

PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH GROWTH (Acts 9:31)

- A. **Now that we** have scriptural leadership in this congregation it is appropriate to begin talking about growth.
1. But not the kind of growth that would simply satisfy our craving for more members, but the kind of growth that is the result of saving souls.
 2. When a congregation finally appoints qualified elders, it is then in a position to do the work the Lord would have it to do, which is to seek out & save souls that are lost, & then to provide refuge for those souls within the church.

“The Kingdom Is Spreading”, words by Mrs. M. B. C. Slade & melody by R. M. McIntosh. The Majestic Hymnal. (Firm Foundation Publishing House, Austin Texas), #321

1 – From all the dark places of earth’s heathen races, oh, see how the thick shadows fly! The voice of salvation awakes every nation, come over & help us they cry. **2** – The sunlight is glancing o’er armies advancing to conquer the kingdoms of sin; our Lord shall possess them, His presence shall bless them, His beauty shall enter them in. **3** – With praising & singing, & jubilant ringing, their arms of rebellion cast down, at last every nation, the Lord of salvation, their King & Redeemer shall crown!

Chorus: The Kingdom is spreading, oh, tell ye the story, God’s banner exalted shall be! The earth shall be full of His knowledge & glory, as water that covers the sea!

This song was written sometime within the last 200 years, but the words were fulfilled by the end of the first century A. D.

Col 1:5-6 – {The gospel was bringing forth fruit in all the world.} **21-23** – {The hope of the gospel was preached to every creature under heaven.}

This feat was accomplished by the year 62 Anno Domini (Latin: “The Year Of Our Lord”)

- B. **The growth** of the first century church was spectacular (**Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7**).

1. What brought about this tremendous growth? Did they have church growth specialists working among them? Did they divide up the church into subgroups based on new religious philosophy or tradition? Did they build Bible Schools & Evangelistic Societies?
 - a. No! Those things would have prevented the explosive growth we just read about.
 - b. Then how did it happen? You might say that the circumstances were just right, & God knew that because He was fostering those circumstances.
 - c. But just as important as that, were the attitudes of those new children of God.

- d. And when you put the best circumstances together with the best attitudes, you have a winning combination that will succeed.

Acts 9:31 – Then the **church**[es] throughout all Judea, Galilee, & Samaria had **peace** & were **edified**. And **walking in the fear of the Lord & in the comfort of the Holy Spirit**, they were multiplied.

[The word “churches” in the Greek is *ekkleesía*, the singular rather than the plural noun *ekkleesíai* for “churches”.

The Holy Spirit is telling us about THE CHURCH (Eph 4:4; Col 1:24), of which there is only one, in those three regions.

There is a lesson for us. Perhaps if our true ambition was to add souls to Christ rather than adding members to our congregation, then perhaps we could see better results.

But in this one verse Luke the Physician explained four principles that led to the growth of the church.]

I. THE CHURCH HAD PEACE (REST)

[Eirene (i-ray'-nay); to join in a harmonious relationship.]

- A. **First of all**, it was experiencing a momentary peace from without (in the world).

1. The church’s greatest opponent, the Sanhedrin, which had forced them out of Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), now had its own problems.

a. The Roman emperor Caligula ordered Petronius, governor of Syria (A. D. 40), to set up the emperor’s statue in the Temple.

b. In addition, the leader & mainstay of Jewish opposition had been converted (Acts 8:3; 9:1ff).

- B. **Secondly**, the church was experiencing, what could have been, a permanent peace from within.

1. The members were servants of the God of Peace (Heb 13:20), & subjects of the Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6).

2. They had received & were preaching & the Gospel of Peace (Eph 6:15).

a. They were at peace with God, because God made peace with them & removed the threat of eternal damnation (Rom 5:1-2, 9-10; Col 1:19-22).

