

Myth Buster

by Dick Brogden

The sermon challenges the myth that churches must grow quickly and instead emphasizes the importance of slow, steady, and life-on-life work in making disciples and building churches.

Topics: "Church Growth", "Discipleship"

Description

Dick Brogden emphasizes the importance of slow, steady growth in the church, highlighting how orthodoxy takes time to spread and build enduring foundations. He debunks myths about the need for rapid church growth and the size equating to strength, pointing out that the best churches grow steadily and are often smaller in size. Brogden also stresses the necessity of external inputs, mentors, and ongoing correction in shaping disciples and churches, drawing from the example of Acts 15 where external guidance was crucial for the early church's formation.

Transcript

Currently there is an inordinate emphasis on size and speed when it comes to the development of the church. Church history soberly shows that orthodoxy tends not to spread as swiftly as heresy and that bad teaching outpaces good. It is the slow, steady repeated truth of God that builds the enduring church. The largest church at the end of the first century was found in Rome, thought by most scholars to be around two hundred members. The churches in Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi, Colosse, and Thessalonica (among others) were most probably between fifteen and fifty. The record of Acts takes place over about fifty years. Biblical precedent indicates that it takes about a generation to get a few churches to what we now consider modest size. One myth is that the church has to grow quickly; another that a strong church is a big church. The best churches tend to grow slowly and steadily, and the normal first century church comprised less than fifty people.

Disciples, too, are forged over time. If a church is but a collection of disciples, then it makes sense that strong churches require time to become solid. Another common myth today in mission is that all new disciples need is the Bible and the Holy Spirit. As appealing as this sounds, it has never been true in history, and if we are honest, it has not been true for any of us experientially. Consider how many books, sermons, mentors, friends, and external inputs help shape and form our spirituality over time. None of us grew to where we are without multiple sources of input over disparate seasons, all the input submitted to the authority of Holy Spirit and the Word. Biblically there always remains the need for an outside catalyst to help correct our biases and heresies. A group of people studying the Scriptures can just as easily end

up pooling ignorance as illumining one another. Acts 15 is a classic example of ongoing external input necessary for the formation of strong disciples and churches. The negative example of external input (requiring circumcison) does not negate the massive, ongoing positive external input.

Paul and Barnabas report the wonderful turning of the Gentiles to Jesus. They also report the negative external pressure. James and the counsel respond by correcting the error and reinforcing what is necessary. In Acts 15:20, James delineates what they should not do-former religious forms and rituals. Paul reminds the council that coming to Jesus demands conversion (v. 3) and James cites Peter that the Gentiles must come out of false religion (v. 14). In Acts 15:32, Judas and Silas "exhort and strengthen the brethren with many words." In verse 35, Paul and Barnabas teach and preach to the Gentiles and in verse 36, Paul and Barnabas commit to revisit their converts to ensure they are walking correctly. Disciples and churches are forged over time. Let us continue to believe that God will do great things and bring millions into His church. Let us continue to understand that it is slow, steady, life-on-life work to make disciples and build churches.

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