

February 20, 2015

Dear Members, Co-Workers and Friends:

In all things, including Christianity, growth may be good or bad. Just as a garden may grow fresh vegetables or weeds, a Christian may grow fruit of the Spirit leading to eternal life or sinful behavior bearing the fruit of death (compare Romans 7:5). It should be clear and obvious that the work of a Christian is to grow in the right way, increasing in Spiritual development. It is the work of the Church to provide the raw materials so that this good growth may occur in the lives of individuals.

The Church of the Eternal God and its international affiliates take a very active approach regarding the commission to preach the Gospel to the world as a witness. We know that the good kind of growth requires that the Truth must be preached (Romans 10:14-15). However, we also realize that the increase that may occur in the lives of those hearing the Gospel message must be subject to the Will of God. Paul had this same mind when he reflected on his and Apollos' work as ministers, stating that it was their job to figuratively plant and water the seed of truth so that God might provide the increase (compare 1 Corinthians 3:5-8). Knowing that Jesus Christ has not yet returned to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, we recognize that there is still a Work to be done so that those who have a calling to answer may be led to grow in righteousness. For this reason we continually strive to find better ways to communicate the seed of Truth to those who will receive it in fertile ground (compare Luke 8:15).

Recalling the parable of the sower (Luke 8:4-15) alluded to above, it is important to be reminded that good growth requires that there is good, fertile ground for the seed of the word of God to be sown. The fact that the Church and those involved in the Work make the effort to sow the seed is not enough. Those who hear and read the message must be ready to receive it with a noble heart. This includes true Christians. We all need to ask ourselves if we provide God with a good place for growth to occur. Are we so entrenched in the ungodly offerings of the world that the Word of God never reaches us? Are we fascinated for a moment, but then quickly distracted by temptation? Are our priorities in life conflicting, so that we neglect to set enough time aside to foster growth and bear fruit? If we answer "yes" to any of those questions, we have some work to do personally so that our opportunity to grow may be fulfilled.

Something else to remember is that we cannot passively stand by, holding on to some bit of truth and do nothing with it. God expects us all to take the Word of God and use it. Sitting still is not an option. The only way that we can sharpen our Spiritual understanding is by studying the Bible, meditating, praying, and putting time and effort into applying the things that we learn. If the raw materials of truth are provided by the Church, then it is our individual responsibility to provide a good place for them to take root and allow them to grow. If we are faithful, God will provide us with the growth we need, and our comprehension will increase to develop a deeper Spiritual understanding. But we cannot sit still.

The good growth of Spiritual knowledge, understanding, wisdom and righteousness is the goal that we all seek—that much is clear. Yet, we need to be aware that bad growth is something against which we need to be on guard. Good growth bears profitable fruit. Bad growth does damage.

Paul wrote to Timothy words of warning regarding bad growth, "But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the

resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some" (2 Timothy 2:16-18). The increase that Paul talks about here is abominable. It is so bad that it is likened to cancer, which spreads and kills when it is unstoppable. The way that this kind of growth is characterized is by being ungodly, and it occurs when we stray from the truth, disregarding sound doctrine. It is apparent that the ones whom Paul condemns here experienced growth, perhaps measured by the number of individuals they gathered as pupils. But, the growth is wretched in God's eyes, because it only leads people further away from Him. Sending a message that may trigger some kind of accumulation or growth is damaging when that message does not have a foundation in the Truth.

It is important to let you know that the growth which the Church of the Eternal God and its international affiliates are concerned with is not the kind that can be measured by quantitative number. But rather, the growth we concern ourselves with is measured in a demonstrated depth of understanding of the Truth. This kind of growth is the Spiritual kind, not the physical kind. Even though our core concern is about Spiritual growth, this does not mean that we can keep the Truth to ourselves. A focus on Spiritual growth does not exclude growth in membership. However, growth in numbers is not our goal. We are concerned about peace and harmony among the membership, as well as growth in the Truth, and those who try to damage or destroy this harmony and who want to bring in destructive heresies will not be allowed to do so, just to maintain a certain number of "attendees." The good growth measured by spiritual metrics must be present first. When an increase in numbers occurs without Spiritual growth of individuals, the result is damaging. The Church of the Eternal God and our affiliates hold doctrine of the Truth dear, and will not sacrifice it for the sake of ungodly gain.

Just as it is a responsibility of the Church to make sure that the messages we broadcast are not of the compromising type that appeal to the ungodly and carnal nature in man, it is our responsibility as Christians to be on guard against those kinds of messages. As we come out of the world we are instructed, "that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ" (Ephesians 4:14-15). If we are diligent enough to discern what is the Truth, we will be able to withstand unsound doctrine that spreads like a disease. Not only that, but by doing so, we provide a safe and nurturing environment for good growth of the fruit of the Spirit to occur.

It may be difficult to continue working constantly in this way, never letting up, but it truly is the most valuable and profitable kind of work that we can be involved in. This is true for the Church and it is true for us as individuals. Peter offers encouragement in this regard, "You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ..." (2 Peter 3:17-18). It is up to us to hold ourselves accountable, and encourage and exhort one another, "and so much the more as [we] see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25), so that we all can grow Spiritually. We have an inheritance and a reward that waits for us if we do.

In Christ's Service,



Eric Rank