

Turning Little Churches into Big Churches

“And the word of God increased: and the number of the disciples multiplied” (Acts 6:7).

A postcard from the World Network of Prayer (UPCI) reads, “1996 was the most productive year in the history of our fellowship.” Sister Nona Freeman, a retired veteran missionary to Africa wrote an article entitled, *Jesus Christ-Still the Same*. In this faith provoking article she states, “The Word is a time-proven irrefutable fact. Whatever God has done through the ages, He can do it again, and more, much more than our finite minds can comprehend. He can stack up waters of the sea and make a dry highway through the flooded river, confuse enemies in darkness while giving His children light, pour a mighty river out of a rock, and rain bread from heaven, deliver a mass of helpless slaves from grievous bondage, and drown their enemies with one stroke. Name the need, and He can and will do it....All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. His limitless power will do whatever we believe Him for. No exceptions. ...In our forty-one years in Africa.. we saw every miracle recorded in the Book of Acts happen in our services.”

God is moving mightily throughout the African Region. In one year alone 73,073 were baptized in Jesus’ name; 103,480 received the baptism of the Holy Spirit in thousands of churches.

We are living in the most tremendous day in the history of the church. Like Daniel we must “set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting” (Daniel 9:3). Like Zechariah we must “Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain” (Zechariah 10:1). Like Hosea we must know “it is time to seek the LORD” (Hosea 10:12). We must accept the same challenge God gave to Jeremiah, “Call unto me and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not” (Jeremiah 33:3).

C. Peter Wagner in his book *Prayer Shield*, stated, “the most massive growth of churches is found in Pentecostal/ Charismatic traditions.” Armed with this understanding, coupled with the statistics and verses given above, I wonder why we persist to believe God will not give us great church growth. Must our churches remain small? Could it be because of our doctrine and standards of holiness that our churches are not growing? Is it really Scriptural for the church to grow?

Churches remain small because we fail to exercise faith for growth. Once we have exercised faith, we must exercise our works and efforts. “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:26). A leadership principle expresses it another way, “Effort In, Results Out!”

Just because we know it is only God who can cause church growth does not give us an excuse to sit back and wait for it to happen. We must sow, plant, and then water the seed. It is after this effort that God will give us the results. If you do not want your church to grow, it will not grow. Each time you set a goal for your church to grow, you are making a statement of faith.

One man said there were three secrets to success. The first, work. The second, work. The third, work. Church growth is hard work.

Our doctrine or standards of holiness could not be considered as reasons for lack of church growth. Of course, if you are looking for an excuse, any excuse will do. People all over the world are hungry for the truth. They are searching for something original and life changing. The beginning of the Church is found in the Book of Acts. Even organizations following the Trinitarian tradition acknowledge the church was born in Acts 2. Our doctrine is clearly stated in Acts 2. This doctrine was strange to the Jews who were assembled in Jerusalem for the Pentecost. Surely the church would, and could not grow. Wrong. It did grow and 3,000 were added to the church on that day. They continued in the Apostles' doctrine, believing and spreading what Peter had given them.

In *Look Out! The Pentecostals Are Coming*, by C. Peter Wagner, there is an interesting review of the United Pentecostal Church of Columbia. He writes, "Some Pentecostals won't even want me to mention this third point. But it is true that by far the fastest growing church in Columbia is the United Pentecostal Church. The United Pentecostal Church is somewhat unorthodox because it baptizes, not in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, but in the name of Jesus. Its nickname is 'Jesus only.' The United Pentecostal Church refuses to dot the i's and cross the t's of the Council of Nicea (the famous church council of 325 A. D. where the present doctrine of the trinity - three persons in one essence - was articulated and approved.) United Pentecostals, of course, don't agree. They preach salvation by the blood of Christ, and can testify of multitudes of transformed lives as signs of people being born again. They believe in the Holy Spirit, in baptism in the Spirit, and speaking in tongues. They consider themselves true Pentecostals, as their name implies. They are not Jehovah Witnesses who deny the deity of Christ. And if anyone doubts their spiritual power, they could simply point to a graph which compares their church growth to that of the next largest Pentecostal Church."

A book has been written by Dean Kelley called, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing*. Again, Wagner in *Look Out! The Pentecostals are Coming* reveals UPCI opposes Christian involvement in organized sports, politics, labour unions, and are strict. Women do not cut their hair, and apparel must be up to rigid standards of modesty. Members do not attend dances or theaters, and consider television and secular music to be worldly. The United Pentecostal Church Manual says, "We warn all of our believers to abstain from any of these practices in the interest of spiritual growth and the soon coming of the Lord for His church."

Wagner records, "It would be easy to draw the conclusion that such standards would quickly render the United Pentecostal Church irrelevant to contemporary Colombian society.....It might well be, therefore, that the strictness of the United Pentecostals in Columbia is actually one of the causes of the fact that they are the largest and fastest growing church in the nation."

Study Questions

1. Comment about church growth in the African Region. _____

2. We are living in the most tremendous day in church history. What must we do to take advantage of this? _____

3. What did C. Peter Wagner say about the Pentecostal movement? _____

4. What is the leadership principle regarding “effort” used in this lesson? _____

5. What are three secrets to success? _____

6. Where is our basic fundamental doctrine found in the Bible? _____

7. Can our doctrine be a reason for a lack of church growth? Explain. _____

8. What does the UPCI believe according to C. Peter Wagner? _____

9. Some say that conservative (strong) standards of holiness is a reason for lack of church growth. Is this true in the case of the UPC of Columbia? _____
Explain. _____

10. What are some of the standards of holiness of the UPCI? _____

Additional Notes
