

Essential Attitudes for Spiritual Growth

Lesson Text: **2 Peter 3:18**

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Have you heard this petition uttered in a public prayer? “Father, help us to grow spiritually and numerically.” Perhaps you have uttered it yourself.
1. God wants us to grow, and it is good to implore His blessings and guidance as we endeavor to grow spiritually and numerically.
 2. **2 Peter 3:18** - “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”
- B. Let me share something with you that I firmly believe:
1. I believe God wants us to grow.
 2. I believe our congregational leadership wants us to grow.
 3. I believe that that this minister of the Gospel wants us to grow.
 4. I believe that you what the congregation to grow.
 5. I believe that we can grow.
 6. I believe that our attitudes are essential to any growth that takes place.
- C. The key to growing numerically, that is, to increase in number the members of The Congregation, is for each Christian to grow spiritually. Spiritual growth will propel our souls to reach out to others with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that the key to this propelling spiritual growth is our attitude.
- D. Does this statement make you wince? **“In the final analysis, whether we go to heaven or hell will be determined by our attitude.”**
1. Some may be thinking, “But preacher, haven’t we heard all our lives that a person can be very sincere and still be lost?” Yes, we have heard that . . . and it is still true.
 2. The case of Saul of Tarsus reveals that to us in such passages as Acts 23:1, 26:9, Galatians 1, and Philippians 3.
 3. But it was still his attitude of honesty and a desire for truth that led him eventually to salvation.
- E. A person with a good attitude can still be lost, but one with an improper attitude cannot be saved until the attitude changes.
- D. In the church, we need desperately to evaluate our attitudes, because there are many ways in which the Lord’s work has been hindered by bad attitudes.

SOME WAYS IN WHICH IMPROPER ATTITUDES HAVE HINDERED THE CAUSE OF CHRIST.

- A. **IMPROPER ATTITUDES HAVE HINDERED THE IMPRESSION WE HAVE MADE ON THE OUTSIDE WORLD.**

1. **Acts 2:47** - The Holy Spirit describes the early church as “Praising God and having favor with all the people . . .” Although problems developed later, Christians were still consistent in and with their convictions.
2. **Ephesians 5:15** – “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise.”
3. **Ephesians 4:15**- Paul tells us that we are to speak the “truth in love.”
4. **Numbers 14:11-24** - When God proposed destruction on his murmuring people, Moses interceded with an appeal which said in effect: “What will the outsiders think?” God was concerned enough about the impression those who were not His people might get that He changed His plans.
- 5 We must teach truth without compromise, but it will be more effectively taught if it is obvious that a sincere sense of concern and burden accompany it. **ILLUSTRATION:** A man endeavored to teach another, but was so harsh, the prospect turned him off. Later he boasted, “I didn’t convert him, but I crippled him so bad nobody else will ever get him.”
- 6 How many times has the church been hindered because people regard us as being cold, icy people who say, “Here we are. Come and get the gospel. Take it or leave it. If not, then go on to torment.”

B. IMPROPER ATTITUDES CAN HINDER CHRISTIANS IN REACHING THEIR LOST LOVED ONES.

1. Most families have some loved ones who are lost.
 - a. They may be like the prodigal son and wandered away. Luke 15.
 - b. Or they may be like Paul’s loved ones mentioned in **Romans 9 -13** – “I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh.”
 - c. Paul’s attitude was one of heaviness . . . and he held sorrow in his heart for them.
2. The attitude used to save our young people must be one that does not alienate them.
 - a. They are sharp and can spot phoniness immediately.
 - b. Attitudes often cause them to react either with resentment or acceptance.
 - c. By our attitude do we communicate that we want to be a friend and help spare them hurt, or that we are an adversary, seeking to keep them from enjoying life, thus souring them on the truth?
3. **ILLUSTRATION:** A lady talked to preachers often about what she could do to get her husband interested in the church. Everyone knew she was aggressive, abrasive, and domineering, but were reluctant to tell that what she really needed to do was to change her attitude. Finally, one day she came to worship and it was noted that her husband was meekly following at

a distance. She wanted to introduce him to the preacher. She was obviously embarrassed that he appeared to be cowed down and was several feet behind her. She grabbed his arm and pulled him closer with an obvious jerk and said, "Well, I got this old sinner here today!" The man eventually became a Christian. Those who knew him wondered how many years it was delayed because of his wife's approach.

