

## Why The Early Church Grew

### Part 3

#### Int.

1. Aim: To discuss some of the reasons why the early church grew and show that if we practice the same we can grow today.
2. The Church began on the Day of Pentecost - as recorded in Acts 2
  - a. The first day there were 3,000 added to the church
  - b. It grew very fast over the next few years
  - c. Paul went on 3 missionary journeys and established the church in many cities
3. We have been looking at some of the reasons why the early church grew so fast.
  - a. They overcame all hindrances
  - b. They were converted to Christ
  - c. They realized a personal responsibility to teach others
  - d. They understood that Christianity was a "taught religion"
  - e. Not because the Apostles were "super salesmen" who used miraculous powers to convert men
  - f. They were dedicated to the cause of Christ
  - g. They lived a pure life
  - h. They feared God
4. The early church grew because the disciples were faithful to the Lord.
5. The people were aware that the apostles had "been with the Lord."
6. Here are more reasons why the early church grew so fast....

## Discussion

### I. CONCERN FOR THE SPIRITUAL WELFARE OF THEIR BRETHREN

- A. There is Little growth if we do not have this concern. "Concern" is another word for "love."
- B. Paul uses illustration of a "body" to point out closeness of relationship of Christians. "Body" used to illustrate other responsibilities such as relation to the head.
1. When one part of the body affected by some situation, whole body "feels" it -  
I Cor. 12:25-27 v. 26 "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it."
  2. "Oneness of mind" which "binds all together"; resulting in strength.
- C. One of the great challenges in regard to "church growth" is the spiritual development of those who obey the gospel.
1. Statistics indicate more than 50% will go back to their former way of life.
  2. THIS IS A DOUBLE LOSS! Think of how much more could be accomplished if the "unfaithful" had remained faithful, productive.
  3. The Local church is designed as a means to help develop spiritual maturity.
    - a. We need to teach and ground the converts in the faith so they will have a knowledge of what the Lord expects of them - Matt. 28:20 - "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you:"
    - b. This is done through preaching and classes which address specific areas of need.
    - c. Much of the "falling away" is result of failure to receive needed instruction for growth.

4. The Christian has a responsibility not only to teach first principles, but take personal interest in new converts to teach, encourage their development. This requires sacrifice of time to build right relationships.
  5. THIS WORK HAS A TWO-FOLD EFFECT:
    - a. STRENGTHENS THE NEW CONVERT,
    - b. BUT ALSO THE OLDER CHRISTIAN.
- D. Early Christians taught to "consider...provoke (stimulate) to love, good works" (Heb. 10:24). "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,"
1. One place to do this is in the assembly - Heb. 10:25
  2. "Daily Life" - "Considering one another" not confined to assembly, but as aware of circumstances which affect life, wherever the opportunity arises.
    - a. If we see a brother in danger, show concern, warn him (Heb. 12:15,16). Many could be prevented from falling if more mature would point out dangers.
    - b. If one falls into sin, make diligent effort to convert him.
      - (1) Not in a "self-righteous, mote hunting" attitude, but "meekness"
      - (2) Gal. 6:1 NKJV "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted."
      - (3) Many feel that one has no business mentioning error to another. Such is misunderstanding of Lord's teaching on "judging" (Matt. 7:1).  
BROTHER'S KEEPER regardless of desire.
  - c. Often, no effort made because of fear that "friendship" will be affected.
  - d. SOULS ARE MORE IMPORTANT (Jas. 5:19,20).

## II. ATTITUDE TOWARD MATERIAL POSSESSIONS

- A. Attitude demonstrated as early disciples responded to physical needs of brethren
1. Acts 4:32; "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common."
  2. 2 Cor. 8:2 "How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality."
  3. Faith and love more than "words"-- "be warmed, filled"
  4. Jas. 2:16 NKJV "and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?"
- B. Possessions used to have "fellowship" in preaching gospel (Phil. 1:5; 4:10).
1. Phil. 1:5 "for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now,"
    - a. Fellowship = partnership, participation
    - b. Support in preaching and teaching the gospel
  2. We are not preaching and teaching because we do not have the means to send them. Rom. 10:14b
  3. Romans 10:15 "How shall they preach, except they be sent?"
  4. Cause of Christ suffers in other places because congregations with ability are not willing to support men in difficult areas.
    - a. Sing, "Lord of harvest, send forth reapers," etc. Such need support.
    - b. In some foreign fields, denominational groups have 65 teachers to one gospel preacher.

