

"WE ARE COMMANDED TO GROW"

While speaking of the local church, the preacher said, "We are commanded to grow." He immediately quoted Mark 16:15 as his proof text: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation." His use of this text is a misapplication of Jesus' words. In fact, there is not a scintilla of the *commanded-to-grow* notion in the New Testament that applies to congregations. This *church growth* mania among brethren began some four or more decades ago and was borrowed from denominational sources.

Some brethren have made a career of it with their "church growth seminars." In their wake we have seen the rise of such inanities as "Juggling for Jesus," "Magic for the Master," "Gymnastics to the Glory of God," classes in everything from auto mechanics to money management, gymnasiums, a host of "social services," and toning down the pulpit to present a non-offensive "gospel."

Many have swallowed the devil's lie that, if a church is growing in numbers, "it must be doing something right." This *grow-at-any-price* dictum has blossomed into full-fledged apostasy in hundreds of churches.

We are not denying that the Lord is pleased with congregational growth that comes from souls who obey the Gospel. Surely, none will doubt that the Lord was pleased with the Jerusalem church's growth when 3,000 obeyed the Gospel in one day (Acts 2:41). He continued (and continues) to be pleased when sincere souls, whom He adds to the church "day by day," obey Him (v. 47). This, however, is quite different from stating, concerning any one church or the church as a whole, that we have a mandate to **make it grow**.

Our mandate in Mark 16:15 is to preach the Gospel and give people an opportunity to obey it. Sometimes—and in some places—conditions are "just right" for many to obey the Gospel—as in Jerusalem. However, one reasons falsely to suppose that the dramatic Jerusalem growth is a pattern we are obligated (or even able) to duplicate. Those events/results cannot and will not be duplicated. God had for centuries been providentially preparing the circumstances that produced the exceptional growth on Pentecost and immediately thereafter (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7).

Paul understood that his duty was to preach the Gospel, not to see how many he could baptize to produce "growth" (1 Cor. 1:17). We are thankful that "many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" at his preaching (Acts 18:8b). However, he would have been faithful had only a few been baptized there, as in Athens—a church about which we never hear another word in the Sacred history (Acts 17:34).

Unlike many brethren, Paul did not believe in "growth for the sake of growth." He rather understood (and followed) the Scriptural principle: "I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" (1 Cor. 3:6). Men ought to learn from Sarah (Gen. 16:1-3) the futility of trying to "help God out," of which placing growth before Gospel smacks.

The Lord's *growth* mandate is to individual saints: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 3:18). Let us faithfully and zealously preach and teach the Word, and leave the growth up to the Lord. The Lord did not say, "Go and make the church grow," but "Go and preach the Gospel."

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