

# How God's Kingdom Grows

## Lesson 14: Challenges To Kingdom Growth, Part 2

God's kingdom is at war. While His kingdom will never be destroyed, this does *not* mean that His kingdom will be unhindered by Satan and his kingdom. You see, those who are living on this earth are in one of these two kingdoms that are in opposition to each other. As God's kingdom must focus on accomplishing His mission, then, each citizen of the kingdom must be aware of the challenges facing God's kingdom and take God's solutions to those challenges.

**1) Persecution.** Shortly after the gospel was preached and people were added to Jesus's kingdom, persecution was experienced (Acts 4:1-3; 5:27-28, 40; 8:1-3; 9:1-2). Concerning the church located in Smyrna, Jesus urged them to be faithful to the Lord through the persecutions they were about to experience (even to the point of death, Revelation 2:8-11). Furthermore, as the book of Revelation often deals with the persecution Christians would experience, it demonstrates that Satan is furious in his defeat and is waging war against those who keep God's commands (Revelation 12:17). Although persecution may look different in each society, Satan is still seeking to cause suffering for following Jesus (Mark 4:16-17).

Jesus has told His followers to expect to experience persecution (Matthew 5:10-12; John 15:18-21). This is because the kingdom of Satan (darkness) hates the kingdom of God (light, John 3:19-21). This expectation for some form of persecution when standing for the truth should be embraced by everyone in Jesus's kingdom as necessary trials on the way to Heaven (Acts 14:21-22; 1 Peter 1:6-7). For, by holding faithfully to Christ, those in God's kingdom are assured of eternal life in Heaven (Revelation 2:10-11)! And, when God's people are faithful through such persecutions, Satan's attempts to destroy God's kingdom can result in the seed of the gospel spreading even further (Acts 8:4; 11:19-21)!

**2) Apathy.** While Satan would like for those in God's kingdom to completely renounce their faiths and embrace living as part of his kingdom, some of his greatest successes to limit the influence of God's kingdom has been through those who profess to follow Christ being indifferent toward the mission of Christ. Perhaps the clearest example of this is seen in the church at Laodicea. Clearly, there had been a congregation of God's people established in this city (Colossians 4:12-13, 15-16). Yet, by the time Revelation was written, they were in a place of apathy (indifference) toward God's mission (Revelation 3:14-22). Similarly, Christians and churches in this same condition today fail to fully embrace the mission of God's kingdom.

God's kingdom involves a mission that requires active participation on the part of every citizen of His kingdom (Ephesians 4:16). So, if any Christian or church fails to take God's mission seriously, such must realize this wretched condition before God and repent of this sin (Revelation 3:17-20)! For, Jesus's kingdom simply will not grow within individuals, communities, or the world as it should without His people being zealous for the good works Jesus desires. Everything God has done for us should cause us to fully embrace His mission and join Him zealously in His work (Titus 2:11-14; Romans 12:11). This kind of love and zeal for God should motivate our actions in a way that causes God's work *not* to be a burdensome obligation (1 John 5:2-4). Rather, this will develop the "Here I am, send me!" attitude that was demonstrated by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 6:8), the apostle Paul (Galatians 2:20), and others.

**3) Immaturity.** Satan does not need to stop people from following Jesus entirely to stunt the growth of God's kingdom. Rather, he can simply influence people not to mature like they should. For, if he can accomplish this, it will do several things. First, it will create many unnecessary problems and

fights inside the kingdom of God that will distract from God's mission (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). Second, it will leave the members of God's kingdom more susceptible to various false teachings (Romans 16:17-18). Third, it will result in spiritual laziness that keeps many people in a state of dependency on others to teach them (Hebrews 5:11-14). Fourth, it will keep these immature people on the sidelines in the mission of God instead of working to help others learn and obey the gospel (2 Timothy 2:1-2).

As we have seen throughout this study, God has provided everything needed for everyone in His kingdom to grow, mature, and be useful in His service (Ephesians 4:11-16). He has designed the process of spiritual growth much like the process of physical growth (1 John 2:12-14, note the little children, young men, and fathers expressions). We are born again to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3-6; 1 Peter 1:23). At this point we are spiritual babies in Christ who depend on the milk (first principles) of the word of God (Hebrews 5:13). However, we are expected to grow up into our salvations (1 Peter 2:2-3) and become spiritually mature, able to handle to solid food/meat (deeper principles) of the word of God (Hebrews 5:14). As we grow, we can then be spiritual parents to others, helping them experience the new birth and grow into maturity (1 Corinthians 4:14-17) – so they can continue the process (2 Timothy 2:2).

God's kingdom can and will grow when His people follow His instructions. Although there are challenges His people must diligently work to overcome, they can be overcome by those who are committed to serving King Jesus! However, Satan will continue trying to distract the people of God from accomplishing the mission of God any way that he can.

## 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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Written by Eric Krieg

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