

# Spiritual Growth and Increased Numbers

**“Then had the churches rest. .. and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied ” (Acts 9:31)**

Let us go back in mind, dear Christian reader, and look for a little at the early church in its primitive simplicity and freshness as presented in the passage quoted above. We shall see first that the saints were **edified**, and then that they were **multiplied**.

## Preparation for Progress

Saul of Tarsus, that bitter enemy and persecutor of the saints of God, had just been converted to God, no doubt in answer to the prayer of the dying martyr, Stephen. Thus the attack of Satan from **without** was overcome, and the very persecutor himself was changed into a most zealous and devoted servant of Christ.

The spirit of untruth, working **within** the church, had also been sternly rebuked in the solemn judgment on Ananias and Sapphira. As a consequence, the church, through God's mercy, had a little rest from persecution without and corruption within.

## Progress Made

Two things are here said about the walk of the churches, which was marked by spiritual progress as well as by increase of numbers : it was **“in the fear of the Lord,”** and **“in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.”** Does not every true-hearted servant of God desire to see spiritual progress and increase of numbers in the gatherings today? Surely; but, alas, how little we see of it! Is there not a cause? **Is it to be found in a walk which is after the flesh, and not after the Spirit ?**

## Edification

Here we are told that the churches were **“edified.”** **It is only as the word of God is ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit and received as His word, that real edification and the building up of the saints on their most holy faith can take place.** May we not well pray that such edifying ministry may be provided among the saints increasingly ?

## The Fear of the Lord

The next thing was that reverential **“fear of the Lord,”** which so becomes us. We rightly maintain that where two or three are gathered together unto Christ's name, there He is in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20). This is His blessed provision for even a day of weakness and declension.

But what reverence this truth would produce in us, if really entered into and believed. Our very attitude and demeanour in a meeting, as well as our walk and conduct before we come together, would bear the impress of His presence, both in anticipation and in realization; would it not?

## The Comfort of the Holy Ghost

Then there was, in those early days, a walking together in "**the comfort of the Holy Ghost.**" It is a truth almost forgotten in Christendom that the Holy Ghost is here, dwelling in the church and in the believer.

The Spirit is here to glorify Christ, to lead us into all truth, to shed abroad the love of God in the heart, to put into the very soul and lips of the believer the cry, "**Abba, Father.**" He is here, too, to lead the assembly in worship, praise, and thanksgiving to the Father and the Son. Blessed and glorious privilege! Blessed are they who walk in the comfort of the Holy Ghost!

#### Why the Present Leanness?

Why is it, then, that we hear of lack of spiritual energy, of lack of unction and power in the meetings? May it not be because we "**grieve**" the Spirit by our ways individually, or because we "**quench**" or hinder Him in our assemblies collectively? **These are serious considerations which we do well to ponder over in the presence of God.**

See what this lack of spirituality and godliness led to at Corinth — divisions, strifes, discord, and even worse; so that the apostle had to say to them, "**Ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying and strife and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?**" (1 Corinthians 3:3). How far is this true among us today ?

If the church of God had only walked in true separation from the world, with an ungrieved Spirit, "**espoused to one husband,**" to be "**presented as a chaste virgin to Christ,**" how different her history might have been! But, alas, other objects came in, and Christ lost His place in the heart.

The history of the church's decline began with what is so touchingly expressed in the word of the Lord to Ephesus, "**Thou hast left thy first love;**" and it will end in the sad state of lukewarmness described in the epistle to Laodicea (Revelation 2+3).

#### Is Revival Possible?

What then is the way of restoration? It is "**to repent,**" to humble ourselves under the hand of the Lord, to take the place of genuine confession and self-judgment before Him. At the same time, we must rely in implicit confidence on "**God and the word of His grace**" as being sufficient for all times, and therefore for this time.

And let us remember with all seriousness that it is our privilege to walk "**in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost**" today, as truly as in the brightest days of the church's history. If this privilege is not enjoyed, whose is the fault? and wherein lies the remedy ?

F.G.B.