

## **THINKING RIGHT ABOUT CHURCH GROWTH (Matthew 13:44-46)**

### **I. First Century obstacles.**

- A. The church has never had it easy when it comes to growth.
- B. Things are difficult today in our area.
  - 1. There is limited economic growth in our area.
  - 2. There are few if any people moving into our area.
  - 3. Many of those here already have ties to area denominations.
- C. However, those are not excuses to have no growth.
- D. If there ever was a difficult time for the church to grow, it was in the first century.
  - 1. In spite of the odds stacked against those brethren, the church grew.
  - 2. Even in the face of great opposition and persecution, the church grew.
- E. You will never read in the book of Acts, any of our brethren saying “we can’t do that.”
- F. Instead, we read, we ought to obey God rather than man.
- G. Notice some of the obstacles of the early church.
  - 1. As far as the world was concerned, the church was promoting a crucified criminal as Lord.
  - 2. Christians were considered anti-social because they wouldn’t join in the ways of the world.
  - 3. They were accused of being atheists because they rejected the Roman gods and the state religion of emperor worship.
  - 4. They were accused of being cannibals for partaking of the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ.
  - 5. Baptism was offensive to Jews because it replaced circumcision (Colossians 2:12).
  - 6. The church demanded morality in an immoral world.
  - 7. Christians would not participate in pagan activities.
  - 8. The church was accused of breaking up families.
  - 9. The church suffered great physical persecution.
  - 10. The church was viewed as a cult.
  - 11. Christianity was a new movement.
  - 12. The church met in secret, either early or late.
  - 13. Christians talked of the world being destroyed by fire (Nero burned Rome and blamed the Christians).
  - 14. Christians were despised because many were slaves or poor.
  - 15. Since they would not swear by Caesar, Christians were considered disloyal citizens.
  - 16. Christians would not be a part of trade guilds because they met in pagan temples.

- 17. The Sabbath day was replaced by the first day of the week.
- 18. The mystery religions of that day did not demand moral and ethical changes of their members as did the Lord's church.
- 19. Christian assemblies were often viewed as illegal since Christianity was not an approved religion.
- H. No matter which way the church went, it faced trouble.
- I. There was social rejection and political danger
- J. All of the opposition could have caused Christians to throw up their hands and quit.
  - 1. No doubt some did.
  - 2. However, the church grew by leaps and bounds in the first century.
- K. We need to remember that God has not given us an impossible task.
- L. Our attitude will determine our actions.

## II. **Thinking right about the church.**

- A. Many times we don't grow because we don't understand the true nature of the church.
- B. Some act as if we must change because the church isn't the best way for doing God's work on earth.
  - 1. Change is the key word of the day in many places.
  - 2. The cry is to substitute worldly ways for God's way.
- C. An understanding of the New Testament church is essential to any growth that can or will take place.
- D. Before we can convince others about the necessity of the church, we must be convinced of it.
- E. While this is not a sermon about the church, there are some key, essential ideas we must believe about the church in order for her to grow:
  - 1. Jesus built only one church and it can't be destroyed (Matthew 16:18).
  - 2. The saved are added to that church (Acts 2:47).
  - 3. The church was purchased by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28).
  - 4. Christ is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18).
  - 5. God receives glory only from the church (Ephesians 3:21).
  - 6. One day, the church is going to be presented to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24).
  - 7. The church demonstrates to the world the wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:8-11).
- F. We must first be converted to these biblical truths before we can help convert others to them.
- G. If we truly believe these things, it won't be hard to go out and help people learn about them.
- H. Our mission of seeking the lost is the most important work on the face of the earth.
- I. We must believe that.

- J. We've been given a commission to go preach to the lost.
  - 1. It may be that we have poor attitudes toward this commission.
  - 2. If that is the case, we need to repent of those poor attitudes and become positive towards the church and her work.

### III. Developing a positive attitude.

- A. We feel the way we do about the church, however that is, because of our thoughts.
  - 1. This is biblical isn't it (Proverbs 23:7).
  - 2. If we can think right about the church, we can feel right about her and get to doing her work.
- B. Br. Whitaker used to tell his preacher students that evangelism is the lifeblood of a congregation.
- C. If we can develop the right attitude towards growth, we can grow.
- D. We can't be negative about growth.
  - 1. One day, a vacuum cleaner salesman knocked on the door.
  - 2. When the lady of the house answered it, the salesman said, "Lady, you don't want to buy a vacuum cleaner do you?"
  - 3. You can imagine she said no.
  - 4. He was negative in his approach and he got just what he was expecting.
- E. When we say things like:
  - 1. This area is too hard;
  - 2. We are too old;
  - 3. We are too small;
  - 4. We've tried that in the past;
  - 5. People are set in their ways...
- F. Or whatever else we might say, we are showing a negative attitude.
- G. There may not be a greater time of negative attitudes towards the church by Christians than right now.
- H. But the fact is, there are more opportunities to get the word of God into the soil of hearts than ever before.
- I. We need to think about what is right with the church, not what is wrong with her:
  - 1. The message is right;
  - 2. The Savior is right;
  - 3. The way of worship is right;
  - 4. The way of organization is right.
  - 5. So many good things and right things that far outweigh any negatives.
- J. The Lord wants His church to grow and will bless our efforts in growing it.
- K. The world or circumstances don't determine our growth, only our attitudes determine our growth.
- L. We need to open our minds to the possibilities around us and go looking

for them.

This outline came from the book "How To Have Biblical Church Growth" by J.J. Turner.