

How Should the Church Grow?

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should grow. I'll never forget when I was first in ministry with Danny and I had just been married and we lived across from this church and this was back in the Kansas City area and they were having tailgate parties in their parking lot after church for Chiefs games and I think they also then they tried something like bring your dog to church or something like that and it was just strange. It seemed like every month they were trying something different to try to attract people to their church but we've got to understand that what you win people with is what you've got to keep them with. So this church whoever they had won by doing these types of things had to keep doing these things in order to keep people coming but we know that that's not the way it's supposed to be.

We win people with the gospel and that's what keeps people coming to church and being a part of the life of the church. But there's a great temptation within the church today to feel like we've got to entertain people on Sunday mornings. Charles Spurgeon, many of you guys are aware of him, a great English pastor.

He said, a time will come when instead of shepherds feeding the sheep, the church will have clowns entertaining the goats. And tragically, that's the case in many churches in the United States of America.

[3:41] America. But the book of Acts, this is the first volume of church history and it records the story of the church from its explosive beginning on the day of Pentecost all the way to the imprisonment at Rome of its greatest missionary, the Apostle Paul. During those three decades, the church expanded from a small group of Jewish believers who were gathered in Jerusalem to embrace thousands of people and dozens of congregations scattered throughout the Roman world. Acts describes how the Spirit of God controlled and empowered the expansion of that church. John MacArthur says that this book could be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles. This book helps us to better understand the New Testament epistles because it gives us a core history of the church and the documents, and it documents the movements and work of the Apostles as the gospel was spreading.

The book follows the ministry of Peter, then of Paul, and from it we learn principles for discipling believers, how the church should be built, and how we ought to be evangelizing the world.

The book of Acts also teaches much to us about the Holy Spirit, who is obviously the third person of the Trinity. In the church today, the Holy Spirit is often treated like the third wheel. He's the one who is less talked about, and there's a book that I recommend you read if you like to read, and it's called Forgotten God, and it's by Francis Chan, and it's all about that, how the church today, we are kind of afraid of talking about the Holy Spirit because we don't know what to say. We don't want to sound too charismatic and referencing Him, and so unfortunately that has caused us to sort of back away from the Holy Spirit as a person, a topic, an issue that we don't feel comfortable bringing up in the church, and that's too bad.

The Holy Spirit regenerates. He baptizes. We'll see in this book. He fills and He sanctifies believers. He is seen choosing missionaries in Acts chapter 13, and He's seen directing their operations in chapter 8.

He presided at the first church council in chapter 15, and He was directing and controlling all of the operations of the church. The author of the book of Acts is Luke. Many of you are familiar with him, Luke, the physician who wrote the gospel of Luke, and who was the traveling companion of the apostle Paul.

[6:19] And we think, or I think, that this book was written between 61 and 64 AD, and that would have been during Paul's first imprisonment. And there's a few reasons for why I think that's the date. First, there was an abrupt ending to the book of Acts, and we'll see that Luke stopped writing because he was bringing everything to the present. It ends there with Paul and him being led away to Rome.

Secondly, the Roman officials were tolerant of Christianity in this book, and that indicates that it was written before the outbreak of Nero's persecution, which began in AD 64. If you remember, Nero wanted to rebuild the city of Rome kind of in his glory. He was a very wicked, very self-centered man. And so the senators did not want to do that. And so he, we believe, set fire to Rome and then blamed the Christians for it. And so there was a widespread, massive persecution of Christians during his rule. And this would have been before that because we see that to this point, the Roman officials seem to be tolerant of Christians. So that's another reason why we believe in a date around 64 or before 64 AD, I should say. Third, Luke does not mention the persecution by Nero.

