

Why The Early Church Grew

Part 1

Int.

1. Aim: To discuss some of the reasons why the church in the First Century grew so fast.
2. It is thrilling to read the Book of Acts and see how fast the gospel spread throughout the world in the first century. You notice that great numbers were obedient to the faith, the number of disciples multiplied, etc.
 - a. On Pentecost there was "added about three thousand souls" Acts 2:44
 - b. The number continued to grow as the "being saved ones" "were added to the number" (v. 47).
 - c. Soon, number of men came to be about five thousand (4:4); Number multiplied (6:1);
 - d. Strengthened in the faith, and "increased in number daily" (16:5)
3. We live in an age when many feel the church cannot grow: That it no longer has anything to offer. Many have been persuaded that there is little use in trying to reach others.
4. God desires the church to grow. It is always pictured in the Bible as that which is alive, and growing. He has equipped the church to grow (see Eph. 4:12). Sometimes we hear, "If it be your will.." Can be assured that He "Wills," but such will be accomplished in keeping principles which He has made known.
5. Why does the church not grow today as it did in the first century? Can the gospel affect the lives of the people of the world? Could it be proclaimed as it was in the first century?
6. There were reasons for this rapid growth. Do we know why it grew then? Will the same principles not work now? The church can grow today if we learn what caused it to grow in the first century and then practice the same things as they practiced.

Discussion

I. THEY OVERCAME ALL HINDRANCES [There were many Hindrances to the growth of the church in the 1st century, but it grew in spite of these.]

A. Early Christians lived in evil surroundings

1. Phil. 2:15 "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;"
2. World in darkness (I Jn. 5:19) "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness."
 - a. Roman society corrupted.
 - b. Consider the wickedness found in Corinth. Word "Corinth" became synonymous with sexual impurity. Yet, gospel had its influence in the corrupt society. Those who had been guilty of gross immorality had been "WASHED" (I Cor. 6:9,10). Paul could refer to these as "saints" (I Cor. 1:1,2).
3. Present day society is corrupt.
 - a. Often think we have few "prospects" because of the wicked conditions in society.
 - b. Two shoe salesmen went to Africa years ago. One sent a message back and said it is hopeless, no one wears shoes here. The other one sent a message back and said the market is wide open, they all need shoes.
 - c. Yes society is evil and corrupt, but they need the Gospel to make them free.
 - d. Rom. 1:16 The gospel is the power of God to salvation

4. If the "seed of the Kingdom" could find lodging in such soil as found in the first century, can it not do the same today?
 - a. The gospel still has the power to change lives. Christ came into the world to save SINNERS.
 - b. There is no limit to the depth, length of God's love. Therefore, no limit on "sinners" who can be reached by the gospel.

B. Lived in midst of religious error: idolatry found on every hand.

1. Often discouraged because response from those contacted is that "I am already a member of a 'Christian church'."
 - a. Often minds are prejudiced against anything that differs from what one has been taught from childhood.
 - b. Often indifference is manifest because of being "satisfied" with one's religion.
2. Religious error found in N.T. days.
 - a. Jews were religious (Rom. 10:1,2). The Lord said they would compass land and sea to make a proselyte: great zeal.
 - b. Gentiles were "religious" Acts 17:22-23
3. While it is true that minds are often closed because of religious beliefs, there will be some with an honest and good heart who will receive the word, produce fruit to perfection (Mt. 13:23).

C. **Most of the world was unconcerned with spiritual matters then.**

1. The Gentiles were "given over to pleasure" Eph. 4:17-19
2. The philosophy of "eat, drink and be merry" prevailed in society of first century.
3. There were those who loved pleasure more than God - 2 Tim.3:4
4. There were those whose "god" was their belly - Phil. 3:19
5. Secularism of our day is no greater than in the N.T. days.
6. But at the same time there were those who set their affections on heavenly things and considered them selves to be "strangers and pilgrims."

D. **Skeptics abounded** (2 Pet. 3:3). Such is not new today.

1. There were those who "scoffed" at the idea of a God to whom men are accountable. Those who looked for "natural explanations" for every thing that surrounds man.
2. Many complain today that "theory of evolution" has created so much skepticism that it is not possible to reach the minds of men. Such has had its influence, but gospel has answers which defeat the "wisdom of men."
3. Many religious leaders today reject the miraculous things of the Bible.
 - a. They deny the account of creation, the miracles of Jesus , and the resurrection of Christ.
 - b. They declare that these are myths which have been contradicted by modern science and therefore no longer have influence on the religious life of man.
4. There have always been skeptics who do not believe the Bible

II. THE EARLY CHURCH GREW BECAUSE:

A. Men were converted to Christ

1. They realized that the purpose of life was no longer to live for self
2. When men seek His truth and are governed by it, then we will be presenting our lives as living sacrifices - Rom. 12:1-2
3. This will have its influence on worship, work, morality, giving, relation to others.
4. Many today are converted to a "church" or party. Have become such because of family.

