

Higher Quality, Greater Quantity

“And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in numbers daily” (Acts 16:5).

“So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers”
(Acts 16:5 *NIV*).

The secret to successful church growth is found in Acts 9:31(*NIV*), “Then the church... enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

In each Scripture above the churches were “strengthened” and “grew.” It seems that they grew after they were strengthened. They had been taught, revived, and became focused on evangelism. As a result they “grew.”

It is God that gives growth to the church.

“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

In the Book of Acts we find two types of growth in the church.

Quantity

First of all, the early church measured their growth numerically. On the Day of Pentecost 3000 souls were added to the 120. Later 5,000 believed. There was a growth in the number of believers (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 6:7) and in the number of churches (Acts 16:5).

“And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

“And the believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14).

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

The minister needs to be an evangelist before he can become a teacher or a pastor. First, we must win the people. After that, we can pastor and teach them.

Quality

Secondly, the early church measured growth according to quality. The Apostle Paul often reported (or received reports from his assistants) concerning the spiritual status of the church. The leaders took special notice of how the believers did spiritually. They wanted to make sure that the believers moved from elementary (basic) to maturity (advanced) in the things concerning Christian understanding, doctrine, and righteous living.

A. J. Gordon said, “If perchance the church should attract men without at the same time transforming them; if she shall attach them to her membership without assimilating them to her life, she has only weakened herself by her increase and diminished herself by her addition.” (Michael Griffiths, *Get Your Act Together Cinderella: A Call to Today’s Church*)

The purpose of the five-fold ministry is to perfect the saints for the working of the ministry (Ephesians 4:12-13). It is imperative that we are involved in church planting. However, we are also in the church-perfecting business. This means that we look for growth and development in our church in many different ways. We are involved in “continuous improvement.” Our desire is to present a perfected church to the Lord.

“That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27).

As a church, we need to commit ourselves to being the church God planned we should be. We should pray and fast to become what God wants us to be. The secret to accomplishing this is found in the following verses:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:1-2).

Growth in numbers should always be accompanied by spiritual growth.

Many times we are not really growing, but getting spiritually fat. Instead of bringing people to maturity in Christ, we have many additions to the church family—just more spiritual babies. We continue to feed them milk, instead of going on to the meatier things of God. We teach our people the same things week after week (prayer, praises and worship, etc.).

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment” (Hebrews 6:1-2).

“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is









a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:12-6:1).

People demonstrate spiritual childishness when they seek material things (homes, cars, money) first and spiritual things take second place. Material blessings are not wrong. However, we should first seek after the spiritual blessings.

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

How Can We Grow?

Growth needs to be encouraged in the following areas:

-  The body of Christ (Ephesians 4:16).
-  Holiness (Ephesians 5:27).
-  Doctrinal understanding and discipleship (Colossians 1:28, 1 Corinthians 14:20, Hebrews 6:1-3).
-  Giving (2 Corinthians 8:1-5).
-  Commitment to evangelism (Matthew 28:19).
-  Spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:7).
-  Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).
-  Ability to be a witness (Acts 1:8).

Study Questions

1. What is the secret to successful church growth? _____

2. How are churches strengthened? _____

3. As a result of the churches being strengthened, what happened? _____

4. How did the early church measure growth? _____

5. What is the purpose of the five-fold ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12)? _____

6. What is the secret to becoming what God wants us to be? _____

7. What are five areas in which the church needs to grow? _____

8. What type of blessings should a Christian seek for first? _____

9. What are three different foundation doctrines of the church (Hebrews 6:1-2)? _____

10. What do immature Christians continue to feed on since they cannot handle the meat of the Word? _____

11. According to Ephesians 5:27, what type of church will be presented to the Lord?

Additional Notes

