

The Old Paths

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“Reasons The Early Church Grew”

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Growth is something that concerns each one of us. In some houses, we may see marks on the wall where junior was measured during his “growing-up” years. Sometimes we pass through a town and will notice all the new buildings. Without fail someone will say, “Look at how this town has grown!” God is also concerned with growth. However, His focus is not on the physical, but the spiritual. He is so concerned about growth, in fact, that the Hebrew writer was inspired to write to Christians and rebuke them for their lack of growth in Hebrews 5:12-14. They “ought to have” grown to the point that they would be teachers of good things, but they hadn’t, and needed to straighten that up.

The book of Acts is a sort of “history book” telling us about the beginning and growth of the Lord’s church in the first century. In addition to this, the epistles reveal much about various congregations scattered throughout the middle east, Asia, and Europe in the first century. During these years, we see the church grow by leaps and bounds. Why was that? In this study, we will look at four reasons why the first church grew the way it did.

The Early Church Grew Because Of The Teaching.

Let us look at the teaching done in the book of Acts from two angles: The type of preach-

ing, and the amount of preaching. We see the type of preaching centered around Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The first gospel sermon declared Jesus and His death, burial and resurrection (Acts 2:22-36). Looking through the book of Acts, we see that other teachers followed suit. Philip preached Christ (Acts 8:5, 12, 35). The apostle Paul preached Christ as well (Acts 13:27-38; 17:1-3; I Cor. 1:23, 2:2). In preaching Christ, the necessity of obedience to God’s word was emphasized (Acts 2:37-38), as well as His kingdom, authority, and baptism (Acts 8:12). The Ethiopian eunuch was obviously taught that baptism was necessary for salvation, or he would not have asked Philip, “See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” (Acts 8:36). Preaching Christ also includes warning, and teaching Christians how to be “perfect” (mature) in Christ (Col. 1:28). These early preachers preached the oracles (utterances) of God (I Pet. 4:11). No apostle or sound teacher taught their opinions. They taught the truth, God’s word (Jn. 17:17).

The amount of preaching is evident in the book of Acts. These people were taught of God on a regular basis. In Acts 2:42 and Acts 2:46, we see people who were “continuing” in God’s word. The text says that they were taught on a daily basis. People were being taught not only publicly, but privately (Acts 5:42). The teaching done was not “once in a while.” Therefore, folks saw daily results

from the daily teaching (Acts 2:47)!

Let us take advantage of our opportunities to learn more of God’s word. Do we crave God’s word daily, or are we too busy? Do we want to hear “more, more about Jesus”? We have great opportunities to learn of His word, including the fact that we can open the Bible daily and read it. If we are not “feeding” on God’s word daily (I Pet. 2:2; Heb. 5:12-14; II Cor. 4:16), how can we expect to grow daily?

The Early Church Grew Because Of The Unity.

The book of Acts reveals a group of people who were united in their concern, purpose, and motive. The Christians were living as Jesus prayed they would in John 17:21-23. Acts 4:32 says, “*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.*” These people genuinely cared and loved one another. This is abundantly clear when we read, “*And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need*” (Acts 2:44-45). This unity brought the early Christians together during times of adversity and made the church grow not only numerically, but spiritually. When we look at ourselves, think of things we can do or say to encourage and promote even greater unity among us. Truly, we are all we have! Why do anything to jeopardize our unity? To do so plays into Satan’s hands. Let us live I Corinthians 1:10 every day.

The Early Church Grew Because Of The Corrective Discipline.

It is important to understand that discipline takes the form of teaching

and correction. In addition to teaching, it is apparent that the early church took disciplinary action. Please read Acts 5:1-11 and notice that disciplinary action was taken by God. What was the result you ask? How many turned against the Lord and His people? *“And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women”* (Acts 5:14). Yes friends, discipline must be exercised if we want the church to grow! Please read II Thessalonians 3:6, and 14-15. *“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us ... And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”* No, this is not a pleasant thing to occur within a congregation, but it is something that must be done to please God, and encourage growth in the church! I am thankful that this church practices not only instructive discipline, but also corrective discipline. I am thankful for this because this is what God wants, and I know this church is determined to do what God wants. Such actions God will bless (Rev. 22:14).

The Early Church Grew Because Of Their Stand For The Truth.

At times, I have noticed certain popular songs talk of both men and women who sin in certain ways in front of their children or others, but then also spend time praying and going to church. What is this? When we study the New Testament, we see that the church took a “daily” stand for the truth (Acts 2:42, 5:42). In other words, they

were interested in hearing and following God’s word daily, not merely on “Sunday.” They wanted to do the Lord’s will all the time, and were conscious of their behavior. They did not have their religion “compartmentalized” as the world suggests, where they are “pious on Sunday, and live like the Devil the rest of the week.” Such actions are hypocritical, and ought not be seen in the lives of Christians. I am impressed with this congregation because I see so many who are conscious of living faithfully for God on a daily basis. We understand that hypocritical behavior has no part in the lives of Christians (I Cor. 15:58; Matt. 7:3-5).

Seeing that these people stood for the truth daily, the church grew daily! For example, in Acts 4:1-3, we read, *“And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.”* Here is a time of adversity and problems for the apostles. The Sadducees, priests, and captain of the temple tried to stop the preaching of Peter and John by arresting them and putting them in “hold” to answer for their preaching (Acts 4:5-22). Please notice that even though the apostles were in prison, there

was a response by those who had heard the truth that day. *“Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand”* (Acts 4:4). The apostles did not back down from their preaching, and the church grew! Later on, we see Christians praying to God about the problems that were upon them. Please notice their attitude in this prayer: *“And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word”* (Acts 4:29). Does this sound like they were going to compromise their beliefs to “get along”? Certainly not!

Conclusion

Because these four things were a part of the early church, we see the church growing by 3000 (Acts 2:47), 5000 (Acts 4:4), multitudes (Acts 5:14), and being multiplied with a great number of the priests (Acts 6:1,7). This growth occurred because they believed and obeyed God, and allowed Him to bless them (I Cor. 3:6).

Do we want this church to grow? It is going to take hard work and involve our putting these principles into practice. We need to concentrate on spiritual growth. When the spiritual growth occurs, the physical growth will come. Let us not be as the Hebrews who should have been teachers and were not. Let us be as the Thessalonians who *“sounded out the word”* (I Thess. 1:8).

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“Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.” (Jer. 6:16)