- b. They were at peace with Christians in other nations (Eph 2:14-15), even though the nations may be at war.
- c. They were at peace among themselves (1 Thess 5:13-23; Rom 14:17-19).
 - 1) As “the salt of the earth” members of the church have their greatest influence in the world when they “have peace with one another” (Matt 5:13; Mark 9:50; John 17:20-21; 13:34-35; Matt 5:9).

[When the Holy Spirit stated that these churches had peace, then they had peace in every sense of the word – *and their growth began with authentic peace.*]

II. THE CHURCH WAS EDIFIED

- A. Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines the word “edified” as *to build up from the foundation* (Luke 11:48); *to restore by building, to rebuild, repair* (Matt 23:29).
 - 1. Jesus used this word when He promised to build or found His church (Matt 16:18), so how do you build the church from its foundation (1 Cor 3:11)?

- 2. (Eph 4:11-12, 16) – When every member of the body does its share to speak the Truth, this will cause the growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.
 - a. You don't have to preach a sermon or teach a Bible class to do this; we can all do this by encouraging godly wisdom in life, virtue in action, holiness in heart & reverence for God.
 - b. A growing church does not have a subversive subgroup that works against the principles of truth & godliness taught by the elders & teachers.

2 Thess 1:3 – We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because ***your faith grows exceedingly, & the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other,***

- 3. This has to be the goal of every congregation that hopes to grow as God would have it grow.
 - a. The growing faith indicated their thirst for the knowledge of God's word (Rom 10:17; 2 Pet 3:18).
 - b. Their growing love indicated their hunger for stronger relationships with each other (1 Pet 1:22-23; 1 Thess 4:9-10).

[How are we doing in the work of edifying one another?

To edify this church will take more than good Bible classes (2 Tim 2:2), prepared & qualified teachers who are willing to accept a stricter judgment (Jas 3:1), sound preaching (2 Tim 4:1-2; Acts 20:27).

To edify this church, it will take a lot of personal effort toward Bible study (2 Tim 2:15; Heb 5:12) & the encouragement of each other (Rom 14:19; Eph 4:29).

But for every minute we dedicate to these things, the Lord will increase our opportunities to save souls, as He did for the church in Judea, Galilee & Samaria.]

III. THE CHURCH WAS WALKING IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD & IN THE COMFORT OF THE HS

A. How does a church walk (denoting conduct) in the fear of the Lord (denoting reverence or awe for Christ)?

1. This word “fear” (fobos) means dread, terror, reverence, respect for authority, rank, dignity (Thayer).
2. Solomon had a lot to say about the “fear of the Lord.” He said, IT “is”...

Prov 1:7 – The fear of the Lord is **the beginning of knowledge**, but fools despise wisdom & instruction. 9:10 – The fear of the Lord is **the beginning of wisdom**, & the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. 8:13 – The fear of the Lord is **to hate evil; pride & arrogance & the evil way & the perverse mouth** I hate. 14:27 – The fear of the Lord is **a fountain of life**, to turn one away from the snares of death. (10:27; 14:26; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4)

But how does one gain or develop the “fear of the Lord”? 15:33 – The fear of the Lord is **the instruction of wisdom**, & before honor is humility.

The more wise instruction we receive from God, the better equipped we can become to fear the Lord, to show Him the proper respect & honor.

3. This is the only time this phrase is used in the NT, & in view of the context it means that the church had more fear of the authority of Jesus Christ than it did of human society & earthly governments ([Acts 4:18-24](#); [5:29-32](#)).

B. How can a church walk in the comfort of the Holy Spirit?

1. Comfort is what the HS offers, He is called the Comforter (KJV: [John 14:26](#); [15:26](#); [16:7](#)) – *comfort is the result of His work*.
 - a. Paraklesis means "a calling to one's side"; either "an exhortation (to spur on, force or impel in an indicated direction) or consolation" (to give relief in affliction).

2. He is also called the Spirit of truth ([John 16:13](#)), which is the Word of God ([John 17:17](#)).

a. So the comfort & exhortation He offers is through the word of God ([1 Thess 4:18](#); [Eph 3:14-17](#)).