C. IMPROPER ATTITUDES HAVE HINDERED MISSION WORK AND THE WORK OF LOCAL CONGREGATIONS.

1. Paul was a builder. He tried to "build again" what he had destroyed. Many brethren have a negative attitude. They desire to tear up and pull down if they cannot control and dictate.
2. Many congregations have communicated to the world more vividly the things that we are against rather than the positive things Christians can enjoy.
3. ILLUSTRATION: Many years ago, an appeal was printed in brotherhood publications from a missionary begging for people to send him tracts. He was in a virgin country where people were willing to learn the truth, but he had no well-written materials to give them to study. Would you believe that the FIRST bundle of tracts he received was 1,000 copies of a tract on the subject, "What Is Wrong with Sunday School Classes"? Honest souls were yearning for truth and yet before they even became Christians, someone was ready to confuse them and divide them with a hobby! What a shame!

SOME ATTITUDES THAT ARE ESSENTIAL FOR CHRISTIANS AND CONGREGATIONS TO GROW.

A. FIRST, WE MUST HAVE THE RIGHT ATTITUDE TOWARD **AUTHORITY**.

1. We must accept the Bible as the Word of God and the final authority in
 - a. **1 Thessalonians 2:13** – "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."
 - b. **1 Corinthians 14:37** - "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord."
2. The church is not a democracy whereby majority rule establishes authoritative doctrine.
 - a. Christ is LORD and HEAD of the Church.
 - b. The **BIBLE** is the **COMPLETE** and **FINAL AUTHORITY** for man today.
3. Lovely brethren . . .
 - a. This truth, firmly accepted by Christians would end the vain practice of trying to restructure God's plan about marriage and re-marriage.

- b. This truth, firmly accepted by Christians would end the vain practice of trying to undermine the position, authority, and work of elders in the Lord's Church.
- c. This truth, firmly accepted by Christians would end the vain attempt to change the avenues of worship God wants His people to use today in worshipping Him.
- d. This truth, firmly accepted by Christians would end all other efforts to de-throne God's will as already firmly established on the pages of God's Holy Word.

B. WE MUST HAVE ATTITUDES THAT ARE **POSITIVE AND OPTIMISTIC**.

1. The Bible teaches that our achievements are geared to faith and expectation.
 - a. **Proverbs 23:7** – “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he . . .”
 - b. **Matthew 15:28** – “Then Jesus answered and said to her, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.”
 - c. **Mark 10:27** - “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.”
 - d. **Mark 9:23** – “Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.”
2. Think about the achievements that have been accomplished merely because someone dared to believe that they were possible when others doubted.
 - a. Transportation
 - b. Communication
 - c. Space travel and exploration . . . The Hubble Telescope
 - d. Medicine
 - e. Modern conveniences in daily use
3. Dare to dream big . . . and dare to do big things.
3. It has been said, “We will never know what God can do for us if we undertake only those things which we have convinced ourselves that we can do without Him.”

C. WE MUST HAVE ATTITUDES OF **COURAGE WITHOUT FEAR**.

1. **2 Timothy 1:7-8** – “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord . . .”
 - a. This passage could be a special source of courage to the timid personal worker.
 - b. Many Christians excuse themselves from knocking on doors or doing other forms of personal work.
 - c. The primary cause is FEAR.

