

The Disadvantages Of Church Growth

Introduction. There are Christians who are unfortunately genuinely opposed to the idea of a congregation growing. So entrenched is this fear that any talk of it will raise a whole list of objections explaining why church growth is bad. However, when examined more closely, what these objections often reveal is that our agenda for the congregation is not always the same as the one Jesus has for His church.

This raises an important question: Whose church is it, anyway? We would all obviously agree that this is Jesus' church. But if this is His church, then His will must be done. Sometimes our resistance to church growth actually puts us at odds with Jesus and what He is trying to accomplish through us. In this lesson we will look at what some consider the disadvantages of church growth and some of the conflicts these objections create with the plans and purposes of Jesus. Why would anyone ever oppose the idea of a congregation growing?

I. ***"If The Church Continues To Grow, We Will Get Too Big"***

- A. So many times over the years Christians have fretted over the dreadful possibility that a congregation might get too big.
 - 1. For some "too big" is a nebulous concept. They do not really have a specific number in mind, but they have visited some places that just seemed too big -- the building was too big and there were too many people at worship.
 - 2. Others have fine-tuned their thinking. One brother commented that they were only going to build a church building that seats 250 because no congregation ought to have more than that.
 - 3. People say this with such conviction it leaves the impression that somewhere the Bible must lay down this strict standard limiting the size of a congregation.
- B. What does the Bible say about the size of a congregation?
 - 1. There actually is no passage that identifies at what point a church becomes too large, that places a limit on size, or that tells us how many elders there should be for each member.
 - 2. We are given information about the size of churches. The Jerusalem congregation began with 3,000 members (Acts 2:41). By the time of Acts 4:4 the number of men had grown to about 5,000. We know that their numbers continued to grow even further (Acts 6:1, 7). At one point the Jerusalem church certainly numbered in the tens of thousands, if not many more.
 - 3. But we also know that God celebrates this growth (Acts 2:47). There is never an indication that this was bad. Not one time does the Holy Spirit describe a church as being too big.

- C. This objection about a church getting too big is not about scripture, it is about preference.
1. Over my years of preaching, I have worked with three churches of different sizes. In each place there were people who thought that their present size was the right size.
 2. Do we stop teaching the lost and neglect our mission because we prefer our group to stay just like it is (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-47)? Is this what Jesus wants? This is the only question that matters. After all, it is His church!
 3. Jesus wants the lost to be saved (Luke 19:10; 1 Timothy 2:3-6). We need to not worry about size, focus on our mission, and let Jesus do what He wants with this church.

II. ***"If The Church Continues To Grow, We Will Not Have Close Relationships"***

- A. The desire to be close is a valid concern.
1. God wants us to be a family. This was characteristic of the early disciples (Acts 2:44-46; 4:32). How large was the congregation where this spirit existed? It was thousands! It is clear that New Testament Christians did not find size to be a barrier that prevented them from developing the close spirit God wanted.
 2. Practical experience teaches us the same. There are churches with just a handful that are cold and impersonal. On the other hand, some of the largest congregations are the most warm and friendly. It is not about size; it is about what we make it.
- B. The Jerusalem church challenges our thinking about relationships in the local church.
1. Some would argue that there is no way to be close in a church with hundreds of people. What they mean is that we cannot know everyone well. We cannot have personal relationships with every member.
 2. This sounds reasonable, until you try to apply these expectations to Acts. How long would it take to learn 3,000 names, bearing in mind that new names were being added every day? How long would it take to have 5,000 families in your home for dinner? The truth is that there were members of the Jerusalem church that did not know each other, members who were never in each other's homes.
 3. What mattered was not being in everyone's home, but being in someone's home. What was more important than trying to be close to every person was that every person was close to someone (Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:19).
 4. We simply cannot allow ourselves to define what we think a spiritual family ought to be, and then to use this to excuse

ourselves from the work of winning the lost. After all, it is clear that He believed we can grow even into the tens of thousands and still be the family He wants us to be. I hope this gives us the determination to get busy!

III. ***"If The Church Continues To Grow, We Will Have Problems"***

- A. There is no way to deny this objection. Growing churches have problems.
 - 1. Sin-sick people often bring baggage when they obey the Lord and need lots of teaching and encouragement to move beyond the problems of their past.
 - 2. Some who are converted will bring wrong ideas learned in the world or religious groups that will have to be corrected.
 - 3. Some will fall back into sin, sometimes involving themselves in ugly situations which call for delicate handling.
 - 4. In time, facilities are outgrown and buildings have to be expanded, placing a financial burden on the congregation.
- B. If it is any consolation, this is nothing new.
 - 1. In Acts, the early church faced all kinds of problems: Persecution (Acts 4), hypocrisy (Acts 5), controversy over the care of widows (Acts 6), controversy over members (Acts 9), physical deprivation (Acts 11), and controversy over doctrine (Acts 15).
 - 2. This is part of being in a growing church. Satan does not like it and he tries to stop us. By using the possibility of problems as an excuse to stop reaching out to the lost, we play right into his hand. The answer to all of the problems that arose was to address the problems. The answer was never to stop growing!
- C. One important point to remember is that dying churches have problems too. Worship is often lifeless, turning off members and visitors. Workers are few. People are discouraged. Every church will have problems. Which set of problems would you prefer?

IV. ***"If The Church Continues To Grow, There Will Not Be Anything For Me To Do"***

- A. This is actually a very important concern.
 - 1. We all need to be working for the Lord (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Peter 4:10-11). But some will complain that if the church grows too large, they will no longer be able to work.
 - 2. But the theory that as the church grows, the work load decreases is simply not so. In fact, the opposite is true. As the early church grew, the work load increased (Acts 6:1-6).

- B. There are two reasons people raise this objection.
1. Some do it out of ignorance. They are part of a large congregation and they genuinely do not know what to do. If I can find no other job, I can always invite my neighbor and teach my friends (Matthew 22:9).
 2. Others raise this objection because of arrogance. They do not want just any job; they want a "celebrity" job that puts them in the public eye. God does not need celebrities; He needs servants (Mark 10:43). How horribly tragic would it be to neglect this vital work of reaching the lost and growing the kingdom just so we can get more face time in front of the crowd.

Conclusion. If you prefer a small congregation, that may not be a bad attitude. If I am looking for a small church that I can join, evangelize, and help to grow, that is good. If I spend my life helping small churches grow and thrive, my life will be well spent.

However, if I am looking for a small church because I want it to stay that way, then that is not good. Jesus wants to see every group of His people reach the lost and explode with growth. It is the New Testament pattern. If that is not what I want, then I am not aligning my will with the will of Christ. I need to want for our congregation what He wants. Jesus wants us to grow. He wants this because every number represents a lost soul that has come back to Him. There is no more important work on earth. There is no more important issue in life than this one. Where do you stand with Jesus?

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