

# How God's Kingdom Grows

## Lesson 13: Challenges To Kingdom Growth, Part 1

While the kingdom of God experienced tremendous growth in New Testament times, even a casual reading of the New Testament demonstrates there were also challenges faced that would try to stop or limit this growth. This can be seen through individual Christians not growing in Christ as they should, unbelievers being hindered from obeying the gospel, and local churches not being what God desired from them. However, it should not come as any surprise that the enemy (Satan) would work contrary to the kingdom of God (Matthew 13:18-23, 37-43). In this section, let's consider some challenges (and solutions) to kingdom growth.

**1) Immorality.** Those who have not submitted to Jesus are often distracted by the pull of immoral things. This can work to harden their hearts so they do not please God or understand the things concerning God's kingdom (Matthew 13:4, 19; Romans 8:5-8). These who live immorally then can have a negative influence on those who are in the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:33). Then, those who become God's people must fight against the desires of the flesh (1 Peter 2:11-12). But, if those who are in God's kingdom engage in immorality without repenting, it can have a leavening influence that spreads to others and hinders the kingdom through influencing other Christians to sin (1 Corinthians 5:1-2, 6; Revelation 2:20-23) and showing an example of hypocrisy to the world (Matthew 5:13; Luke 14:34-35).

God has given people everything they need to overcome immorality in their lives through the forgiveness offered by Christ (1 John 1:5-2:2) and the armor He provides (Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 Corinthians 10:13). God has also warned His people of evil influences and urged them not to become partners with those who do evil (Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 15:33; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1). Then, God has also commanded that those who are spiritual

restore any member of His kingdom who goes into sin (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20). If the one who is in sin will not repent, the immoral one is to then be removed from among them (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15).

**2) False teaching.** False teaching can come in many different forms, but is always condemned and works contrary to God's kingdom. For example, the Galatian Christians had fallen from Christ by giving in to false teachings (Galatians 1:6-9; 5:1-4). Paul warned the Ephesian church about those who would distort the truth and lure the disciples into following them (Acts 20:29-30). Timothy was told there would be a time people would depart from the faith by following false teachings (1 Timothy 4:1-3) and would not tolerate sound teaching (2 Timothy 4:2-4). Peter warned there would be many false teachers who would exploit and lead others into destructive heresies (2 Peter 2:1-3). John warned that many deceivers were in the world and that those who followed false teachings do not have God (2 John 1:7-11). Jesus warned the church in Pergamum to repent for tolerating false teaching (Revelation 2:12-17).

God has given His people the one faith of the gospel to hold to and urged them to diligently contend for it (Jude 1:3-4). Knowing and growing in this way of truth will help God's people guard against those who pervert the Scriptures (2 Peter 3:14-18). Leaders in the kingdom of God have a specific responsibility to help every Christian grow so as not to be misled by the various winds of false teaching (Ephesians 4:11-16). Furthermore, those who are teaching false and will not repent must not be accepted or aided by those in God's kingdom as if they were teaching truth (Romans 16:17-18; 2 John 1:9-11).

**3) Division.** Jesus recognized the importance of unity among those who professed to believe in Him and prayed about such shortly before He died (John

17:20-23). In this, we can conclude that division would hinder others from believing in God and Jesus as His Son and knowing about the love of God. Such division is often closely connected with false teaching and is dangerous for the same reasons we have discussed (Romans 16:17-18). Other times, division is not due to false teaching but is due more to issues that are indifferent to God and/or personal disagreements (Romans 14:1-3; 3 John 1:9-11).

In addition to the truth that must be used to combat any false teaching, God has instructed His people to reject those being divisive, after warning them (Titus 3:9-11; Romans 16:17-18). This will limit what they can do to cause destruction in the kingdom of God. Then, God's people are plainly expected to do everything they can to keep the unity God has given intact (as God has revealed one unified system of belief, teaching, and practice, Ephesians 4:1-6). So, in matters pertaining to the faith God has revealed, there must be no compromise (and any divisions that result simply work to show who are approved of God, 1 Corinthians 11:19). But, in matters of liberty/indifference to God, there must be patience (Romans 14:19-23).

Satan is working to do whatever he can to tear down and limit the kingdom of God. Although he will never be successful in destroying it completely, he can influence much harm that is done along the way. Therefore, God's people must be aware of some of these major challenges so as to guard against them and answer those challenges God's way so God's kingdom might continue to grow as God desires!

## Discipleship Questions

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

**Teaching:** What did you learn from this lesson?

**Rebuking:** What are some ways this lesson challenges you to live differently?

**Correction:** How does this lesson help you make positive changes for Christ?

**Training & Equipping:** How can you apply this lesson to be trained and equipped in God's service?

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