

Growth Of God's Word

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How can God's word "grow"? We think of a tree growing, or a child growing, but God's word?

Three times the book of Acts speaks of God's word growing. First, after resolving the complaint about some widows in the Jerusalem church being neglected, *"Then the word of God grew, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem"* (Acts 6:7). Obviously, the body of truth (i.e. the gospel) didn't become any larger. But unrest within the church discourages the spread of the gospel; once that issue was settled God's word was proclaimed enthusiastically, resulting in numerous conversions.

Second, after the death of Herod Agrippa I (the one who killed James and wanted to kill Peter), Acts 12:24 says, *"But the word of God grew and multiplied."* God dealt with the murderous monarch in due time. Meanwhile, Herod's brutal behavior couldn't stop the spread of the gospel.

Finally, the inspired record states, *"So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed"* (Acts 19:20). The first word, "So," points to the reason the Lord's word grew, as shown in the two previous verses. Some believers evidently hadn't made a clean break with pagan occultism ("magic"). When they confessed their deeds and demonstrated the fruit of repentance by burning their expensive books, the gospel made tremendous advances.

God's word spreads (grows) when Christians are united, when Christians evangelize despite persecution, and when Christians show genuine conversion by turning away from their previous ungodly practices. God's word will grow today when we pay heed to these very things.

Be Kind To One Another

Henry Charles Link stated, "If we were to make the conscious and frequent effort to treat others with consideration (kindness), the effect on us and on society as a whole would be amazing."

Paul, encouraged the church in Ephesus to *"be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another even as God in Christ forgave you."* The preceding verse said, *"Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice"* (4:31-32). Paul knew the Ephesian church would face hard times and had warned them: *"Savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves"* (Acts 20:29-30).

In years past I have seen great loving congregations destroyed by unkind, hurtful words spoken by careless tongues. We have a loving, caring congregation here at (Justin), and we would do well to take to heart Paul's warnings listed above. We dare not hurt the church for which Christ died!

In his beautiful description of love Paul began by saying, *"Love suffers long and is kind"* (1 Corinthians 13:4). God warned His people of a day when they would be taken captive; but He also reminded them of His desire for them to repent. *"Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. So tear your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm"* (Joel 2:12).

The French have a proverb: "To speak kindly does not hurt the tongue."

--Cecil Burch (via Old Paths), adapted

The Power of the Gospel to Change our Lives

The gospel's power to save us from our sins is well-documented. The apostle Paul, in writing to the church at Rome explaining his ardent desire to preach the gospel to them, says, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek"* (Rom. 1:16). As powerful as is the gospel's ability to save, it is conditioned on faithful continuance in its teachings. Paul writes the brethren in Corinth, saying, *"Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain"* (1 Cor. 15:1-2). Make no mistake about it—the gospel's power to save is conditioned on our faithfulness to its teachings.

The gospel also has the power to shape the lives of Christians into conformity with the image of Christ. Please notice that in the aforementioned passage *the gospel* is used interchangeably with *the word*. The word of God is divinely powerful, not only to save souls, but to transform lives. In Christ, we are not powerless to resist the world's pressure to conform to its likeness. Instead, we can pursue transformation *"by the renewing of [our] mind, so that [we] may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect"* (Rom. 12:2). As we behold *"as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, [we] are...transformed into the same image..."* (2 Cor. 3:18). But, again, the gospel's power to change lives is conditioned on our willingness to make the necessary changes revealed therein. James says that we *must "prove [ourselves] to be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves"* (Jas. 1:22). We will not be blessed by the gospel's power to transform unless we *"abide by it"* and become *"an effectual doer"* (vs. 25).

The gospel of Jesus Christ has never been more accessible. We have, at our finger tips, God's power to save and transform our lives. Why, then, is there such a famine of God's word in our land? (Amos 8:11). As long as we are content to give the gospel mere lip service, souls will not be saved and lives will not be transformed. A radically different approach to the gospel is required.

--Glen Elliott (Greenbriar, AR)