Fourth, there is no mention in the book of the fall of the temple, which occurred in 70 AD. And then fifthly, Luke is silent about the further career of Paul. He makes no mention about his travels after his release or his second imprisonment or his death. So those are all the reasons why we think a date around 61 to 64 AD when this was written. And then you see that Theophilus is mentioned as the recipient of this volume that Luke writes. And so a lot of people want to know, well, who is Theophilus? And the easy answer to that really is, we don't know. We don't know who he was. Maybe we'll meet him in heaven and we'll find out then. But there's a couple of things or one thing that might help us to understand, give us an idea of who he might have been. And that's first is that Luke refers to him as most excellent Theophilus. And so that suggests that he was somebody important, most likely some kind of Roman official. And he may have been given, he may have been a Christian, I should say, and maybe he was receiving instruction from Luke, or he might have been an unbeliever that Luke was trying to persuade. Some have speculated that he was Paul's lawyer. And so Luke was writing this for his hearing before his emperor, but there's not much proof to sustain such a belief. What's the practical application of this book? Well, it's this. God can do amazing things through ordinary people when he empowers them through his spirit. God essentially took a group of fishermen and used them to turn the world upside down.

God took a Christian-hating murderer and changed him into the greatest Christian evangelist, the author also of almost half the books of the New Testament. God used persecution to cause the quickest expansion of this new faith in the history of the world.

[9:53] God can and does do the same through us today. He changes our hearts. He empowers us by his spirit, and he, in giving us a passion to spread the good news of salvation through Christ. If we try to accomplish these things in our own power, we will fail. Like the disciples in Acts chapter 1 verse 8, we are to wait for the empowering of the Spirit, then go in his power to fulfill the great commission.

So, let's begin going a little bit more slowly through what was read in verses 1 through 11. In Acts, we see that Christ's work of redemption has been completed, but that the church work of evangelism has only just begun. And we today are still working towards that goal of finishing the task that the Lord has commissioned us to do until he returns.

So, as the book of Acts begins, there is an important transition that is taking place. During his ministry on earth, the work of preaching and teaching was done primarily by Jesus as he was training his disciples for this moment.

Now that responsibility had been given to the apostles. Their task was to proclaim the gospel to the lost and also to lay the foundation for the church by teaching and then defending against any error that occurred within it.

Most people would be hesitant to give such responsibility to a group that had scattered when Jesus was arrested, if you remember. And Peter himself, who was often seen as the leader of the group, profanely denied his relationship with the Lord three times.

[11:30] When Jesus appeared to them after his resurrection, he found them hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jewish authorities. Thomas, if you remember, wasn't present that first time, and

he refused to believe the testimony of the others, but only came to believe after a second appearance of Jesus and after he was invited to touch his crucifixion wounds.

So, this group of men would not be a group of men that most of the world would look to as being capable of fulfilling the task that the Lord had given them because they were of normal, regular backgrounds and upbringings, and they were fearful and timid and cowardly throughout much of their time with Jesus and after and during his crucifixion.

So, how would they be able to withstand the challenges that would soon face them with such little faith? Well, John chapter 14, verses 1 through 6, Jesus says, And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him.

You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. And then in John 14, 26, a little further on, the Lord says, But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

So, the Holy Spirit, the Lord says, will empower these regular guys, these apostles, and all believers as well with the resources that they need to be able to continue to finish the work that our Lord and Savior has given us to do.

[13:20] So, first we see the message in chapter 1, verses 1 through 2. The first account, I composed Theophilus about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up, after he had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom he had chosen.

So, the first account that Luke is referring to is the gospel that he wrote, the gospel according to Luke, which was largely concerned with the early life and ministry of Jesus, which included all that Jesus had begun to do and teach until the day he was taken up.

Jesus' miracles had strengthened the faith of his disciples, his parables had clarified spiritual truth, and his teaching formulated their theology.

And so, all these things laid a foundation for the work that he would call them to carry out. The Lord spent a lot of time building these men up and making sure that the message they taught was organized, that it was grounded in truth, and that it would be used to establish and to grow his church.

