

Kingdom Expansion through Multiplication

Part 5

AN INTRODUCTION TO CHURCH GROWTH

KEY VERSE:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.

(Matthew 16:18)

INTRODUCTION

In the last teaching you learned of the responsibility of each believer to multiply spiritually by sharing the Gospel message.

God has a special plan for new believers raised up by this process.

They are to become part of a fellowship of believers known as the Church.

Believers are to reproduce individually within the context of the Church. As new believers are born again into the Kingdom of God, the Church is multiplied.

This teaching introduces God's plan for the Church as a center of spiritual multiplication.

The following four teachings deal with specific types of church growth.

THE CHURCH

When we speak of the "Church," we are not talking about a man-made organization or denomination.

It is not a product of history or the result of a plan thought up by man.

The word "Church" actually means "the called out ones."

When we speak of the Church, we are talking about the world-wide fellowship of all true believers who have been called out of the world into the Kingdom of God.

For purposes of ministry, this world-wide fellowship of believers is divided into local groups of believers.

These local groups are also called the Church.

Some of these local groups have remained independent.

Others have joined together in organizations such as Springs of Revival Church, the Assemblies Of God, Baptist, Methodist, etc.

You do not become part of the true Church by joining an organization.

You become part of the true Church by being born again into the Kingdom of God.

This is done by confessing and repenting to Jesus and accepting Jesus as your personal Savior.

After you become a believer, God's plan is for you to become part of a local fellowship of believers which is part of the true Church.

HOW THE CHURCH BEGAN

In the Old Testament the nation of Israel was chosen as the group of people through which God would reveal Himself to the nations of the world.

Over and over, Israel failed in this responsibility.

In New Testament times when Jesus came to earth, Israel rejected Him as their Messiah.

Because of this, God raised up another group of people through which to reveal Himself to the world.

That group is called the Church.

The first mention of the word "Church" is when Jesus explained how the Church would be built:

**And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.
(Matthew 16:18)**

In this passage Jesus revealed that Peter would be one of the spiritual foundation stones of the first church.

This meant he would be important in its growth and development.

Peter's name actually meant "a rock or a stone."

Jesus then said of Himself, "...upon THIS rock I will build my Church."

He indicated that the Church would be established upon Him.

He would be THE rock upon which the Church was built.

There would be many other lesser stones (people like Peter).

In fact, believers are called "living stones" which are part of the structure of the Church:

Ye also as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. (I Peter 2:5)

The foundation of these "living stones" is a "Rock."

That Rock is Jesus and it defines the limits of the Church.

A Church is not a true Church unless it is built upon the Lord Jesus Christ and His Love.

Over the years many different church denominations have developed for purposes of organization and ministry.

If they are a true Church founded on Christ, they are all part of the one world-wide fellowship of believers:

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

One Lord, one faith, one baptism.

One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Ephesians 4:4-6)

Jesus said the "gates of Hell " would not prevail against the true Church.

This implied that the Church would experience great opposition from Satan, but would not be defeated.

The book of Acts in the Bible records the first opposition to the Church (Acts 8).

Throughout history to the present time, the Church has received much opposition, but it still exists and it will continue to exist.

It will fulfill the purposes of God.

HOW THE CHURCH IS DESCRIBED

The Bible uses several illustrations to describe the Church.

These examples reveal much about the structure and purpose of the Church.

Look up each of the following references in your Bible. The Church is described as:

- A new man: Ephesians 2:14-15
- The Body of Christ: Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:30; I Corinthians 12:27
- The temple or building of God: Ephesians 2:21-22; I Corinthians 3:9,16; I Timothy 3:15; I Peter 2:5
- A royal priesthood: I Peter 2:5,9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10
- The Bride of Christ: II Corinthians 11:2; Matthew 25:6; Ephesians 5:22-32
- The household of God: Ephesians 2:19
- The flock of God: John 10:1-29; I Peter 5:3-4; Hebrews 13:20; Acts 20:28

There is one Church but it is referred to in the Bible in different ways.

