

A GOOD CHURCH CHECK-UP

By Pastor Rene Lussier

Acts 9:31 (NAS)

So the church(es) throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, **being built up**, and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

Luke used **intervals** to record the growth and prosperity of the church... let's look at the intervals again.

- The 2nd interval gave us a new look into the condition of the church at that time.
- As we are coming near to our 12th anniversary, it is a good time for us as a church to have a spiritual check-up. (*Car owners needs to have check-ups...*)
- *At the end of this verse, we read the church continued to increase or multiply. Why? How?*
- *What did they do? What conditions have they been facing? How did they live? Why did they prosper?*
- *How does that apply to us? Can we also increase, grow, prosper? What is the key, the secret?*
- ... **The brothers sent him of (Saul) to Tarsus –(Then-So) the church -**
- Let's summarize a few our previous studies of Acts to understand the background of our verse...
- In chapter 8 the Christians fled from Jerusalem because of Saul's persecution.
- We saw the example of Phillip, preaching in Samaria.
- Acts 9 began with a zealous man (Saul) *breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord* (Acts 9:1). But God was more than able to turn this persecution into a great blessing.
- By the time Saul came back to Jerusalem (**About 3 years**) there were churches throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria.
- Now Luke wants us to know that the church was not only persevering, but it was strong, and growing despite the great opposition that had come against it.
- This tells us that in just a few short years the church had expanded dramatically.
- Acts 2 God increased the number of believers, in Acts 9 He increased the number of churches
- By this time there were churches scattered over Judea, Galilee, and Samaria but Luke they are part of the **one and same great church**
 - Judea & Galilee: The text of the Book of Acts tells us nothing about church planting in Galilee or in Judea.
 - We don't know who started these churches, how they did it.
 - This reminds us that Acts is only a partial history of the church during this period.
 - All the churches were within the limits of the holy land. [Fulfillment of Acts 1:8]
- **The church . . . enjoyed peace:**
- This may have different meanings:
 1. **The obvious meaning is that the persecution ceased because the persecutor had been converted**
 2. This was an important historical crossroads in Israel and in the Roman Empire.
 - In 37 AD, **Caiaphas** was replaced as high priest, first by Jonathan, then by Theophilus. (Religious leadership change)
 - In the same year, (Political change) Caligula succeeded Tiberius as Roman Emperor. Caligula was bitterly hostile against the Jews, and had ordered his statue to be placed in the temple at Jerusalem for worship, and the Jews were too much engaged in their efforts to prevent this to persecute the church (*Josephus, _Ant_. XVIII. 8, 2-9*).

- **Instead of growing more secure and self-seeking in the day of their prosperity, they made a good use of this time of peace.**

THE CHURCH... WAS BEING BUILT UP-BEING EDIFIED-

- The meaning is not church planting but edification.
- The word "edified" (oikodomeo) simply means "built up, to grow spiritually, to promote spiritually growth, to strengthen, to establish, to confirm in the faith."
- **BACKGROUND:** During the persecution, the disciples were scattered and preached the good news, many were saved and churches were planted, but because of persecution, it was difficult to establish the churches in faith...
- **EDIFICATION**-A favorite terminology with Paul: 1 Cor14...

1Cor 14:12 So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.

- The work of **redemption** consists in **building up** a proper *habitation for God*.
- 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.
 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

1Pet 2:5 (NIV) you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

ILLUSTRATION:

A brand new baby is a new life that requires many recourses invested into it in order to keep that life going. Likewise in the church, if we are to have that ‘new life,’ it will take continual investment to keep it going. If we want to kill the life of God in our church, we need to simply stop giving.

David T. Wallace

Acts 9:31 (Amplified)

So the church throughout the whole of Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was edified [growing in wisdom (**Knowing God**), virtue (**Christian character**), and piety (**Christian living**)]

THE CHURCH ... WAS GOING ON IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

Going... or walking—Let us look first at the word, "going on or walking".

The same Greek word “**Poreuomai**” is translated in (Mark 16:15) by, "Go". "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature", and in (Matthew 28:19) by "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..."