B. Realized a personal responsibility to teach others:

1. Only way Church grows is for the "seed of the kingdom" to be sown in the hearts of men - 2 Tim. 2:2 "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."
2. The early disciples taught that they had a personal responsibility for sowing the seed.
3. Growth of the church did not depend on "professional clergy". In religious bodies that develop a "professional clergy" growth decreases.
4. Fulfillment of this responsibility came as a result of a realization of the love and grace of God, Christ: from gratitude for what had been done for them

C. They understood that Christianity was A "taught religion"

1. Jn. 6:44,45 "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me."
2. New Covenant requires "Know the Lord" - Heb. 8:11
3. Those "added" were those who "gladly received the word" - Acts 2:44
4. They knew that it was the Word that produces faith
 - a. Rom. 10:17
 - b. "Seed" of the kingdom (Lk. 8:13). "Seed" is as powerful today as at the beginning. It will produce the same today.
5. Regardless of "power in seed" there will never be "fruit" until seed is planted. "Reaping" always in proportion to "sowing" (see 2 Cor. 9:6).
6. Early church grew when persecuted (see Acts 8:1,4). "They went preaching," apostles remained in Jerusalem.
7. In time we ought to be teachers - Heb. 5:12
 - a. How many? All who have progressed beyond infant stage.
 - b. If not using abilities, then losing them; stand in danger of forgetting importance of first principles.
8. WHERE DO WE BEGIN?
 - a. Family: parents (Eph. 6:4). Not enough to "take children to Bible school." Where do they sit, what do they do?: Older women (Tit. 2:3-5).
 - b. Friends - neighbors
 - c. Toward all. Love of Christ should constrain to want to tell others.

D. Success of the church in the first century was not due to the fact that the apostles were "super salesmen" who used miraculous powers to "convert" men.

1. Those scattered went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4), Note Acts 11:19-21
2. Paul spent several years in prison; yet this was a period of great growth for the early church (see Phil. 1:12-14).

E. No movement can be successful when only a small part make effort to teach. Only five to ten per cent have ever talked to another about spiritual condition. WHY?

Conclusion

1. The church can grow today if we learn what caused it to grow in the first century and then practice the same things as they practiced
2. Most members of the church will say that they want the church to grow.
 - a. There is a great reward awaiting those who "win souls" to the Lord
 - b. There is great disappointment who do not use their ability to "win souls" to the Lord.
3. Song: Lead me to some soul today

Lead Me to Some Soul Today

Will H. Houghton

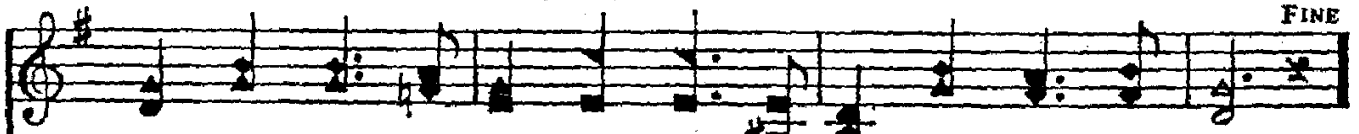
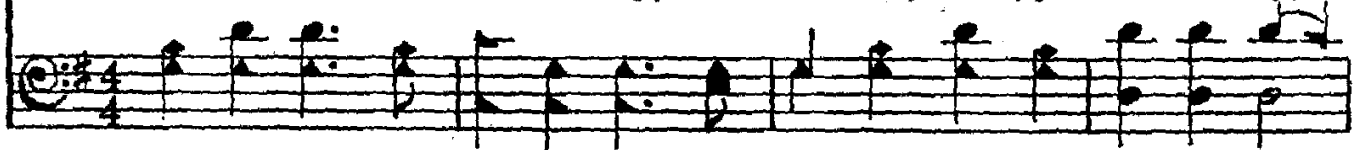
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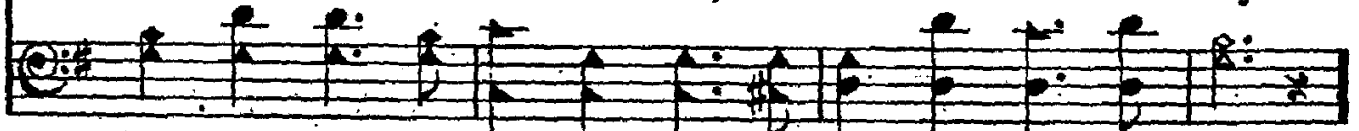


Lead me to some soul to-day; O teach me, Lord, just what to say;

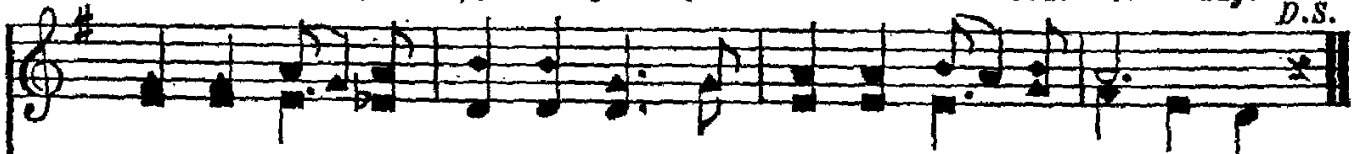


FINE

Friends of mine are lost in sin, And can-not find their way.



D.S. Melt my heart and fill my life: Give me one soul to - day. D.S.



Few there are who seem to care, And few there are who pray;
who pray;

