should help them grow. All the saints must grow into a full-grown man and no longer be little children. They must grow up into Christ, the Head, in all things.

THE WAY TO GROW

What is the best way, actually the only way, to help children grow? All the mothers know the best way is not to teach them but to feed them. Feeding, not teaching, causes children to grow. This is why Paul said, "I fed you" (1 Cor. 3:2, KJV). How can we likewise perfect the saints? We should not merely teach them; we should feed them. Paul planted and Apollos watered (v. 6). To water the plant is simply to feed it. What the churches as the kingdom need for the perfecting of the saints is not teaching but feeding. As mothers know, little ones are perfected year after year by growth. Because of this growth they are able to do many things. But this does not mean that the children lacked the organs before the perfecting work began. It simply means they lacked the ability. This ability comes only by perfecting, and perfecting comes from the feeding which helps them grow. Such feeding is what all the churches as the kingdom need today.

TEACHINGS AND GIFTS

After hearing some of my messages, a few people were offended and argued, saying, "You say that we don't need teachings, gifts, or regulations. Don't you think that the teachings are helpful? Are the gifts not needed? Don't you think that some of the regulations are good?" My response is that it all depends on how you use them. These things are all right if they help people to grow, but the tragedy is that many Bible teachers help people only to know the Bible, not to grow. I know this from experience, because I was under the best Bible teaching for seven and a half years. During that period I did not have the slightest amount of growth in life as a result of that teaching. Many others have had the same experience. Perhaps, in some exceptional cases, Bible teachings helped people grow a little. However, they did not help very much. Everything depends on whether the teaching affords people the growth in life.

The same is true with the gifts. I was personally involved with them, especially with tongues. I am sorry to say that I did not witness the genuine growth in life among the people who spoke in tongues. I am not criticizing or despising, but I must be faithful and honest to speak the truth. Check with so many of the people who speak in tongues. Where is the growth? Today the churches as the kingdom of God need something to help them grow in life. If speaking in tongues can help the saints grow in life, I am for it. I myself dropped it because I found that it produced no growth. Speaking in tongues may stir up your heart and your spirit, but once you have been stirred up, you must immediately turn to life. Otherwise, you will be hungry. Regardless of how much you exercise your gifts, you will remain hungry. Speaking in tongues will never feed you. You may say that it gives some satisfaction, but do you have the growth?

Even growth by itself is not adequate. The proper growth produces transformation, a genuine change in life, a metabolic change in your being. Transformation is the true proof of your growth. Following transformation comes the building. The real growth produces transformation, and transformation issues in the building. On the contrary, most people who speak in tongues are very independent. Thank the Lord if you have received help from speaking in tongues, but if you remain there, you may become independent and individualistic.

I know these things from my experience. I was involved with them and saw them for myself. In the meetings held for the exercise of spiritual gifts, most people do not care for others; everyone cares for his own practice of the gifts. In their daily living as well, it is very difficult for tongue-speaking people to be one with others. Throughout the history of the church, no one has been more divisive than tongue-speaking people. Nearly every tongue-speaker is a division in himself. In spite of this, there is a kind of assurance among tongue-speaking people that if all the believers will speak in tongues, all will be one. This is superstition. History proves the opposite. There is not the proper oneness among tongue-speaking people. What we need today is the proper growth that results in transformation and building. This will produce the real oneness.

GROWTH IN LIFE

Why did the apostle Paul write 1 Corinthians 3 as he did? Why did he say that he planted, Apollos watered, and God caused the growth? Why did he say that, as a wise master builder, the grace of God was given to him, that he laid a foundation, and that another builds upon it with either gold, silver, and precious stones, or wood, grass and stubble? We need to consider the entire book to understand why he wrote in this way. In 1 Corinthians 1:5 and 7 Paul told the Corinthians that they had all knowledge and lacked no gifts. But then he said in 3:1 that he could not speak to them as to spiritual men. He told them that they were still fleshy, infants in