- The idea is that of travelers going to a place, and **THEY ARE GOING ON** in the right path. Christians are thus travelers to another country, an heavenly.
- *And walking*—The word is often used to denote Christian conduct, or manner of life
- Each person is walking to his eternal destination. *How are YOU going? Are YOU leading anyone to come with YOU?*

Walking in the fear of the Lord

- Fearing God means that I know that God cares what I do.
- It means that as we go about our day, we are considering what God would have us do and putting God's will above our own.

Keeping a continually *tender conscience; dreading* to offend him.

Fear of the Lord is an expression meaning the awareness of God's holiness, of his presence in the church, a sense of his closeness and belonging, a sense of purpose.

ILLUSTRATION: We are the bride of Christ.

- The relationship of a couple in love is not lived in fear, but in respect and with a desire to honor and please, and a desire of closeness.

We are not slave or prisoners, but children of God.

- Ask yourself if there is a difference between a boy who loves his dad and knows that his dad is watching the football game and another boy who knows that his father does not care about him...
Apply this example to your concept of the fear of God...

Message “**They were permeated with a deep sense of reverence for God.**”

Proverbs 14:27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life

You will see life in a church that has the Fear? of the Lord

It brings? blessing, prosperity and increase

Proverbs 22:4 By humility and the fear? of the LORD are riches and honor and life.

THE CHURCH ... WAS GOING ON IN THE COMFORT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In the comfort “**paraklesis**” of the Holy Spirit—“**calling to one's side to help**”

- The word, “paraklesis” in Greek is quite large and describes the different workings of the HS.
1. The first is “**comfort**”, like a mother with a child who has fallen down. This is how the Holy Spirit ministers to us.
 - In days of trouble and affliction, the HS had comforted them.
 2. He provides “**counsel or exhortation**”. (*including conviction, instruction and guidance*)
 1. God does not just want to set us free from sin, comfort us in adversity; He also wants to instruct us in righteousness.
 2. God wants to guide us into those good works that He has prepared beforehand for us.

3. The Spirit gives vision and refreshes a vision.
4. He creates cheerful hearts (encourager), and enthusiasm toward God's will.
3. Another meaning is that He gives the power needed to fulfill our mission. He enables us to do (God's will) according to His good pleasure.
4. He distributes spiritual gifts that the Church needs in order to minister to one another and to those outside...

BACKGROUND & EXAMPLE: The disciples were enjoying peace, because the persecution had ceased. Many of the disciples came back to Jerusalem and the apostles began to make preaching tours out from the city.

Acts 9:32 (NIV) As Peter traveled about the country, **he went to visit the saints in Lydda.**

33 There he found a man named **Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years.**

34 "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "**Jesus Christ heals you**. Get up and take care of your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up. **35 All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.**

36 In **Joppa** there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas {[36] Both Tabitha (Aramaic) and Dorcas (Greek) mean gazelle.}), who was always doing good and helping the poor.

37 About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room.

38 Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

39 Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

40 Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up.

41 He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. **42 This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.**

43 Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

THE CHURCH ... CONTINUED TO INCREASE

"Sometimes the church multiplies the more for its being afflicted... At other times its rest contributes to its growth, as it enlarges the opportunity of ministers, and invites those in who at first are afraid of suffering." Matthew Henry:

They multiplied as they kept going on under the guidance and the moving of the Holy Spirit...

"When the members walk with the fear of the Lord before their eyes and with the Spirit's encouraging voice in their hearts, the church will be strong and will also surely multiply."

[R.C.H. Lenski.

- The multiplication of the disciples was the result of the peace, the edification, the walking in the fear of the Lord, the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

There are three things that the multiplying church will do.

1. First, we continue to be built up in love by Jesus, edified, knit together. Even though we are separated by geography or language or culture or style, we are one in the love of Christ Jesus. Eph 4:16 **From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.**
2. Second, we go in the fear of the Lord, always checking to see what God thinks. Concerned about the things that are on God's heart. Grieved by the sin that grieves Him.
3. Third, we go in the comfort/counsel of the Holy Spirit. Always eager to hear the next mission that God has prepared for us. Always listening to the Holy Spirit's whispers.