

The Advantages Of Church Growth

Introduction. One of my favorite passages from the Old Testament is Daniel 2:44. The kingdom established by Jesus Christ is the one kingdom that will endure forever. It has no end. Not only is this kingdom a great kingdom, but the God whom we serve in the kingdom is a great God. He is the only God. His royal majesty and authority are second to none.

Furthermore, our great God has given us a great work to do in His kingdom. It is a work that was given first to the disciples of Jesus, and then to all who would follow Him (Mark 16:15-16). We might think it an uncomfortable "chore," but it is fantastic that God would give to people like us the amazing task of taking His word to the world! Who are we that we should be given such a responsibility? Who were the disciples to whom Jesus first gave this work? They were ordinary people with ordinary occupations. They must have been stunned when Jesus said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Surely it seemed like an impossible task, but they did it and were successful.

I wonder if they might have thought, "Let's do this on a small scale, and maybe we can handle it." But they did not keep it small. From its beginning, the church experienced explosive growth! I sometimes wonder if the "small scale" attitude they did not have is an attitude we may have inadvertently picked up. Smallness, weakness, and lack of success seem to be ingrained in some Christians. We cannot be content with that disposition, especially in light of the fact that we are part of a great kingdom.

When thinking about churches, it is a common belief held by many that smaller is better. We recently explored that idea and examined what are perceived as disadvantages in allowing a church to grow. Having answered those, we need to see the other side of the coin. What advantages are there to working hard, converting many souls, keeping a group together (as opposed to breaking off and starting little groups), and allowing the church to grow?

I. *A Larger Congregation Can Meet The Needs Of Association Better*

- A. Christians, young and old, need association (Acts 1:13-14; 2:46; 1 Corinthians 16:17-18; 2 Timothy 1:16). Is smaller better? Young people in small churches often have no Christian friends their own age. If their need for association is not found among God's people, it will be found among people of the world (1 Corinthians 15:33).
- B. Parents usually want their children to have more Christian friends their own age with which to associate. Everyone hopefully understands that this does not automatically mean that they will make it to heaven, but a larger congregation provides an advantage, not a disadvantage.

- C. You do not have to accept the myth that when churches grow, they get impersonal. The family of God in Jerusalem was able to maintain the "one heart and one soul" concept even though they numbered in the thousands (Acts 4:32). What they did, we can also do.
- D. An advantage as you grow is you can associate more with those whom you have so much in common (2 Peter 1:1). This is true among teens, young married couples, widows, etc. During our Vacation Bible Schools, which mainly focus on children and teenagers, we have around 50 children present. Would fewer have been better?

II. ***A Larger Congregation Has Greater Resources From Which To Draw***

- A. The variety of backgrounds and abilities in our congregation means a larger talent pool from which to draw (Ephesians 4:16). We are blessed with tremendous talents in this congregation and we can do outstanding work (Acts 13:1-3).
- B. On the other hand, consider what happens when a church divides, even under good circumstances. The talent pool is split, often resulting in two struggling groups. Sadly, they may never have elders and deacons.
- C. Smaller congregations often have trouble just surviving financially. They do little outside support, because they have none to give. You sometimes find two or three small churches in one community, each struggling to survive and none large enough to support itself. There is no virtue in a number of congregations, but in the number of Christians -- the number of souls saved!
- D. An economy of scale is reached after initial expenses are met. All excess can then be put toward evangelism. Doubling the size of a church does not double expenses. While the meeting house and utilities may cost more, they are not doubled. What is doubled is the contribution. Our congregation supports seven preachers. If we broke up into two small groups, probably neither one could support their own preacher.

III. ***A Larger Congregation Can Edify More Effectively***

- A. The church assembly is designed to edify (1 Corinthians 14:12, 26). What was it like to come together in Jerusalem and sing God's praises with more than 10,000 believers? After fighting the world all week long, you have this multitude coming together to support one another (1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:3).
- B. I would rather have four saints singing to encourage me than two. I would rather have 40 than four. I would rather have 400 than 40. I

would rather have 4,000 than 400. God deserves the praise of more, and I need the encouragement of more!

- C. Do you feel better when many come together as opposed to few? Certainly, a few Christians can gather together and edify one another effectively; and it is obvious that they can worship God acceptably. But, are you not more encouraged when more come together to praise God? At one dying church a brother said, "If one more person leaves, we might as well close the doors." That is hardly an edifying situation.
- D. The church is the pillar and support of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). At its core, it is a teaching institution.
 - 1. We ought to use all the means at our disposal, as did Paul (Acts 20:20). However, the smaller the congregation, the less media teaching it can do (radio, TV, Internet, newspaper, etc.). One church had a successful radio work, converting many; they grew and divided because they were getting "too big." That ended the radio program and took away the opportunities!
 - 2. A larger church can have a far more diverse and personalized course of study for all of its members and their children. Some parents might say, "I like a small church," then complain about the fact that there are no adequate Bible classes for their children in the small congregation.

IV. ***A Larger Congregation Can Be A Greater Aid In Reaching The Lost***

- A. Remember that our mission is taking the gospel to the lost wherever they are (Isaiah 66:19; Luke 19:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:8; Revelation 14:6).
 - 1. The Assemblies of God denomination has been one of the fastest growing groups for the past 30 years.
 - 2. Why? One reason is that they realized that a little frame Assembly of God building on every corner was inefficient. They began to close and consolidate. That gave them more money, more visibility, and more opportunities to teach by media.
- B. Can we not be as wise as others (Matthew 10:16; Luke 16:8)? If they can grow without the truth, can we not grow with the truth? We must have more concern for the growth of the kingdom as a whole, rather than what "I prefer."
- C. A congregation in a university town has a door to the whole world. It has students in its community from all parts of the globe. What an opportunity for evangelism! You can take Christ to where He is not named (Romans 15:20).

Conclusion. Do smaller congregations have a right to exist? Of course they do. There is nothing wrong with being in a smaller congregation. Yet,

some of the attitudes we have about this may be wrong. When someone says, "I like a small church," what will they do if the church grows? When people say, "Large congregations are unfriendly," are they not painting with too broad of a brush? When folks argue that "You cannot know everyone in a large church," is that an excuse for not doing evangelism? When someone says, "There is no work for me to do in a large congregation," does that not show a lack of understanding of the real work of evangelism?

Statements like these are often accepted as gospel truth. As a result, we have lost the picture of what the church can be. It is much like adjusting the knobs on an old television; if you twist enough knobs, you will lose the picture. When people lose the picture in evangelism, they sit instead of go.

Evangelism is God's great work -- a work He has given us to do! Let us not be convinced that the days of aggressive evangelism were limited to the first century (Acts 8:4). God wants all men to be saved. If we are content with the number of souls we have now, we will never take seriously our Lord's work of saving the world. We need to be, in this generation, what God intended us to be. Let us act from faith, not fear!

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