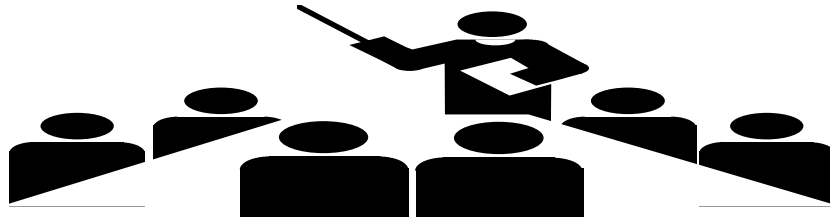


CHURCH GROWTH SEMINAR



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Topic:
“Theological Foundations for Church Growth”

Outline

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- II. Our Devotion to Prayer (Acts 1:14)
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CHURCH GROWTH SEMINAR

Rev. Darryl B. Starnes, Sr., Instructor

THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR CHURCH GROWTH

Scripture Lesson: Acts 1:1 – 2:47

The foundations for all Church Growth methodologies and evangelism strategies must be theologically sound and biblically based in order to justify adoption and implementation. Pragmatism (what works); rationalism (what makes sense); empiricism (what can be scientifically verified); and existentialism (what feels good) may have some value, but are inadequate foundations and are unreliable means of evaluating the relevance and merit of Church Growth methodologies. The church must look to the Divine revelation as recorded in the Holy Scriptures to find the foundations upon which to build its models and methodologies for fulfilling its mission in the world. The Acts of the Apostles, especially chapter 1 and 2 are the reliable source from which the following theological foundations are drawn.

Our Dependence upon God (Acts 1:8)

The most significant factor in church growth is often the most overlooked. Growth is always the result of God's supernatural power and He causes it to occur only among those who are rightly related to Him and depend upon Him for it. The church must look to Christ, Who is able to build the church (Mt. 16:18). The church must look to the Holy Spirit, Who is able to empower the church for effective witness (Acts 1:8). The church must look to God, the Father Who is able to cause the church to grow (1 Cor. 3:6) In identifying a pattern of divine activity in the God's dealing with Moses and the Israelites, Kenneth Hemphill highlights six spiritual principles:

1. God is always at work.
2. He desires and seeks a people.
3. The plan and work of God are accomplished by His power and He receives the glory.
4. He called out Moses and promised His presence.
5. He requires obedience to His plan.
6. God was adding to His church.¹

Our Devotion to Prayer (Acts 1:14)

The most authentic expression of dependence upon the supernatural power of God is the devotion to the ministry of prayer. Those who truly are depending on God make prayer a priority in their lives and ministries. Before the explosion of Pentecost took place, the Apostles and believers devoted themselves to prayer. An effective plan for church growth must recognize the ministry of prayer as the substance of all authentic church growth.

¹. Kenneth Hemphill, The Antioch Effect (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), pp. 25-29.

Our Experience of Spiritual Awakening (Acts 2:1-4)

All lasting and authentic church growth is the result of a spiritual awakening. Pentecost was that awakening for the First Century Church and resulted in an evangelistic explosion that sent witnesses throughout the Mediterranean World. A supernatural encounter with God must precede the implementation of methodology and spiritual awakening is an evidence of that encounter. Dr. Louis Drummond sites six signs of spiritual awakening: 1) Brokenness and contriteness of heart; 2) Confession of sins and pursuit of cleansing; 3) Fullness of the Holy Spirit; 4) Joy manifested in life; 5) Evangelistic emphasis and 6) Social action. Dr. Kenneth Hemphill also offers six similar evidences of spiritual awakening:

1. Repentance and confession
2. Healing of broken relationships
3. Concern for the lost and how to reach them
4. A serious quest for effective methodologies
5. Creative God-inspired methodologies surface
6. Church leadership models commitment to Great Commission ²

Obedience to the Great Commission (Acts 2:11; Matthew 28:19, 20)

Indispensable to the work of evangelism and church growth is an understanding of the nature and mission of the church. After the spiritual awakening, the followers of Christ seemed clear about their mission and immediately began witnessing about the "mighty miracles of God" to those who were present. As the Body of Christ, the church must have both correct theology of and strong commitment to the Great Commission of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The mission of the church is to "make disciples of all nations" and has three primary components: 1) "Going" (evangelism and witness); 2) "Baptizing" (initiation and assimilation); 3) "Teaching" (discipleship and nurture).

The Imperative of Leadership (Acts 2:14)

Church growth and effective evangelism become realities as God raises up men and women who lead the movement with courage and commitment. Peter seemed to be that kind of leader early in the Christian movement. James, the brother of Jesus, also became a significant figure in the Jerusalem Church. Paul and Barnabus became the most significant figures in the spread of the gospel to the Gentile world. In order for any church or denomination to experience church growth, those whom God has called to leadership must answer His call today.

The Prominence of Preaching (Acts 2:22-39)

It is very difficult to separate the meaning of "kerygma" and the meaning of "Evangelion", for both words are rooted in the proclamation of "the gospel". Dr. Lewis Drummond defines evangelism as "the communication of the gospel with a concerted self-conscious effort to confront the unbeliever with the truth about and the claims of Christ, with a view to leading that unbeliever to repentance to God, faith in our Lord, Jesus Christ, and initiation into the church." ³ Preaching (kerygma) can be defined exactly the same way. C.