The effectiveness of every believer's ministry depends on a clear and deep knowledge of the word. Another quote from Charles Spurgeon. We might preach till our tongue rotted, till we exhaust our lungs and die, but never a soul would be converted unless the Holy Spirit uses the word to convert that soul.

[14:45] So it is blessed to eat into the very heart of the Bible until at last you come to talk in scriptural language and your spirit is flavored with the words of the Lord so that your blood is bibbling and the very essence of the Bible flows from you.

And then secondly, we see the manifestation in verse 3. To these he also presented himself alive after his suffering by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of 40 days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

The apostles not only needed the proper message, but they also needed the confidence to proclaim that message, even though it would cost them their lives.

Jesus secured their confidence by presenting himself alive to them after his sufferings. Then he offered them many convincing proofs, such as entering a room where the doors were locked.

That's pretty convincing. Showing them his wounds, the places where his body had been pierced. And then not only that, he is showing them that he's in physical resurrection form.

[15:59] He's eating and he's drinking with his disciples. And all of this proves to them, gives them evidence that they need to be confident that in fact their Lord did come back from death.

Most convincing though was that he was appearing to them over a period of 40 days. So this wasn't just a one-time thing. He was appearing to them, and he was appearing to them over a long period of time.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 15, 5 through 8, Paul goes into greater detail about this. He said that first he appeared to Cephas, then to the 12, then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, much later after these 40 days, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. So Paul is saying there, if you don't believe our testimony, listen, there are people who are still alive, and you can go and talk to them, and they will

testify to the fact that Jesus has in fact come back to life from the grave.

So the end result of these appearances was that the apostles had become absolutely convinced of the reality of Jesus' physical resurrection. They knew it. There was no denying it.

[17:18] They could not doubt that in any way. And so this assurance gave them the boldness that they needed to preach the gospel to the very people, even, who crucified Christ.

The transformation of the apostles from fearful, cowering skeptics to bold, powerful witnesses is a proof of the resurrection. Today, Jesus Christ does not manifest himself physically and visibly to believers.

Jesus said to Thomas, if you remember, because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are they who did not see me and yet believe. Again, 1 Peter 1.8, Peter writes, Though you have not seen him, you love him.

And though you do not see him now but believe in him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory. And while we may not see the physical manifestation of the Lord today, we can easily see him through the works of his spirit today, can't we?

We see that in the transformation power of seeing somebody who is lost and hearing their testimony about who they were and all that they experienced in life and all the things that they had done.

[18:29] And then hearing about how they heard the gospel and how they received Christ as their Savior and were indwelt by the Spirit. And you see a person who's completely been changed as a result of that.

And that shows the power of the Spirit and that is a manifestation of the reality of Jesus Christ and the truth of the gospel. Thirdly, we see the might in verses 4 through 5 and then the beginning of verse 8.

And gathering them together, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised, which he said, You heard of from me, for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

But you shall receive the power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And so the apostles were excited at this point. Jesus had returned and they were probably very eager to get going with him and maybe even thinking that now was the time where he was going to begin his kingdom on earth. And so this would have sounded very strange to them to hear Jesus said, Now I want you to go back to Jerusalem because they were ready and eager to get going. They had the truth, but as Jesus said, they still lacked the power of the Holy Spirit, which they needed to have in accompanying that truth as they were about to go out and spread the gospel.

[19:57] The apostles, like all believers, this is a quote from John MacArthur, The apostles, like all believers of all dispensations, knew of and had tasted the working of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus sent them out on a preaching tour, he told them, It is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. In John 14, 17, Jesus told the apostles, The Holy Spirit abides in you and will be in you.

Like the other believers in the old economy, they experienced the Spirit's power for salvation and life, as well as for special occasions of ministry. In the new economy inaugurated at Pentecost, the Spirit would permanently indwell and empower them in a way that was unique.

So while the promise of power was primarily for the apostles, it also has implications for believers today. This promise was at the heart of the Old Testament prophecies concerning this new covenant.