Christ. This is why we say that Bible knowledge and gifts in themselves do not help. The Corinthians had both but were very short in growth. In the local churches we are not sectarian or exclusive; we receive every proper thing that is of the Lord. We are not opposed to Bible knowledge; neither are we opposed to the gifts. **But the Lord's recovery today is not a matter of knowledge or gifts—it is a matter of growth in life.** During the past one hundred fifty years, the doctrines and gifts have been recovered, but the growth in life has not been recovered adequately. Our burden today is for the recovery of the growth in life. It is good that you have Bible knowledge and that you have spoken in tongues, but do not stop with these things. Go on to the growth in life. There is such a danger that those who have Bible knowledge will stop there, and that those who have experienced gifts will stop there. You must go on. Knowledge may be a bridge to bring you from one side to the other, but do not stay on that bridge. **You need to go on to life.**

THE BASIC STRUCTURES

The book of Matthew does not emphasize Bible knowledge or gifts. **Rather, it stresses the seed of life and the growth of that seed with transformation to produce minerals for the building up of the church (ch. 13).** The Lord told Peter that he was a stone and that He would build His church and give to Peter the keys of the kingdom (ch. 16). These are some of the basic items found in the book of Matthew. The seven parables in Matthew, the mysteries of the kingdom, are also basic items. On the contrary, healing and tongues are not basic structures. The basic structures are the seed, growth, transformation, and building. I am not against Bible knowledge or gifts, but I am against overemphasizing them. Some who speak in tongues care for nothing but tongue-speaking. The church is not a tongue-speaking church, and the Lord's recovery is not the recovery of tongue-speaking. Although tongue-speaking may have helped people, it is not basic. **The basic items are the seed, the growth, the transformation, and the building.**

IN THE EPISTLES

What is sown as a seed in Matthew 13 is developed in 1 Corinthians 3. There we see the growth, the transformation, and the building with precious materials. Bible knowledge is good, but do not remain there. We all must grow. The Lord is looking for the building that comes out of the growth in life and the transformation by life. Nothing else can satisfy Him. The ultimate consummation of the Bible is the New Jerusalem. In the New Jerusalem gifts, knowledge, and

regulations cannot be found. There is simply the flow of life, the tree of life, gold, pearls, and precious stones.

To perfect the saints is not simply to teach them the Bible or to train them to exercise gifts. To perfect the saints is a matter of feeding them and of helping them to grow. If speaking in tongues and Bible knowledge have helped people in some way, we thank God. However, they must go on positively to have the growth in life. To perfect the saints is to cause them to grow into a full-grown man. Has tongue-speaking produced this kind of growth? Has it produced a full-grown man? People who stress gifts are “children...carried about by every wind of teaching” (Eph. 4:14). Among them there is no full-grown man. They do not know how to grow into Christ in all things for the direct building up of the Body. Ephesians 4:15 says that we need to grow up into the Head in all things. Then verse 16 says that after growing up into the Head, we must all be joined together and knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part. This is the way that the Body, the church, is built up directly.

Do not be distracted by anything. Bible knowledge may help, but do not be distracted by it. Gifts may help, but do not be frustrated by them. After using these bridges to get from one side to another, leave them and go on to the growth in life that will produce adequate and proper transformation. Then we will have gold, pearls, and precious stones for God’s building. God’s intention is to have a building.

In Matthew we do not find gifts or Bible knowledge, and in 1 Corinthians Paul belittled both gifts and Bible knowledge. Neither Ephesians nor Romans says much about gifts, although in Romans the gift of hospitality and other such gifts are mentioned. We need the gift of hospitality. Although you may speak in tongues a great deal, if you keep three guests in your home for a period of time, you will be exposed as to how little growth you really have. We need the growth in life. For the building of the local churches we do not need the so-called gifts; we need growth.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Now we come to the harvest in Revelation. The seed is in Matthew, its growth is in the Epistles, and the harvest is in Revelation. The picture of the city presented in Revelation 21 and 22 is very clear. That city is not built of clay or bricks. All the cities constructed by the enemy as counterfeit buildings were made of bricks. The tower of Babel was built with bricks (Gen. 11:3), as were the two cities of Pharaoh built by the enslaved Israelites (Exo. 1:11, 14). Bricks are composed of mud plus human work. God never builds this way. His building is

composed of gold, pearls, and precious stones. It has nothing of mud and the work of human hands. God's building is marvelous in our eyes because it is altogether His doing. No man can manufacture the materials for God's building. Gold, pearls, and precious stones are produced by God Himself. Every part of the New Jerusalem has been transformed. At the center of this city is the throne of God (Rev. 22:1, 3), indicating the kingdom. The throne signifies the ruling authority. The ruling and reigning of God are there. Out of the throne proceeds a river of life that waters the entire city, and within the river of life grows the tree of life that feeds the city (vv. 1-2). This is a picture signifying that watering and feeding produce growth, transformation, and building. **This is the harvest of the seed sown in Matthew.**

