

How God's Kingdom Grows

Lesson 9: The Local Church In Kingdom Growth, Part 2

The local church has been designed by God as an outpost in the spiritual warfare being fought between His kingdom and Satan's kingdom. While the King reigns from Heaven, the base of operations for His people (i.e. His army) is not limited to any one place on this earth. Instead, God's design involves His people to be spread in local communities all over this world and to be organized in local churches through which the causes of His kingdom can be accomplished. As we have seen, one of the functions of the local church is to help those who are disciples of Jesus grow. Now, in this second part, let's focus on how the local church helps in kingdom growth regarding those who are not already following Jesus.

1) Equip saints to share the gospel. As there are different roles involved in leading God's people within the church (i.e. evangelists, shepherds, and teachers, Ephesians 4:11), being connected with a local church should result in all the saints being equipped to do God's work (Ephesians 4:12). For, these leaders are *not* there to do the work of the church while others watch. Rather, these leaders are there in large part to equip every saint with the knowledge and training needed to do God's work themselves! Sadly, many churches today have developed a culture in which the work is done by only a few. However, this separation between the work done by the church leaders and the members of the church is foreign to the expectations of God set forth in the Scriptures. For example, when persecution hit the church in Jerusalem, the saints were equipped enough they could go on their way preaching the word (Acts 8:4; 11:19-21). The apostle Peter also instructed saints to be ready to give a defense for the hope in them (1 Peter 3:14-16). So, rather than the gospel being shared by a few knowledgeable and trained leaders in Christ's army, the picture God gives in Scripture is an entire army becoming

increasingly more knowledgeable and trained to take the gospel to others who are lost! All those who are in Jesus's church should be holding up the word of truth in this world (1 Timothy 3:15). Those who were once spiritual babies in Christ are thus fed and trained so as to reproduce spiritually by impacting people in their own circles of influence!

2) Support evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. As the local church focuses on doing the work of God and spreading the gospel of Christ, God has authorized them to provide financial support to those who teach the gospel and do this work. This can include sending financial support to an evangelist. For example, though Paul was an apostle, he provides a model for taking the gospel into places it needed to be taught and building up churches in various communities. In his writings, he speaks of the right to financial support for those who are spreading the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:3-14; 2 Corinthians 11:6-9; Philippians 4:15-17). Then, Paul specifically mentions the right for elders (shepherds) who are good leaders to receive financial support (1 Timothy 5:17-18). Finally, the principle is generally given that those who are taught should share with the teacher (Galatians 6:6). Therefore, it should be clear that the church (collectively) and individual Christians in the church have the right and responsibility to share financially with those who teach the gospel of Christ (as a worker is worthy of wages, 1 Timothy 5:18; 1 Corinthians 9:13-14). However, the Scriptures also demonstrate that an evangelist, shepherd, or teacher may also exercise his/her right to choose not to receive this financial support and be a burden on the church (1 Corinthians 9:12, 15). Still, God demonstrates that a church can share with those leading by teaching the gospel so as to help them accomplish this work in His kingdom. Therefore, the members of the church must be generous to give to

support this work when they give upon the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). This helps both teach the lost and build up the saved.

3) Send evangelists and teachers. The work of financially supporting others to teach the gospel can be accomplished by the local church both in the sense of supporting those who are teaching locally, as well as those being sent into other communities. Consider some examples seen in Scripture of a local church helping to further the cause of the kingdom in other communities. When the church in Jerusalem heard Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, and they also preached in many villages of the Samaritans (Acts 8:14, 25). When the church in Jerusalem heard about the gospel being obeyed as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, they sent Barnabas as far as Antioch to strengthen the disciples and teach others (Acts 11:19-26). As the church in Antioch grew, they grew to the point of there being various prophets and teachers and the Holy Spirit instructed them to send Barnabas and Saul out from them to spread the gospel in other places (Acts 13:1-3). In fact, the Scriptures show the clear need for preachers to be sent with the gospel in Romans 10:13-18. Each of the examples given show how God's kingdom grew as a result of sending men with the gospel!

The local church plays an integral role in the growth of God's kingdom. Not only does the local church (acting both collectively and distributively) impact growth in those who have previously decided to follow Jesus, but also in those who have not yet made this decision. If every local church will commit to their roles in the growth of God's kingdom, more opportunities will be given for people (both saved and lost) to be part of and grow in His kingdom.

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?