

# The Growth of the Church

## Both Inside (defining orthodoxy) and Out (numbers of people)

Acts 15:1-29 The Jerusalem Council

✎ The Holy Spirit leads the church in her doctrine and decisions. The submission of the church and her consensus about the grace of Jesus Christ testifies to her authenticity; the church's continual growth is evidence to the Holy Spirit's leading.

15:10 – "...why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." It is by GRACE alone through FAITH alone in CHRIST alone that we are saved. Adding anything is anathema!!! (eternally condemned)

15:16-18 – James' quotation of the OT is the Holy Spirit's way of substantiating and justifying decisions. As Hosea puts it, "Scripture testifies to Scripture."

15:19 – "...we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God..."

- We must not get in the way. Recommendations should be for the benefit of the disciples.

15:23-29 – Here we see the beginning of the method of writing epistles as the Holy Spirit's way of communicating to the churches.

✎ **Read the book of Galatians.** Observe how critically important it is that freedom is obtained ONLY through faith in Christ alone. The issue of circumcision was very significant in the early church. From the Galatian epistle, identify the freedom that only comes through faith in Christ (look in chapters 5 and 6).

## The Church grows into Macedonia and Greece (Paul's 2nd MJ)

15:36-41 Human disagreements do not hinder the work of the Holy Spirit. We can argue but depart with godly dispositions.

16:1-5 Timothy was brought to the Paul's team and received mentorship and missionary experience. Note Timothy's submission to a request a ritualistic observance for the furtherance of the Gospel. The churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

### **Paul's vision of the man of Macedonia**

16:6-10 Paul's vision was authenticated because he had an ear to hear. God doesn't work in confusing ways. God's revelation comes to those who have been prepared (ie. Cornelius, Ethiopian Eunuch, Joseph from OT).

### **Lydia's Conversion**

16:11-15 The missionaries were expecting to meet with the Lord (v.13) The Lord brought Lydia to them to hear and respond to the message. Note she was a worshipper of God; she had been prepared to receive the Message.

### **Paul and Silas in Prison**

16:16-40 God doesn't want recognition from sources which are not of Him; they only cause confusion. Paul became so troubled and cast out the demon. As soon as the source of income was terminated for the girl's owners, the persecution began.

In the midst of persecution, Paul and Silas were preparing themselves by focusing on the Lord rather than the circumstance. When God's power was manifested, they did not run and salvation occurred.

When we don't focus on ourselves, our trials and tribulations enable us to be a part of God's gracious salvation to those involved in the situation. The Holy Spirit used Paul and Silas to bring joy to the jailer and his household. Also, Paul and Silas did not seek to leave as soon as possible but rather demanded things to be done in the proper manner testified again to even the magistrates of the city.

Observe how the Holy Spirit called them to Philippi for the many opportunities that were waiting for God's grace to manifest!!!

Read the **book of Philippians** and observe the awesome teachings in this epistle written from the Philippian prison. What were Paul's main emphases found in chapters 2 and 3?

### **Conversion of Prominent People**

In Thessalonica

17:1-9 Note Paul's teaching in the synagogue about Jesus. Also observe the persuasion of some of the Jews, but more so, the large number of God fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. Once again, note the resulting persecution which often times accompanies the preaching of Jesus.

17:10-15 The Bereans examined the Scriptures to test Paul's teachings. Note who received the message – prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

17:16-34 In Athens, Paul reasoned in the synagogue as well as in the marketplace.

### **Note about evangelism and missionary work:**

Paul was able to connect and converse with the different cultures because of his knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures and the ideas in which people trafficked. To be effective in sharing the Gospel, we must be able to connect with the ideas of contemporary culture which invariably (though in varying degrees) are related to the spiritual aspects of life as identified and defined in Scripture.

Read the books of **1 & 2 Thessalonians** and observe his exhortations and encouragements to the church there. In light of Paul's experiences in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens, what correlations can you see in these two epistles?

**Discussion:** Looking over these chapters in Acts and the referred epistles, how does the Holy Spirit grow His Church?