[The church in Judea, Galilee & Samaria walked in the fear of the Lord & in the comfort of the Holy Spirit because the members were living in obedience to God.

No congregation can grow, in the Lord's way, unless it fears Him enough to seek the comfort & exhortation of the Holy Spirit that comes by obeying the word of God.]

IV. THE CHURCH WAS MULTIPLIED

A. **We noted** that point at the beginning of this lesson ([Acts 2:41, 47](#); [4:4](#); [5:14](#); [6:1, 7](#)).

1. This did not occur while the members were just being passive observers.

a. The seed of the Kingdom, the Word of God, must be sown into the hearts of men before there can be an increase of souls ([Luke 8:11ff](#)).

b. The gospel of Christ, God's power to save, must be preached before the church can see even one soul added to Christ ([Rom 1:16-17](#)).

c. This implies the very thing we read ([Acts 8:4](#)).

[What we should understand from this lesson is that before the preaching of the gospel to a lost & dying world there must be a steady foundation.

And that foundation is Peace with God & within, Edification through teaching, the Fear of the Lord, & the Comfort of the Holy Spirit.

When that is the foundation of a congregation, then it will not be able to hold the gospel to itself; its members will preach it, & the Lord will take care of the multiplying effect ([1 Cor 3:6-7](#).)]

Let us be "holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished & knit together by joints & ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God" ([Col 2:19](#)).

GOD'S PLAN FOR OUR SALVATION:

Hear the gospel of Jesus Christ; read it in your Bible: Acts 2; 3; 13; 17; Rom 10:17

Believe Jesus to be Lord and Christ, the Son of God and Savior: Acts 2:36; John 3:16; 8:24; 20:30-31; Acts 4:12; Titus 1:4

Repent of your sins: Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 1 John 3:4

Confess your faith in Jesus Christ: Matt 10:32-33; Acts 8:37; Rom 10:9-10

Be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins: Acts 2:38; Rom 6:3-4; Gal 3:27; Acts 2:38; 1 Pet 3:21

Be obedient to the Lord, He will be your Judge: Titus 2:11-12; Heb 5:9; 2 John 9; Rev 2:10; John 12:48

PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH GROWTH (Acts 9:31)

Before the end of the first century A. D. the gospel of Christ had been preached to every creature under heaven and was bringing forth fruit in all the world (Col 1:5-6, 21-23). The growth of the church was spectacular (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7). In our text Luke the Physician explained four principles that led to the growth of the church.

I. PEACE

A. Peace from without (in the world).

1. Jewish opposition was fighting another front: Emperor Worship.
2. Saul of Tarsus had been converted to Jesus Christ (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1ff).

B. Peace from within (in the church).

1. Servants of the God of Peace (Heb 13:20).
2. Subjects of the Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6).
3. Received the Gospel of Peace (Eph 6:15).
 - a. At peace with God (Rom 5:1-2, 9-10; Col 1:19-20).
 - b. At peace with Christians in other nations (Eph 2:11-22).
 - c. At peace among themselves (1 Thess 5:13 -23; Rom 14:17-19).

II. EDIFIED

A. Built up from the foundation (1 Cor 3:11; Matt 16:18).

1. Every member doing his part to edify the body (Eph 4:11-12, 16).
2. Faith must grow & love must abound (2 Thess 1:3).

III. WALING in the FEAR of the LORD AND in the COMFORT of the HOLY SPIRIT

A. Fear of the Lord: reverence & awe for the authority of Christ.

1. By receiving God's instruction (Prov 1:7; 9:10; 8:13; 14:27 – 15:33; Heb 12:25-29).

B. Comfort of the Holy Spirit: His consolation & exhortation.

1. By receiving God's Word, Truth (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7, 13; 17:17; Eph 3:14-17).

IV. CHURCH MULTIPLIED

A. The saints preached the Word (Acts 8:4; cf. Luke 8:11ff; Rom 1:16-17).

B. The Lord multiplied the effort (1 Cor 3:6-7; Col 2:19).