

THE MEANING OF CHURCH GROWTH (Matthew 28:18-20)

I. Numerical growth.

- A. When you read through the book of Acts, you see numerical growth.
 - 1. Acts 1:15.
 - 2. Acts 2:41-47.
 - 3. Acts 4:4.
 - 4. Acts 5:14.
 - 5. Acts 6:1.
 - 6. Acts 9:31 points to geographical expansion which had to mean numerical expansion as well.
 - 7. Acts 12:24.
 - 8. Acts 19:20.
 - 9. Acts 21:20.
 - 10. Outside of Acts, we have Colossians 1:23..
- B. If we are going to be biblical, we have to be interested in numbers.
 - 1. As numbers increase, the church grows.
 - 2. This is seen in souls being saved.
- C. God has to think pretty highly of numbers to have mentioned them so much in the book of Acts.
- D. In reality, real numerical growth only occurs when people are added to the church through obedience to the gospel.
- E. Here is where some get into trouble though.
 - 1. They focus so much on numbers that their definition of obedience to the gospel gets skewed.
 - 2. They will accept anyone and everyone into the body.
 - 3. If someone has been baptized into a denomination they are accepted.
 - 4. If someone simply says they've been saved, they're accepted.
 - 5. That is not growth.
 - a. Numbers may go up but it is not true growth.
 - b. It isn't because the gospel hasn't been obeyed.
- F. We need to be concerned about numerical growth when it comes to conversions because that is true growth.

II. Spiritual growth.

- A. This type of growth is developed in the body of Christ.
 - 1. This applies to all members, new or old.
 - 2. The quest for this type growth is also seen in Acts.
 - a. Acts 2:42.
 - b. Acts 16:5.
- B. The objective of this type growth is found in Ephesians 4:15.
- C. It is progress in Christ-likeness, being more like Christ each day.
- D. When you read through what are known as the General Epistles, the need for growth and how to achieve it is stressed.

1. 2 Peter 1:5-7.
 2. Ephesians 4:13.
 3. 2 Peter 3:18.
 4. Philippians 2:5.
 5. 1 Peter 1:15-16.
 6. Romans 12:1-2.
- E. The only way this type growth occurs is through Bible study.
1. The more Bible we know, the more we can apply it to our everyday problems and cares.
 2. In reality, if a congregation is full of members who are Christ-like, the goal of this growth, then people in the world will take notice.
- F. This has to take place, but we can't let it keep us from evangelizing.
1. We are to teach the world as well as ourselves (Matthew 28:19-20).
 2. If we truly grow in Christ-likeness, we will grow in our love for the lost and the carrying out of the mission of Christ (Luke 19:10).
- G. We have to have balance.

III. **Organization of efforts.**

- A. God, as we mentioned this morning, has always been and always will be a God of order (1 Corinthians 14:33).
1. There is real and needed place for organization in the church.
 2. As the saying goes, you plan the work and work the plan.
 3. Church growth won't happen haphazardly.
 4. Good leadership will develop a good plan for growth and how to use new members and existing members in the work of the church.
- B. Notice a lengthy passage (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).
1. Every member is important.
 2. Each member has different needs and abilities.
 3. Leadership is tasked with the responsibility of organizing this complex group of souls and lead that same group in a way that pleases God.
- C. For that reason, God has established the need for an eldership in every congregation (Ephesians 4:11).
- D. However, we can program ourselves to death.
1. We can focus so much on organization that the leadership fails to focus on evangelism and even spiritual growth.
 2. It can become a hindrance instead of a help.
- E. The right balance of programs and efforts is key to maintaining growth.

IV. **Missions.**

- A. We are to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15).
1. This means we are to have a world vision.
 2. One writer stated, "We must begin in our "Jerusalem" and then go into the next town, and then into the next, etc."
- B. This is exactly what was recorded in the book of Acts.
1. It started in Jerusalem.

2. It was then preached in Judea, Galilee and Samaria.
 3. The gospel then went to Caesaria and Antioch.
 4. Then it began to spread over Asia Minor and into Europe.
- C. As we noticed earlier, Paul could say by inspiration that the gospel had been preached to every creature during his lifetime.
- D. It is amazing to think that those brethren in the 1st century with limited means of travel and knowledge of where to go accomplished such a tremendous task.
1. I'm thankful for the advent of the internet age in regards to the spreading of the gospel.
 2. I'm thankful for the technology that is available that can send the gospel to some of the remotest places in the world.
 3. We can accomplish this task again.
- E. A growing church is a mission minded church.
- F. However, there are some that say that mission work is the most important thing and neglect the local work of evangelization.
1. Many excuses are given for this.
 2. Some say, we've tried around here and aren't getting anything so we are focusing on Africa.
 3. Others say that there is so much more readiness to accept the word in other parts of the world that our money needs to go there.
- G. Your next door neighbor is a mission point if he's not a Christian.
- H. We are all missionaries in the truest sense of the world.
- I. There has to be a balance of emphasizing local evangelization as well as world wide evangelization.

V. Members moving from one congregation to another.

- A. This type growth only affects the numbers present at a service.
- B. It is not true biblical growth because a soul has not been added to the body of Christ when a person changes congregations.
- C. This is going to happen for different reasons.
1. Some live far away from the congregation they have been attending and want to move.
 2. Some move into a new town and thus are in search of a new congregation.
 3. It may be that things are unscriptural at one place so a new congregation is sought.
 4. More reasons than this cause this happen but these are some.
- D. There is nothing wrong with this.
1. We've benefitted here at West Walker from new brethren coming in from other congregations.
 2. We've also suffered at the loss of some our brethren who went elsewhere for various reasons.
- E. We can't count on this or promote this type of moving.
- F. I hope it is never said of us that we are actively recruiting members of other congregations to come here.

- G. This has been done by brethren, but it is not a true measure of growth.
- H. It is God's desire that each Christian be associated with a local congregation of the Lord's people.
 - 1. There is much benefit and blessing to this.
 - 2. If it is the case that someone would be better served somewhere else or here, that is understandable, but we need to be giving our all to the congregation of which we are a part while we are there.

VI. Restoration.

- A. The New Testament is implicitly clear about the need for restoring the lost.
 - 1. Galatians 6:1.
 - 2. James 5:19-20.
- B. The parables of the lost coin, lost sheep and lost son all point to this.
- C. The fact is, we are our brother's keepers.
 - 1. We must be interested in the souls of those who are members here or members of any other congregation who have fallen away.
 - 2. Those souls are just as important as the soul of someone who has never obeyed the gospel.
 - 3. There ought to be a sense of urgency on our part in evangelism but especially for a family member, spiritually speaking, who is in danger of losing his or her soul.
- D. We'd have to have a lot of additions or new buildings built if we could get back a percentage of fallen away Christians.
 - 1. I remember riding around the roads around here with Neil on occasion or Gene.
 - 2. It struck me how often they would point to a house and mention that the person who lived there used to go to church here or somewhere else but have since fallen away.
- E. The fact is, we've got people who are not here today who should be but have fallen away.
- F. Restoring the lost is a vital aspect of church growth.
- G. Think how large we would be if we could get back half of the people who have fallen away?

From a book by br. J.J. Turner entitled, "How To Have Biblical Church Growth".