### **III. EARLY CHURCH GREW BECAUSE THE DISCIPLES WERE UNASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL.**

- A. Paul was unashamed - Rom. 1:16 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."
1. In face of worldly wisdom and the philosophy of the day, men considered the gospel to be weak, contemptible;
  2. The gospel was and is God's means of saving men - I Cor. 1:21,24 "...it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."
  3. The early church was convinced that it was God's wisdom, power.
  4. Not to be ashamed of the "testimony of the Lord"
  5. 2 Tim. 1:8 "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;"
- B. Lord requires disciples to have courage to "confess Him" as Lord
1. Matt. 10:32,33 "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."
  2. Mk. 8:38 "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."
  3. "God has not given us a spirit of fear" (timidity) (2 Tim. 1:7).
  4. No reason for fear: Can stand against all opposition (Eph. 6:10,11).

- C. One of greatest problems facing the church is that members are afraid, ashamed to boldly confront the world with the gospel
1. Acts. 4:29,31 "they spoke the word of God with boldness."
  2. Afraid others will think that one is ignorant, out of step with "educated".
  3. Arguments can be answered.
    - a. Most only repeat arguments which have never been examined.
    - b. Some reason that if someone with "education" makes argument it must be right.
    - c. A person can be "educated" in some areas and ignorant in others.
  4. Afraid others think that one is narrow minded, "religious bigot."
    - a. Afraid to challenge teaching of error, use SWORD OF THE SPIRIT - Eph. 6:17
    - b. TRUTH HAS NOTHING TO FEAR.
  5. Afraid that others think one to be a "religious fanatic," fail to speak against evil surroundings - Eph. 5:11 "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them."
  6. Some ashamed of the demands of the gospel:
    - a. Afraid others will get feelings hurt.
    - b. Do not invite to worship services for fear others hear something to cause them to realize they are not right. (ex., Denominationalism, necessity of baptism, necessity of worship according to N.T.)

7. Some do not have "nerve" to mention anything to do with "spiritual."
  - a. "People will not listen." If that is true, then they are the losers.
  - b. We can look for opportunities, use "speech with grace, seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6).
  - c. Many will listen when they see genuine concern for them. (Difference in such and confronting one with "you are on your way to hell" on every occasion).
  - d. Can speak to others about different matters, but "freeze" when subject of religion comes up: Try to avoid conversation.
  - e. We have too much "inhibition" when it comes to religious subjects. Religious people look for opportunities to talk: Persuaded they are right.
  - f. Greatest reason for "timidity" is fear of being rejected: Not a personal matter (see Lk. 10:16).

#### **IV. GROWTH PROMOTED THROUGH FERVENT PRAYER.**

- A. Church was "born in prayer"
  1. Acts 1:14 "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers."
  2. Acts 2:42 "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."
  3. Fervent prayer of righteous has effect on growth today
  4. James 5:16 "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

B. Some things for which to pray which are related to growth.

1. Wisdom - Jas. 1:5 "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."
2. How to conduct life, approach work, see opportunities - Col. 4:5,6
3. Conditions permitting preaching of the gospel I Tim. 2:2 "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence."
4. God rules in affairs of men.
5. Receptive hearts - 2 Thess. 3:1 ESV "Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored"
6. For those preaching - Eph. 6:19 "And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel,"
7. No greater encouragement for preachers than to know brethren are earnestly praying for their efforts: All working to the end of glorifying God.
8. Individuals. "Easy to pray for lost world; more difficult to pray for one we know."  
PRAYER INVOLVES ME. (Causes to speak, work to convert).

C. A Praying church will grow. Aware of needs, willing to do what can that prayers answered.

## CONCLUSION

1. "Am I really concerned with the growth of the church? Is my life hindering or promoting the growth of the church?"
2. Before growth in numbers, members must be dedicated to Christ, His cause. Little ever accomplished without dedication.
3. Each must examine own life..."Am I dedicated, committed to the Lord and His cause?" All will realize that they fall short. Must repent of failures, determine to walk more closely to Him who leads. Encouragement to know Lord forgives.
4. 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.
  - a. Most members of the church will say they want the church to grow. However, this is something that must be demonstrated by actions rather than words.
  - b. Each should want to know what he can do to cause the church to grow. There is great reward awaiting those who "win souls" to the Lord.
5. Let us earnestly pray for those matters which will result in growth of the church; work that such be accomplished.