A FORETASTE

We do not have to wait until the **future** to enjoy feeding, watering, growing, transformation, and building. We in the Lord's recovery of the churches are qualified and privileged to have a foretaste now. Of course, we do not yet have the full taste, but the foretaste indicates that the full taste is coming. The sisters have a foretaste of a meal in the kitchen before putting it on the table. The foretaste is indicative of the full taste. **Actually, the foretaste of a meal is exactly the same as the full taste, but on a smaller scale.** The foretaste cannot be salty and the full taste sweet. The full taste that will be in the New Jerusalem is what we enjoy in the local churches today as the foretaste.

The full taste includes the river of life, the tree of life, growth, transformation, and building. What about Bible knowledge and gifts? They are not to be found in the New Jerusalem. **In the New Jerusalem we can see the river of life and the tree of life. We see growth, transformation, and building.** We see a city constructed with gold, pearls, and precious stones. This is all we can see. Since these are the items of the full taste, we should not add other things to the foretaste. Rather, we should enjoy these items of the foretaste. Revelation 21 and 22 show us a complete picture of the kingdom as our full taste.

TRANSFORMATION

The crucial point in God's building is transformation. In Christianity very little is known about transformation. Even if you listen to the outstanding preachers and consult the libraries and bookstores, you will find very little being said about transformation. **What is transformation? Transformation means that the Lord Jesus, the seed of life, with all His rich element, is being added into you.** His essence is the all-inclusive Spirit. This Spirit is the very essence and element of the Lord Jesus. After you were saved, He began to impart His element into you. Day by day, as you open yourself and give Him opportunity, He will impart His element into you. **Doctrines**

are not the element. Only Christ Himself, the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, is the element. Such a Christ as the all-inclusive Spirit is imparting Himself into your spirit, and from your spirit into your whole being. **He will spread into your heart, mind, emotion, and will.** This element of Christ is truly a transforming element. Once this element comes into you, something happens. For example, after mothers feed their children, the food is digested and assimilated by the children. The element of the food enters the children's blood, and then it penetrates their cells and organic tissues, causing them to grow.

Growth is always accompanied by metabolism. Metabolism does not mean an outward change but an inward change that results from a new element being added into your being. **This new element discharges the old things and produces something new.** Suppose a young man has a very pale face. If I wish to change him outwardly, I can apply pink powder to change his color. This is the way morticians change people. They make cosmetic alterations in an attempt to beautify a dead body. However, regardless of how beautiful it may be, it is still dead. Such outward beautification and alteration is not transformation. Do not try to alter a person's countenance by coloring his face with powder. Rather, feed him with milk, steak, apples, and other good food. After a few weeks you will see some genuine transformation. In Ephesians 3:8 Paul says that he preached the unsearchable riches of Christ. This means that he fed people with the riches of Christ. **In 1 Corinthians Paul says, "I have fed you" (3:2).** He goes on further to say that Christ is our spiritual food and spiritual drink (10:3-4).

In 2 Corinthians 3:6 Paul says that the letter kills. The letter refers to the black and white letters of the Bible. The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. We must have the Spirit. Who is the Spirit? *"The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit"* (1 Cor. 15:45b). *"The Lord is the Spirit"* (2 Cor. 3:17). The pure Word says that the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. *"The Lord is the Spirit."* What shall we do? We simply need to open ourselves continually and say to the Lord, "O Lord Jesus! Come in, Lord Jesus! Fill me up, Lord Jesus!" Open yourself and let Christ fill you. If you are faithful to receive Him in a constant and thorough way, He will spread into your inner being. By the proper digestion and assimilation, you will be saturated by all the nourishing elements of Christ.