It is called:

- The Church of God: Acts 20:28; I Corinthians 1:2;10:32; 11:22; 15:9; I Timothy 3:5; I Thessalonians 2:14
- The Church of the living God: I Timothy 3:15
- The Church of Christ: Romans 16:16
- The Church of the firstborn: Hebrews 12:23
- The Church of the Saints: I Corinthians 14:33

- The people of God: Hebrews 4:9; I Peter 2:9-10

SCRIPTURAL PURPOSES FOR THE CHURCH

There are many purposes of the Church revealed in the Bible.

Its members are to be engaged in:

WORSHIP OF GOD:

The greatest purpose for which man was created was to worship God.

Worship is a central purpose of the Church.

Study the following verses: I Peter 2:5,9; I Corinthians 14:26-27; John 4:23-24; Ephesians 2:19-22.

SERVICE WITHIN THE BODY:

Members of the Church are to serve by ministering to the needs of each other:

- These needs may be material needs: Acts 11:27-30; Acts 6:1-6.
- Members are to freely share their substance with others: Acts 2:44;4:32, 34,37
- Members should also show care for the spiritual needs within the Body of Christ: John 15:1-7; Romans 15:1-15; I Corinthians 3:9; Galatians 6:1; Colossians 2:16-23; I Thessalonians 2:7-16.

FELLOWSHIP:

- The fellowship of the Church is based on unity in Christ: Ephesians 4:4-6
- The Church is made one in Christ: Ephesians 2:11-18. Each member is equal before the Lord: Ephesians 2:19-20.
- The Church is to be a community of fellowship in word, prayer, and deed: Acts 2:41-47; 4:24,32-33; Ephesians 2:20-22; I John.
- Their fellowship is to be united with one purpose, mind, soul, and heart: Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24,32; 5:12; 15:25

The fellowship is not only to be within individual churches but also between churches.

Study the following verses which illustrate the close fellowship between the early churches:

- They recognized they were one in Christ with a common bond: Acts 15:1; Romans 15:26-27
- They regularly communicated with one another: Romans 16:16; I Corinthians 16:19-20; Philippians 4:23
- They helped one another: Romans 15:26; I Corinthians 16:1-3.
- They supported the apostles' labor in other fields: Philippians 4:15-16
-They shared letters from the apostles: Colossians 4:16.
- They sent representatives to one another: Acts 11:22,23,27; 15:1,2; I Corinthians 16:3,4
- They encouraged one another as models of the faith: II Corinthians 1:24; 9:2; I Thessalonians 1:7-10; 2:14
- They cooperated in the common cause of evangelism: I Thessalonians 1:8.

MISSION:

The Church exists for mission, not just for meetings of worship and fellowship.

The purpose of both Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament was to reveal God to the world.

In the Old Testament, Israel was to be a witness to the heathen nations around them.

The strategy of God was for nations to come and see His power revealed in Israel.

In the New Testament, God's strategy was different.

His plan was for the Church to go to the nations as His witnesses.

The true mission of the Church is summarized in Ephesians:

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Ephesians 3:10-11)

Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure, which He hath purposed in Himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in Heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him. (Ephesians 1:9-10)

The mission of the Church is summarized as follows:

1. The Church is to present Jesus to the world as Lord and Savior. The Church is to lead people into the right relationship with Jesus so they may experience forgiveness of sins and new life.
2. Through water baptism teaching, and preaching, the Church is to establish believers in the doctrine, principles, and practices of Christian living. They are to teach converts to "observe all things" commanded in the Word of God.
3. The Church is to organize new believers into functioning local fellowships.
4. These established churches are then to repeat this process to win new believers and establish new fellowships.

Study more about the mission of the Church in the following verses:

To spread the Gospel to the world: Matthew 5:13-14; 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:45-49; John 20:19-23; Acts 1:8.

To serve as salt of the earth and light of the world: Matthew 5:13-16; Philippians 2:14-16; I John 4:1.

To disciple new converts: Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 20:27-28; Ephesians 4:11-16; I Peter 5:1-3.

TYPES OF CHURCH GROWTH

If the Church fulfills its Scriptural purposes, four types of growth will result:

INTERNAL GROWTH:

Internal growth refers to the spiritual growth of the people within the church.