². Lectures, Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham, Alabama, 1995

³ Ibid

H. Dodd distinguishes preaching (kerygma) from teaching (didache). Kerygma is the public proclamation of the gospel to the non-Christian world. Didache is teaching about the Christian life to Christians. One thing is clear. God has chosen the foolishness of preaching (kerygma) to save those who believe (1 Cor. 1:21). The gospel (Evangelion) is the power of God unto to salvation to all who believe (Rom. 1:16) Michael Green points out some key characteristics of the preaching of the early church, which I would like to put into the following categories:

- 1) Christocentricity- They preached a person, Jesus Christ; his death burial and resurrection, ascension and return.
- 2) Grace- They preached a gift; forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, salvation.
- 3) Soteriology- They emphasized the importance of regeneration; turning to Christ in repentance, faith, and baptism as signs of that change.
- 4) Ecclesiology- They emphasized the importance joining in the apostolic fellowship through participation in the common life of the Church, by prayer, service, and regular reception of the Eucharist.
- 5) Discipleship- They emphasized the importance of continuing in the apostolic teaching through faithful study of and obedience to the Scriptures.
- 6) Eschatology- They emphasized the importance of urging other people towards conversion and they related the message of salvation not only to the individual, the Church and the Lord, but also to the whole purposes of God for world He created.⁴

The Urgency of Invitation (Acts 2:40)

The Apostle Peter not only shared the gospel with those present, he also offered Christ and urged his listeners to make a decision. Luke records, "And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation". The urgency of Peter's invitation was unmistakable. This same urgency should characterize our evangelistic thrust today.

The Importance of Initiation (Acts 2:41)

Luke records, "And they that gladly received his word were baptized." Baptism is a part of the Great Commission and a part of Peter's instructions to those seeking salvation. Baptism is a sacrament of the church which celebrates the initiation of the new convert into the Family of God. As the Holy Spirit places the new believer into the Body of Christ in the mystical, invisible realm, the church celebrates that initiation in the physical, visible realm through the dramatic ritual called baptism. It is important for the new Christian to know and understand in a very tangible way that he is not only connected with Christ, but also with Christ's Body, the Church. Baptism must not only be a symbol of what God has done for the believer, but a symbol of hospitality and acceptance demonstrated on the part of the those in Christian family who make-up the Body of Christ.

The Importance of Assimilation (Acts 2:41)

Luke also records, "and the same day, there were added unto them about three thousand souls". Those who

⁴ Michael Green, Evangelism in the Early Church (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 275-277.

respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ must not only be baptized, they must be added to the church and assimilated into the Body. In other words, they must find their place in the Body of Christ and in the fellowship of His people. They must be made to feel that they belong and are accepted. It must be communicated to them not only that they need the church but also that the church needs them and cannot function at maximum efficiency without their presence and participation.

The Necessity of Nurture (Acts 2:42)

From the very beginning, Christian nurture for all believers was a priority in the Church. Luke records, "And they continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer. The Church must become a nurturing environment that provides for the people of God these four critical means of spiritual growth: 1) a dynamic and meaningful teaching ministry; 2) a rich and nurturing fellowship among the members; 3) an opportunity to celebrate the Lord's Supper regularly and experience communion; and 4) a community that prays together and communicates with God. Disciples are made only in a nurturing community.

The Significance of the Supernatural (Acts 2:43)

In an age when rationalism and empiricism reign supreme over the minds of men, the significance of the supernatural is de-emphasized even among the people of God. It cannot be denied that the way God manifested His Divine power had a lot to do with the growth of the Church in the New Testament. Luke records, "And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles". There was a holy reverence pervading the church, because people could see that God was at work. Even when the church spread to Antioch in Syria and the Apostles sent Barnabus to inspect the situation; he could see that the hand of the Lord was at among them. It is when people can see that God is doing something in our lives and churches that is inexplicable that they often become thirsty for the truth of the gospel and phenomenal church growth takes place.

The Value of Unity (Acts 2:44-46)

If there is anything that undermines church growth and evangelism, it is division and discord among the people of God. If there is anything that creates an atmosphere which fosters evangelism and church growth, it is unity and harmony among the people of God. Luke's account historical narrative helps us to see just how significant the reality of unity was in the growth of the early church. The aspects of that unity are as follows:

- 1) Unity of experience
- 2) Unity of fellowship
- 3) Unity of purpose
- 4) Unity of resources
- 5) Unity of concern
- 6) Unity of heart
- 7) Unity of destiny

The Wellspring of Worship (Acts 2:47)

Luke includes in his narrative an insight into the importance of worship in the life and growth of the early church. Passionate praise was a part of the worship of the Church of the New Testament and it had a role in

the good favor that the church experienced with the community and to some degree the growth of the church. Kenneth Hemphill calls worship "the Wellspring of Church Growth" and describes the elements of what he calls "authentic worship" as follows:

- 1) Authentic worship is prompted by the Holy Spirit.
- 2) Authentic worship focuses on praising and adoring God.
- 3) Authentic worship makes prayer central.
- 4) Authentic worship makes the reading of Scripture central.
- 5) Authentic worship makes the preaching of the Word the centerpiece of worship
- 6) Authentic worship makes giving a vital part of worship.
- 7) Authentic worship calls the worshipper to commitment and active response ⁵

Hemphill outlines the impact of authentic worship on church growth as follows:

- 1) Authentic worship provides the supernatural empowering for the people of God.
- 2) God often communicates His strategy for His people during times of worship.
- 3) Authentic worship is the key to committed service.
- 4) Worship is essential to the evangelistic ministry of the church.
- 5) Worship is critical to church growth because of its transforming impact on the lives of believers. ⁶

⁵ Hemphill, pp. 41-49.

⁶ Ibid, pp. 53-55.