1. They fear that the door will be slammed in their faces.
2. They fear they will be insulted.
3. They fear they will not be prepared to answer any questions that might be asked.
4. They fear they will fail to say the right thing or do the right thing
- d. Some key words stand out in 2 Timothy 1:7-8 to explain why God has not given us the spirit of fear.
 1. "Power"
 2. "Love"
 3. "Sound mind"
- e. Romans 1:16 - For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.
- f. If we equip ourselves with the power of the Gospel . . . and we sincerely love the souls of the lost . . . then we will approach them sensibly (as one with a sound mind, and not as a fanatic). That combination will work.
2. **Hebrews 13:5-6** – “. . . For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"
4. Why do we fear? Could it be because we have not learned the lessons of Matthew 10:28 or Proverbs 29:25.
 - a. **Matthew 10:28** – “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Jesus is saying we are not to fear man.
 - b. **Proverbs 29:25** - The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.

D WE MUST HAVE ATTITUDES OF PATIENCE AND FORGIVENESS.

1. **Ephesians 4:1-2** – “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love”.
2. I wish I could assure each and every one present that upon one’s obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ that there you would never be disappointed in another person and that no offending mistreatment would ever enter your life-space. But I cannot because Jesus said in **Luke 17:1** – “It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!”
3. We need to learn the qualities of Christian love so that we will not attach significance to things that others do. The apostle Paul tells us in **I Corinthians 13:4** that love “. . . suffers long, and is kind. . .” The following verse tells us that love “. . . is not provoked.”

4. **ILLUSTRATION:** A lady confronted the preacher about another lady in the church: "She has recently been snubbing me. I'm going to have it out with her. She just walks right by me and acts like I'm not there. I intend to find out why." The preacher said, "I'm glad you talked with me first. The lady means you no harm. She just learned recently that she is going blind. She does not want sympathy or pity, but she is determined to keep attending the services. She cannot see now well enough to tell who people are. She has counted the number of steps from the back of the building to her customary pew. She tries to get in and out with as little distraction as possible.

The first lady then said, "Oh, wouldn't it have been terrible if I had added to her great burden with my petty complaint. I must find her and see if I can help her in some way."

5. An attitude of patience and forgiveness will prevent (and correct) many blunders.

WE MUST HAVE THE ATTITUDE OF BROTHERLY LOVE.

A. It may well be that LOVE is the first thing God wants us to learn.

1. **1 Thessalonians 4:9** – "Concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another." Herein we see that brotherly love is a lesson God teaches. It is obviously something that He wants each of us to know.

2. **Mark 12:28-31** - "Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?"

Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.

And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment.

And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

If we are taught this of God, and no commandment is greater than this, or worthy of being counted first, then isn't this one of the first things God wants us to learn? Unfortunately, it is often the LAST thing many people learn.

B. **Hebrews 13:1** – "Let brotherly love continue."

1. **1 John 4:20-21** – "If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"

And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also."

2. **John 13:34-35** – “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.
By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”
3. It has been said that “Some Christians are like porcupines...they have many good points but they are hard to get close to.”
4. There is a story of a church that was having trouble. It appeared that it might split. One member asked another, “Have you decided yet which side you are going to be on if we split?” He replied, “No. But I can tell you this-- when I do decide, I’m going to be bitter.”
5. Christians need to remember the greatness of God’s cause in comparison to the smallness of our feelings and never let personal feelings on mere matters of judgment lead us to contribute to division in the body of Christ.

CONCLUSION:

A. We have observed some essential attitudes Christians need for spiritual growth.

1. We must have the right attitude toward authority.
2. We must have attitudes that are positive and optimistic.
3. We must have attitudes of courage without fear.
4. We must have attitudes of patience and forgiveness.
5. We must have an attitude of brotherly love.

B. These are certainly fundamental to spiritual growth taking place. If we could all cultivate these to the highest degree humanly possible, many of the obstacles to our spiritual growth would be removed.

C. **God’s Plan For man’s Salvation**