



## HOW CHURCHES GREW IN ACTS

*Governance for Growth and Stability*

# Lesson 1 | 6/13/2021

## Overview and Introduction

“Who’s in charge of the church?” Most American Christians would answer, “The pastor is.” Further, most American churches are run like American government where it is assumed that democracy is the form of government that God approved. Members have a “vote”, and they use that vote to

exercise control. If they don’t like the way things are done, they organize a movement to vote them out of office. *That’s the American way!* But it’s not the biblical way. We need to answer clearly from the Bible, “How did God intend disciples to view their governance?” so that we don’t just do things the American way – but the way God intended for growth and stability.

First, I want to show where things stand in the religious world with governance structures before we begin with the Biblical model.

As currently organized in the modern world, the major forms of church government are called:

1. **Episcopal** - strong hierarchy of ordained clergy, namely the bishop, above the local congregation. It is closely tied to the idea of apostolic succession, the belief that bishops can trace their office in a direct, uninterrupted line back to the Apostles of Jesus. The bishop supervises the clergy within a local jurisdiction. Some examples of this structure are found in churches who are Orthodox, Methodist, Anglican, along with some Lutherans, and the Roman Catholic Church. The authority is placed in the bishop *where the authority is shared downward* in the structure. Some find their proof for this in Acts 6:3, 6; as well as 14:23; Matthew 16:18; and most pointedly in the role of James or Peter in the early church.
  - a. Though the rest of the government of the Roman Catholic Church resembles, to a great degree, the Episcopal form, some distinguish the form of government as its own structure as Papalism or Romanism. One source says, “Romanism holds to a transmitted infallibility. The pope is infallible: 1. when he speaks as pope. 2. When he speaks for the whole church. 3. When he defines doctrine or passes a final judgment. 4. When the doctrine thus defined is within the sphere of faith or morality.” [Augustus H. Strong. Systematic Theology, 914-917].
2. **Presbyterian** - a series of church courts with emphasis upon the local presbytery. Presbyterian governance by the rule of assemblies of elected presbyters, or elders, or church board. Groups of local churches are also governed by a higher assembly of elders known as the presbytery (or classis). These presbyteries can be grouped into a synod. Presbyteries and synods nationwide often join together in *a general assembly*. Presbyterian polity was developed as a rejection of governance by hierarchies of single bishops (episcopal polity). Presbyterianism is also distinct from congregationalism, in that individual congregations are not independent, but are answerable to the wider church, through its governing bodies (presbyteries, synods and assemblies). Some examples are churches that are Presbyterian, Reformed and some Bible churches.
3. **Congregational** - emphasis upon the local congregation and democracy. Congregationalist polity, often known as congregationalism, is a system of church governance in which every local church or congregation is independent, ecclesiastically sovereign as some churches would describe or as brethren would say, “autonomous”. Among *contemporary* churches, perhaps the most popular form of government is the congregational church government where the final governing authority resides within the congregation itself. While many churches of today are defined as “congregational” is this way, there is a variety of ways this governance is managed within those congregations: a member “vote,” the pastor, etc. In addition to churches of Christ, churches that

are often described as congregational in their polity are churches that are Baptist, Congregational and Independent churches, and Quakers, just to name a few.

As we explore the book of Acts to see how governance was executed among churches in the New Testament, we will realize that, in language, “congregational” will be the Biblical way even though most of the present practices within that structure called “congregational” are not Biblical. And since our aim is to be Biblical in everything, we will defend only what the New Testament teaches.

Just as Ephesians 4:1-6 teaches, there is clarity from Paul that churches were to be united in their view of the oneness of what they were to believe. To the Corinthians, Paul said that “you all agree and [that] there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1Corinthians 1:10). And he further says that Timothy would “remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church” (1Corinthians 4:17).

The authority Timothy would have in teaching (c.f. 2Timothy 4:1-4) would not be organizational. It would be authority from the word he would deliver from inspired men (2Corinthians 13:1-10). Those men would be moved to write what we could understand (Ephesians 3:4) by the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:13; 16:13; 2Peter 1:3-4).

What we will discover is that churches in the New Testament are seen to be – or were instructed to be – independent, local and self-governing bodies. While one could say there were acting as democracies complete in themselves, they were following the executive orders from the Apostles’ teaching and none of whom had legislative power.