These elements not only nourish but also kill. Just as in good food there is the killing power to kill germs, likewise, in the element of Christ there is the killing power. The killing power of the cross is in the all-inclusive Spirit of Jesus Christ. The more you take Him into you and allow Him to penetrate you, the more all the negative, corrupting things—the flesh, the leaven, and the worldly things—will be killed. In addition, you will receive nourishment, and you will grow and

be transformed. By this transformation you will be built together. Knowledge and gifts cannot transform you and build you together. Only the Spirit of life can perform this work.

THE SHAPING OF LIFE

Within the process of transformation is the shaping of life. In every form of life there is the **life essence, life power, life law, and life shape**. The element of Christ has the divine element within it. The more you enjoy Christ by eating Him and taking Him into you, the more the divine element will saturate you. This element, the life of God, has an essence, a power, a law, and a shape. As it grows within you, it will regulate and shape you, conforming you to the image and form of Christ. The more you are transformed, the more you will be conformed to the image of Christ. Ephesians 4:22 says, *"Put off...the old man."* How can we put off the old man? The more we try to put him off, the more he comes back. Only the element of Christ can discharge the old man. The more the element of Christ discharges the old man, the more we put off the old man. The best way to rid yourself of the old man is to eat something new of Christ. This will discharge all the oldness. This is what it means to put off the old man. The practical way to put off the old man is to take Christ in. The more He comes in, the more He will discharge the elements of the old man.

The result of this process will be something new—the corporate Christ, Christ as the corporate new man. The new man is the church and is the reality of the kingdom. The putting on of the new man is the putting on of the kingdom; the putting on of the church life is the putting on of the kingdom. **The kingdom is the spreading of the Lord Jesus. After He comes into us, He spreads Himself within us and discharges all our oldness.** Then we are in the kingdom. Ephesians 4:24 says that the new man is created according to God. Not only is the old man discharged, but a new man comes to replace him. This new man is a corporate man created according to the image of God.

Genesis 1:26 says that man was created in the image of God, but it is only through the spreading of Christ within us that we will have the real image of God and exercise God's dominion. If we do not express the image of God, it will be difficult for us to exercise God's dominion. The image of God is for the kingdom of God. If we have His image, we can represent Him. We can become the representative of God. That is the kingdom. Therefore, the image is for the kingdom.

When we come to the book of Revelation, we see that there is a throne in the universe, and God is sitting upon it. His appearance upon the throne is like a jasper and a sardius stone (4:2-3). Jasper is a shining, transparent, light-green stone, signifying God Himself, and sardius is a

red stone, signifying Christ as the redeeming Lamb. In Revelation 22:1 we see God on the throne and the Lamb.

Eventually, the wall of New Jerusalem is built with jasper, and the city has the appearance of jasper (21:11, 18). This means that the city has the appearance of God, because the glory of the city and the shining of the city are the glory and shining of jasper. Also, of the twelve layers of foundation stones, the first layer is jasper (v. 19). Thus, the whole city has the appearance of jasper, that is, the appearance of God. This is not only transformation but also conformation. God's building, New Jerusalem, will be conformed to God and bear His image.

Today some teach that each local church should have its own distinctiveness and appearance. If they would read the last two chapters of Revelation, they would see that the whole city, from every direction, **has the same appearance**. The city has one expression and bears one image—the image and expression of God. The city faces four directions, yet it has only one appearance.

In the same principle, there are many local churches, yet all of them are golden lampstands. None bears its own expression, such as silver or copper or bamboo or mud. However, some say that each local church should be distinctive. If one expresses gold, the other should express bamboo. If one is golden, the other should be copper. According to Revelation 1:12 and 2:1, each lampstand is a golden lampstand. If you were to change the position of the lampstands, it would be difficult to identify them. Because of pride, people love to be independent, different from others, and individualistic.

John the Baptist proclaimed, "The kingdom of the heavens has drawn near," and the Lord Jesus repeated the same words (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). The situation is quite different today. If one should preach that the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near, another, refusing to use the same term, might preach that the church has drawn near. People like to speak something new to display how smart they are. This is not the way of God's kingdom. **In God's kingdom all the lampstands are golden.** Eventually, all the lampstands will lose their identity. When the seven lampstands are placed together, we should not be able to see a difference between them. Eventually, the whole city of New Jerusalem will express the one image and appearance of God.