EXPANSION GROWTH:

Expansion growth is growth in numbers which occurs when the mission of evangelism is fulfilled by the Church.

New believers are won and incorporated into the Body of Christ.

EXTENSION GROWTH:

A church extends when it starts new churches in similar cultures.

BRIDGING GROWTH:

Bridging growth occurs when the Gospel is shared across cultural boundaries with people of another race, ethnic group, or nation.

Diagram

Here is a diagram that illustrates the different types of Church growth:

Internal:

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Expansion:

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Extension:

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Bridging:

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You will study each of these types of growth in the next four teachings which concern multiplication within the local Church.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND CHURCH GROWTH

The Holy Spirit is the spiritual power behind all types of church growth:

But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

This verse shows how the Holy Spirit enables:

Internal Growth:

The disciples would receive a new spiritual experience in this special outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

This would enable them to become powerful witnesses of the Gospel.

Expansion Growth:

The church would multiply in Jerusalem.

Extension Growth:

The Church would extend to plant new churches in other similar cultures (Judea).

Bridging Growth:

The Church would bridge cultural gaps to reach other regions like Samaria and the "uttermost parts of the earth."

The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit has many ministries.

He was active in the creation of the world, was the inspiring force of the written Word of God, was active in the earthly life and ministry of Jesus, and serves many functions on behalf of the believer.

The Holy Spirit reveals the truth of the Gospel and draws men and women to salvation.

The Holy Spirit even has a ministry concerning Satan.

He is the restraining spiritual force that limits the power of Satan (Isaiah 49:19).

Each of His ministries are discussed in detail in our study called "Ministry Of The Holy Spirit."

The Holy Spirit also has specific ministries affecting the growth and development of the Church:

THE HOLY SPIRIT FORMED THE CHURCH:

On the Day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2:1-41 the Holy Spirit formed the Church.

The Bible teaches that the Church is the habitation of God built by the Holy Spirit:

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone;

In whom all the building fitly framed together growth unto a holy temple in the Lord;

In whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

THE SPIRIT INSPIRES WORSHIP:

The worship of the Church should be inspired by the Holy Spirit:

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him.

God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. (John 4:23-24)

For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. (Philippians 3:3)

THE SPIRIT DIRECTS MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES:

This is evident in the record of the missionary activities of the first Church:

Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. (Acts 8:29)

Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia,

After they came to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit suffered them not.

And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel unto them. (Acts 16:6,7, 10)

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. (Acts 13:2,4)

THE SPIRIT SELECTS MINISTERS:

Some denominations appoint or elect ministers to serve in the Church.

Many people go to college or seminary to be trained as ministers.

But the requirement set by Scriptures is that ministers be called and selected by the Holy Spirit:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)

THE SPIRIT ANOINTS PREACHERS:

Paul wrote:

And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. (I Corinthians 2:4)

THE SPIRIT GUIDES DECISIONS:

Acts teaching 15 records a special meeting of leaders to discuss various problems in the Church.

Their final decision was guided by the Holy Spirit:

For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things. (Acts 15:28)

THE SPIRIT BAPTIZES THE CHURCH WITH POWER:

The book of Acts opens with the record of this great event:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as a fire, and it sat upon each of them.

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1-4)

This baptism was the powerful force behind the internal, expansion, extension, and bridging growths of the Church recorded in the remainder of the book of Acts.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Here are some guidelines for recognizing the true Church.

It is a Church that is: -Doctrinally correct: All teachings are based on the written Word of God.

-Composed of regenerated members: The lives of its members have been changed by the power of God.

-Worshipful: Worships the one true God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

-Evangelistic: Is actively involved in the mission of reaching the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

2. Here are some guidelines for recognizing a false Church. It is a church that is:

-Doctrinally incorrect: They emphasize selected portions of God's Word and eliminate other portions.

They do not take the Word of God literally.

They accept teachings of man which contradict God's Word.

-Divisive: May have divisions within the church and seeks to cause division within the Body of Christ in general. See Romans 16:17-18; Acts 20:29,30; Ephesians 4.

-Controlling: A false church will attempt to control the lives and actions of its members in a domineering way.

-Composed of unregenerated members: People continue living in the old sinful lifestyles.