

CHURCH GROWTH OR KINGDOM GROWTH WHAT IS YOUR TARGET

By Rev. G. Robert Cox

There is a growing tendency within the Christian churches around the world to concentrate on growing large churches. Some have reported membership totals of fifty thousand or more. The number of churches reporting memberships above ten thousand has increased at an almost unbelievable rate. At no time in the recorded history of the Christian church has the percentage of mega churches of total churches been so high. The sale of books and literature on church growth has reached levels exceeding other types of Christian literature.

Much has been written on this subject both pro and con. What we need to consider is what God says to us through His word. Now is the time for searching God's word to determine where and how we should proceed. The choice must be made based on His word only. Man conceived ideas will not satisfy God.

1Co 1:25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

A reading of 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verses 18 through 31 speaks to this issue. This says that the greatest wisdom comes from God and his word. When we base our purpose on committee meetings and worldly based surveys we leave God out of the picture. Too many of the methods and plans related to present day church growth are focused on numerical growth. God is looking for spiritual growth. When a church grows spiritually the natural result is an increase in evangelism, discipleship, and true worship bringing God Praise and Honor. When we glorify His son Jesus Christ by taking the Gospel message to the lost God is glorified. We must present the whole truth to those who are lost and in desperate need of a savior. When we make it comfortable and pleasant for the lost we are not being true to the Gospel of Christ. We make a mockery of the Cross of Christ.

Matthew recorded how Jesus expects us to answer the title question:

Mat 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

This one verse is the key to real growth. God is more concerned with our spiritual growth than with the numbers of members we can count in our congregation. Please understand that God is interested in adding new believers, but He wants them to be true believers.

*1Ti 2:3-4 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, (4) who desires all men to be saved and **to come to the knowledge of the truth.***

Peter's first sermon after Pentecost is a perfect example of the message sinners need to hear. This was not a seeker friendly service. All through the New Testament we do not find a soft sell of salvation. The sinner must know he needs a savior before he can accept Christ as Savior. We are only cleansed of our sins by the Blood of Christ shed on the Cross of Calvary. Nothing else said, written, or performed will cleanse us of sin. The message of the Cross has disappeared from many modern day churches.

The message of the Cross is the beginning point on our journey to the knowledge of the truth. There are many books on the subject of the cross. Most were written in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. The last half of the twentieth century saw a transformation of the Christian church. This change began in the US and in English churches. The Charismatic revival brought about a renewed interest in the infilling of the Holy Spirit. However as with all major events in the life of the Christian church God's truth was perverted. What has transpired over the last thirty to forty years has brought the world into the Church. The result should have been that the church would have taken Christ to the world so the lost would be saved.

The only way to recovery for the Christian church is complete surrender. Not to surrender to the world and give up, but to surrender to Christ and give up our worldly ideas. The only hope for the future is to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Nothing we can devise, conceive, plan, or initiate in our own wisdom or knowledge can be successful. We must be ever on guard against relying on man conceived plans and methods instead of God's Word. God will reveal the truth of His word through the Holy Spirit.

John 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

Jas 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

What is becoming clear is that we cannot rely on our own power. When we plan, create, conceive, or attempt to carry out ministry without God we will fail. The only way to follow God and His plan is to surrender. We must lay down our life and our plans and programs and allow the Holy Spirit to work through us. Total surrender is to give everything to God without reservation.

Before we can lead others to a life of service we must come to understand the message of the Cross. Then we must live out the message of the Cross. The Message of the Cross reveals the three aspects of the Cross. The first is that Christ died for us on the Cross of Calvary. The second aspect is that Christ died as us and we died with Him. The third aspect is that we are dying daily with Christ. The first two aspects of the Cross happened once for all while the third aspect of the Cross continues until we cross that great divide into the Eternal Presence of God. We have a separate study on the Three Aspects of the Cross available for study that gives a more complete look at the Cross.

Salvation is the beginning point of our life as a Christian, not the period at the end of the sentence of our life. Many Christians do not grow and serve God because they lack discipleship. The easy way is to be satisfied with salvation and simply reflect the appearance of a Christian without the surrender and life long service to God. When a person can attend a church and be lost in a crowd of thousands they are not useful in extending the Kingdom of God. They only contribute to the attendance count. God is looking for sons and daughters whose love for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit cancels any selfish ambitions or desires. Praise God there is still a remnant of believers willing to surrender all for Him.

Few people fully understand the depths of surrendering to Christ. Surrender means to give up your rights, to relinquish your control of your life. The greatest enemy to our serving God is self. Paul says we are to consider the old man, our sinful nature, to be dead.

Rom 6:6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

Rom 6:11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Eph 4:22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,

We should know that when Christ died as us the old nature also died. As born again Christians and knowing this we are to put off the old man. This is the beginning of spiritual growth. We cannot instantly change from our old selfish ways, but we can begin to put off our old ways as God reveals them to us. The Holy Spirit will guide and convict us as we continue to surrender to God. This is the process by which the Kingdom of God grows. We need the power of the Holy Spirit in order to grow and to begin to serve God. There is only one way that can happen. We must allow God to bless us with the Holy Spirit. God desires for us to have the fullness of the power of the Holy Spirit, however we can stop the blessing. God will not force it on us, nor can any other person stop what God desires to do.

Act 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

When we begin to read and study the Word of God the Holy Spirit will give us understanding of the Word as we have need of it. Paul said in Eph 1:3 that God has blessed us with "**every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ**". Paul further said in Eph 2:10 that God prepared good works for us before the foundation of the world. Because the understanding, the good works, His will, and the power of the Holy Spirit have always been there we must now begin to allow them to be active in our lives. This will only come as we seek God in prayer and in His word. John begins his Gospel this way:

Joh 1:1-4 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (2) He was in the beginning with God. (3) All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. (4) In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

A wonderful thing will happen as we seek Christ in His word. We will begin to see that the Word is truly Jesus Christ and that the Word is a living person. What a glorious revelation for anyone who desires to serve Him with their life.

The only way a teacher can be effective is to believe what they are teaching. For Christians it means allowing God to form our beliefs with his word and through the power of the Holy Spirit teaching the wonderful truth of Christ.

The question remains, what is your target? Will you seek numbers or will you seek the Kingdom of God? Consider this verse from Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

Eph 4:1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,