

# The Brown Street Beacon

*"...Shine out among them like beacon lights,*

*holding out to them the Word of Life" (Phil 2:15-16)*



Volume 2

December 7, 2014

Number. 42

## Church Growth

**T**he New Testament church was a growing church. If we study church history from the book of Acts, we learn that the church faced many obstacles. There were some who did not believe and caused trouble for those who would preach the gospel (Acts 17:5). There were those in the church who fell short of their obligations (Acts 5:1-11). There were even some doctrinal problems which confronted the church (Acts 15). Yet, the church grew. Should we not learn from the New Testament church that growth is indeed possible? We need not make excuses for not growing. Instead, we need to be as busy as we can in doing those things that will enhance growth.

The power behind growth in the New Testament was the Word of God. In Acts 2 Peter preached the Word and three thousand souls were converted to Christ (Acts 2:36-41). Yes, Peter spoke by the inspiration of the Spirit, and folks were astonished by the miracle of tongue speaking on that occasion, but the conversion of the three thousand is still traced back to the Word. Signs and wonders simply confirmed the words spoken by preachers of that day (Mark 16:20). The inspired Word is what caused so many to turn to Jesus. They believed what they heard and their hearts were pricked. "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? (Acts 2:37). It was this question that led to their baptism, and it was the Word of God that led them to ask the question. Acts 2:41 says, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized..."

The Word has not lost its power. Church growth still depends on the Word. Paul indicated such in Rom. 1:16: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth..." The gospel still has the power to penetrate the heart of the lost soul; however, it has obvious limitations. It cannot preach itself. There must be a sower to plant the seed in the ground if there is to be fruit produced. Such is the case with the gospel, which is the spiritual seed of the kingdom. We must be determined to sow it into the hearts of men. If we will develop the attitude that first century Christians had toward preaching the Word, the church will grow. In Acts 8:1-4 we find Christians, even after severe persecution, going everywhere preaching the Word. This is what we must do, for "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14).

In regard to the local church, there are other things to consider concerning church growth. A local church should be concerned with having a good worship service. Our services should be uplifting and edifying. We accomplish this, not by getting involved in entertainment and recreation, but by following the pattern set forth in the New Testament, and by worshipping God with the right spirit (John 4:24). Commitment and sincerity should be made obvious by our services. The way we pray,

sing, observe the Lord's supper and listen to the preaching of God's Word reveals the overall spiritual make-up of the congregation. The atmosphere is important when visitors come who are looking for a church. Bible studies can be obtained when people visit regularly because they enjoy the worship service. People moving in from out of town look for a congregation with good worship services. Some of them need to be taught, but others are already good sound Christians who will be attracted to a congregation in which the services are orderly and the commitment is obvious. Worship service is enhanced and more edifying when everything is done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40). If this exist in a local church, and if the preaching is sound, not dynamic or entertaining, but clear and scriptural, the church will have a greater chance to grow.

Being friendly to all visitors is another important factor. When people come to visit a local church, they want to feel comfortable. If they do not feel comfortable, they probably will not come back, even if everything is done scripturally. One thing that makes people comfortable is to be treated kindly. We should let all of our visitors know that we are happy and excited that they have come to be with us. We should express our joy to them and be sure to invite them back. Once people feel comfortable among us, they can relax and begin to appreciate the scriptural nature of all that we do in our assemblies.

Another thing that is important in regard to church growth is having good Bible classes. I realize that the kind of Bible class arrangement that we have is not commanded by God. We are commanded to study, but the class room arrangement is simply an expediency to carry out that command. Nevertheless, if we are going to have Bible classes, we must strive to have the best classes we can. Again, that is brought about by being sure that what is taught in these classes is Bible doctrine. We must abide in the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42). People who come to worship God tend to appreciate a Bible based study where they learn more about God's will or have their already existing knowledge reaffirmed and strengthened.

Ultimately it is the Lord Who adds to the church (Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 3:6, 7). However, church growth is not completely out of our hands. We have some responsibility too. There are things that we can do that will better lead to God giving the increase. Let's do our part.

*Don*

## Thoughts About Marriage

**Aaron Erhardt**

- ***God's plan for marriage is simple.*** He intends for each man to have his own wife for life. Divorce is not part of the plan. Polygamy, Homosexuality, and bestiality are not part of the plan either. One man with one woman for life!
- ***Marriage, according to God, involves a "leaving" and "cleaving."*** Man is to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. His new relationship must take priority over his former relationship. "The bond between husband and wife is closer than the bond between any other people on earth" (DeHoff's Commentary, Vol. I, pp. 14-15)'.

• **Marriage is a good thing. It was instituted for our benefit.** Solomon wrote, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord" (Proverbs 18:22). Marriage provides companionship and a safe and sanctified way to procreate. It also prevents sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 7:2).

• **Some people believe that celibacy is somehow a "holier" or "higher" state than marriage.** That is simply not true. God said it was "not good" for man to be alone. The Hebrews writer said that marriage "is honorable." Although the scriptures do give us the right to remain celibate, they do not affirm in any way that such practice is more pleasing to God than marriage.

• **The Bible is clear as to who can marry.** (1) The one who has never been married. (2) The one who has divorced his companion for fornication. (3) The one whose companion has died. (4) The one who reconciles with his companion after they have divorced. No one else has the right to marry.