

“STILL MORE AND MORE”

Have you ever noticed that preachers are never satisfied? (Elaborate and give examples)

Actually, there is good reason for preachers to be like that – that’s the way the Lord is . . . and that’s the way the Lord’s apostles and preachers in the early church were. When they wrote to Christians and to congregations, they acknowledged the faith and love and devotion that were evident . . . and they commended them and praised them for it . . . and then they encouraged them to do “still more and more”.

Let me give you some examples:

PAUL’S LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA

When Paul wrote this letter, the church at Thessalonica was already a loving, caring, zealous, hard-working church.

We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; (1 Thessalonians 1:2-4)

You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. (1 Thessalonians 1:6-8)

And yet Paul was not satisfied with the church at Thessalonica, and he did not want them to be satisfied with themselves. He wanted them to have a healthy spiritual discontent. He wanted them to do “still more and more”

and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you; (1 Thessalonians 3:12)

Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10)

Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may excel still more. For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; (1 Thessalonians 4:1-3)

Paul commends the brethren at Thessalonica because their faith and love were growing.

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater; (2 Thessalonians 1:3)

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

Paul says he has heard of the faith and love of the brethren in the church at Ephesus . . . and what he has heard causes him to constantly make mention of them in his prayers, giving thanks to God for them.

For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you, and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; (Ephesians 1:15-16)

And yet Paul was not satisfied with the church at Ephesus . . . and he did not want them to be satisfied with themselves . . . He wanted them to do “still more and more”.

In Eph 4:15 he urges them to do better in every aspect of Christ-like character and Christ-like devotion

but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:15-16)

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT PHILIPPI

When Paul wrote to the church at Philippi that church was already an outstanding church (in fellowship, faithfulness, obedience).

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. (Philippians 1:3-5)

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6)

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; (Philippians 2:12)

And yet Paul was not satisfied with the church at Philippi, and he wanted them to do “still more and more”.

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9-11)

Our survey of these texts makes us aware of a number of important things:

The impact that a single church can have not only locally but around the world.

More than once Paul noted how a congregation's faithfulness and work was known in other places!

And that can not only encourage those who set the example, but also motivate the people in other places.

Cf. the rooster who brought a picture of an ostrich egg and put it in the hen house: “Ladies, I just wanted to show you what they're doing in other places”.

The importance of acknowledging and affirming the good in others.

All too often we preachers (and others in the church) are busy wanting to make things better and we forget to acknowledge the good that is there. Sometimes it takes a visitor or a new comer to remind us of what we are doing that is making an impact.

And all of us can appreciate a genuine word of commendation.

The importance of enlarging ourselves and our work together.

Regrettably we tend to be discontent in things where we should be content – I'm talking about material things; and we tend to be satisfied in things where we should striving for more – I'm talking about spiritual things.

I could wish that we might just pick out one of those prayers every week and focus on it and seek to excel in the areas Paul mentions.

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” (Jn. 15:1-2)

So it's not just preachers who want you to do “still more and more” – it's also the Lord who wants you to do “still more and more”.

Conclusion: Like Paul said about these churches I appreciate the church at Perry Heights—your faith, your love for one another, your vision to spread the gospel around the world, your desire to work together in peace, your willingness to welcome and embrace those whom come among us, your commitment to follow the truth of the gospel, your desire to grow in understanding of God's will, your desire to bring back those who might have drifted away and to seek new opportunities to lead others to the Lord.

If Paul was here, he might just urge us “to excel still more and more”. Let this be a time of rest and reflection on past work done. Let us affirm the good that has been accomplished. Let us set our sights on the future what we may do for God in the coming year.

(Based on an outline shared with me by Bill Walton)