Ezekiel 36, verses 25 through 27 say, Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all filthiness and from all your idols.

[21:06] Moreover, I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh, and I will put my spirit within you.

Very clear. For John baptized with water, verse 5 says, But you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. So what does that mean? A lot of people are wondering, what does it mean to be baptized by the Holy Spirit?

And there's a lot of misunderstanding about what that means. And so a resource that I use a lot, that I recommend other people use, it's called gotquestions.org.

www.gotquestions.org. And what it is is a website that is run by a lot of seminary students, former seminary students, pastors, missionaries.

And so you can go there, and there's a search bar, and you can type in a keyword or a question, and it'll pull up a lot of different articles. And so you can get some good information and some good answers for the questions that you have.

[22:10] So that's what I did with this question. I wrote, What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit? And I want to read to you their answer. It's kind of lengthy. Their answer is this, The baptism of the Holy Spirit may be defined as that work whereby the Spirit of God places the believer into union with Christ and into union with other believers in the body of Christ at the moment of salvation.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit was predicted by John the Baptist and by Jesus before he ascended into heaven. For he said, For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

This promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. For the first time, people were permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and the church had begun. 1 Corinthians 12, 12-13 is the central passage in the Bible regarding the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free, and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Notice that we all have been baptized by the Spirit.

All believers have received the baptism synonymous with salvation, and it is not a special experience for only a few. While Romans 6, 1-4 does not mention specifically the Spirit of God, it does describe the believer's position before God in language similar to the 1 Corinthians passage.

[23:34] What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means. We died to sin. How can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may have new life. The following facts are necessary to help solidify our understanding of Spirit baptism.

First, 1 Corinthians 12, 13 clearly states that all have been baptized just as all have been given the Spirit to drink. Second, nowhere in Scripture are believers told to be baptized with, in, or by the Spirit or in any sense to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

This indicates that all believers have had this experience. Third, Ephesians 4, 5 seems to refer to Spirit baptism. If this is the case, Spirit baptism is the reality for every believer just as one faith and one Father are.

In conclusion, the baptism of the Holy Spirit does two things. One, it joins us to the body of Christ. And two, it actualizes our co-crucifixion with Christ.

[24:52] Being in His body means we are risen with Him to newness of life. We should then exercise our spiritual gifts to keep that body functioning properly as stated in the context of 1 Corinthians 12, verse 13.

Experiencing the one Spirit baptism serves as the basis for keeping the unity of the church as in the context of Ephesians 4, 5. Being associated with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection through Spirit baptism establishes the basis for our separation from the power of indwelling sin and our walk in newness of life.

The Spirit's presence, leading, and might were absolutely essential and the apostles were to be, if they were to be, effective in continuing the Lord's unfinished work.

And so we see that they have already experienced His saving, His guiding, His teaching, His miracle-working power, and soon they would receive the power they needed for the ministry after the Holy Spirit would fall upon them on the day of Pentecost.

And that word power there in the Greek is *dunamis*. And *dunamis* is the word from which we get our English word dynamite. And you all know what dynamite does.

[26:06] All believers have in them, and this is what this is saying, all believers have in them spiritual dynamite for use of gifts, service, fellowship, and witness.

And they need to experience the release of that power in their lives. And tragically, I don't think we see that enough in the church. When people come into the church, they should see people who are on fire, like we say.

They are explosive. They're dynamic. Why is that? Because we have the Spirit and His power living inside of us. So the question is, how can we do that?

Firstly, by not grieving the Spirit, by living sinfully. And that comes from Ephesians 4, 30 through 32. And then secondly, by then continually being filled and controlled by the Spirit.

And that's from Ephesians 5. And I want to read that passage to you so we have a better understanding of what does that mean. And it says there, do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.

[27 : 11] How do we do that? Well, he explains, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

So being united with one another. And it may sound strange, maybe not to Dan, but singing to one another, right? You know, and I've been around the office this week and I hear Evelyn, she whistles sometimes.

