



Growth: Acts Perspective

Acts 6:7 -- And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

Introduction

1. The book of Acts is a historical book written by Luke as a follow-up to his gospel. It is written to Theophilus (a lover of God) to give a careful and accurate account of the spread of the gospel after the ascension of Christ.
2. The book provides us a model for church growth and incredible examples of faith and conviction. It serves as a witness to spur us on to the work we have to do as elders, deacons, evangelists, teachers and saints.
3. The book of Acts records for us the beginning of the church to a point when it has its foothold in every part of the Roman Empire. In just over 30 years we witness the phenomenal growth of the church and, in the process of providing the historical account, we are given the ingredients necessary for growth.

A. A Scriptural Concept?

1. We are drawn to the book of Acts because we seek to do all we can to aid the growth of our congregation today. As we examine this book we must first ask ourselves if a focus on growth is a scriptural concept.
2. In fact, some of our brethren have indicated that true growth is going to weed out the weak and uncommitted and therefore cause a "spiritual" growth, but more than likely, not growth in numbers.
3. Are we mistaken in looking for a pattern to achieve numerical growth? No. God seems to have always been concerned about numbers. In 2 Peter 3:9, the apostle says that God does not wish any to perish, but desires all to be saved.
4. In Acts 2:21, Peter also quotes from Joel: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." God has made provision for all. That is His goal.
5. Paul further comments: "How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:14-15).
6. God cares about every single soul, therefore, we should also. In point of fact then, it should be our goal that the church grows in number.

B. References to Numbers

1. Luke records, in several places in the book of Acts, references to the numerical growth of the church. In Acts 2:41 he mentions that 3000 were added that day; in 4:4 he says the number of men came to be 5000; in 5:14 he states multitudes of men and women were constantly added; in 6:7 the number of disciples was greatly increased; and in 21:20 there were many thousands (perhaps as much as 10,000) among the Jews who believed.
2. In Acts 9:42; 11:21,26; 14:1,21; 17:12; 18:8 the general references are to many, large, considerable numbers, great multitudes and many disciples. Luke quite often paints a picture of a flood of people that are giving their lives to God.
3. But even in all this plethora of increase, there is a caution that needs to be observed. God is not just concerned with the quantity of numbers, but even in quantity, with the quality of the numbers.

C. Caution Regarding Numbers

1. God never compromises truth to gain numbers. Over and over in the book of Acts it depicts the men of conviction who hold to the truth, even if rejected by the majority.

2. Note Peter's confrontation with the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:19-20; or Stephen in Acts 7 before the same group, even as it is becoming more hostile. Paul is rejected by the Jews in Antioch for his stance in Acts 13:50 and again there are those that reject his solid presentation of the truth in Athens (Acts 17:33-34).
3. Although many were coming to the truth, the vast majority of people were indifferent or antagonistic to the truth, yet it was never compromised to gain the masses.
4. God always causes the growth. We do not. We are merely servants accomplishing God's will. If we think that numerical and spiritual growth originates from us then we will divide and destroy the church, as was the case in Corinth. Instead, we must hold to the truth and follow God's direction and then, through us, God will accomplish His work.

1 Corinthians 3:5-7 -- What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.

5. Growth is not the focus in Acts, it is the result of dedicated men and women spreading the word, by faith, to a lost world.

D. Growth Comes with a Price

If we are serious about the growth of the church, then we have to be willing to pay the price for that growth to occur. The two basic elements of that price are:

1. Personal Dedication to God.

- The beginning of the book of Acts vividly describes the devotion of the Christians. They were continually devoting themselves to the truth, each other, remembering Christ, and trusting in God (Acts 2:42). This description is early in the book because it forms the foundation of the growth experienced in the church.

Acts 2:42 -- And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostle's teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

- They were willing to sacrifice their earthly wealth (Acts 4:32-37), their freedom (Acts 4:18-20), and even their lives (Acts 7:60; 12:2). The attitude displayed by these early Christians is what fueled the growth of the church.

2. Rejection by Men.

- Paul made a list of some of the hardships he went through to serve Christ and spread the word to the lost (2 Corinthians 11:22-29). All of these near death experiences he went through in the time covered by the book of Acts. He states in verses 28-29 that the reason he suffered these was out of concern for the churches because of the conspiracies that originated even from those within who apparently had hearts of the wrong kind of soil.
- Almost every page of the book of Acts is some description of servants of God suffering rejection by Jews, Gentiles, leaders, the people, false brethren, heretics, etc. They paid the price because of their love for God, but also because of their love for souls. This love paved the way for growth: quantitative as well as qualitative.