And it's just like, that's a joyful thing. Usually when people are whistling, they're not angry when they're doing that, right? There's some joy in their heart. And so when people are around us, they should experience that joy in our hearts.

And so we are being continually filled by the Spirit. That's how we become dynamic like that. And the result, well, Ephesians 3, 16 and 20 says that according to the riches of His glory, when we are living like this, when we are dynamic like this, He may grant you to strengthen you with power through His Spirit and your inner being.

now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think according to the power that is work within us. So when we as Christians are living like this, the things that God will do through us will amaze not only us but the world around us.

[28 : 40] Fourthly, the mystery, verses 6 through 7. And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom of Israel?

He said to them, It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority. So again, the apostles were hoping that Jesus' return meant the arrival of His kingdom right then and right there.

They had experienced a rollercoaster ride of hope and doubt and now they felt that all that was over. But Jesus brings them back to reality saying that it was not for them to know those times or those epochs which the Father had fixed by His own authority.

And if you remember, I guess it's been six years ago now, Harold Camping and his May 21, 2011 prediction that Jesus would return. I remember I was in Mardell's at that precise moment when he said it was going to...

I thought, well, if He does come back, Mardell's would be a good place, I suppose, for Him to find me. But obviously, that wasn't the case. A lot of money was spent.

[29 : 45] A lot of people tragically spent their life savings on buying preserves or whatever, giving their money away because they thought for sure that the Lord was coming back and they should have read the Bible and they would have known that Harold Camping doesn't know any better than Jesus does when He's going to come back.

And then even with the solar eclipse that happened on Monday, you know, there's a lot of speculation about that as well. And obviously, we're still here. And the Lord hasn't come back yet. So don't put much into any of that kind of foolish speculation. Scripture teaches many things about the earthly and glorious reign of Jesus and His kingdom, but not the precise time of its establishment.

All that believers can know is that the kingdom will be established when He comes back. However, the time of His second coming is unknown to all but God the Father. And then fifth, we see the mission.

That's the rest of verse 8. You shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and all of Judea and Samaria even to the remotest part of the earth. So the mission was this, to go to the remotest parts of the earth to be witnesses for the Lord.

[30 : 58] Rather than waste time speculating about when Jesus will come back, the apostles were to focus on the work that they had been called to do. And this was the primary purpose for which the empowering of the Spirit would come to them.

And the early church was so effective in its day that we'll see in Acts chapter 17 that it upset the world. They were so effective for the Lord. They were great at being His witnesses.

And witnesses, in the Greek, *martyris*, can mean martyrs. And many of you are aware of what that term means. Tertullian, a great early church father, said that the blood of the martyrs, their blood became the seed of the church.

Because many people were seeing that the Christians had such faith in their Lord and how calmly and joyously even they faced death for their relationship to Christ and the fact that they refused to say that He was not their Lord and Savior, that He was not the Messiah.

And so that was their lives, their deaths, drew a lot of people to the gospel and its truth. Sixth, we see the motive in verses 9 through 11.

[32:16] And after He said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them and they said also, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky?

This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come back in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven. And so the angels here are actually giving a mild rebuke of the apostles.

They're basically saying, What are you doing? Why are you waiting? Jesus has not been lost to you. That you have a work to do. He will return.

But right now, what you need to do is go get to work in obeying what He has called you to do. The truth that Christ will return provides a powerful motive to serve Him.

2 Corinthians 5.10 says, We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

[33:23] And so that's motive enough right there that we will all one day stand before our Lord and Savior and give an account for how we spent our time and our lives here on this earth.

The task of finishing the work that Jesus begun, the duty of evangelizing the lost world is a daunting one, but the Lord in His mercy from the start has provided all the spiritual resources necessary to accomplish that task.

It is up to each believer to take those resources and to them then put them to use.