The English word democracy comes from two Greek words that together mean “the rule of the people.” A democratic government is one in which the people rule. Although there have been very few civil governments that have operated by pure democracy, the democratic principle, at least in theory, has been incorporated into the way the United States is governed. However, in his famous address to the elders of the Ephesian church (Acts 20:16–38), Paul gave important insights into how the church of Jesus Christ was to be governed:

*Keep watch over yourselves and over the whole flock of which the holy Spirit has appointed you overseers, in which you tend the church of God that he acquired with his own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come among you, and they will not spare the flock. And from your own group, men will come forward perverting the truth to draw the disciples away after them.*

While some may see in Paul’s word an evolving, governance format, it is clear from Peter’s words that he viewed his work among the 12 apostles as truly pastoral (or like an elder or pastor) in 1Peter 5:1-3. And even for Peter and the other 12, the authority that they had was in the message that they shared (c.f. Acts 15).

We will progress to the next lesson as the Apostles as the Source of that authority. And as we progress, we will see the Biblical model found in their teaching in Scripture that was established as precedent in contrast to the governing practices among churches that have led people away.



## HOW CHURCHES GREW IN ACTS

*Governance for Growth and Stability*

## Lesson 2 | 6/20/2021

### The Word of Truth: The Authority of the New Testament Church.

**The Authority is the Word.** To understand the church of the New Testament we need to understand where they perceived their authority. In our last lesson we considered that the authority that the evangelist Timothy would have would not exist in his office – but

in his teaching (c.f. 2Timothy 4:1-4). The authority of the New Testament church was never intended to be organizational. Even for the Apostle Paul, it would be authority from the word he would deliver as an inspired man (2Corinthians 13:1-10) that would be the source of authority for Corinth. Those men would be moved to write what we could understand (Ephesians 3:4) by the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:13; 16:13; 2Peter 1:3-4). And it would be that word that is the expression of the authority for (not of) the New Testament churches wherever they would be.

**The Authority is the Apostles' Teaching.** So, when we read that the early church “devoted themselves to the Apostle’s teaching” (Acts 2:42), this is the demonstration of authority. The first congregation of people who followed Jesus did not imagine their way or follow their inner consciences to guide them to what they were to be or to do – instead they devoted themselves to the authority of those whose “ways which are in Christ” that “they taught in every church” (1Corinthians 4:17) so that they would “learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf on one against the other” (1Corinthians 4:6). These apostles gave the early church “everything pertaining to life and godliness” (2Peter 1:3) because they were given “all truth: (John 16:13) by the Holy Spirit. The early church who wanted to follow Jesus turned to Jesus’ Chosen Ambassadors for their every direction. Churches who want to follow Jesus today should be no different.

**The Authority is Truth.** It was this “word of truth” that Jesus hoped that his Disciples would follow (John 17:17). Abstractly speaking, truth is what is “a conformity to fact or reality” and its authority is the authority of reality or what is real, not what seems to be real. Therefore, defying truth is defying reality. Even in other relationship like the authority of a parent over his child or government over its citizen, it must ultimately conform to truth or “right,” or each will face the inevitable rebellion. Might does not make right – and neither does majority rule. Further, rebellion, of itself, does not prove a thing right either. What makes something right is that it is true, or truth. Truth does not seek to force itself on us. We must seek after it – for only in it is true freedom (John 6:44-45; 8:31-32).

**Only God has such Truth in Him.** Such sovereign authority is, in its ultimate sense, suited only to God. He is God of truth; His word is truth (Deuteronomy 32:4). Respect and desire for truth leads man to God, and any other attitude is contrary to God-like-ness. The way to heaven is the Way of truth (John 14:6). And Jesus is Head over all things to the church (Ephesians 1:22-23).

So how did the early church respond to this?

1. **The early church followed Christ as the Head of the church.** Even from Pentecost, Jesus was declared Lord (Acts 2:36) and Lord to every believer (Romans 10:9; Philippians 2:11). As Lord, Jesus must be master or owner of something. Jesus is Lord of all because He is Lord of each. And from the church’s viewpoint of things, His authority and position over them is because He has been raised to be Lord (Acts 2:36) over His Kingdom of which they were citizens (Colossians 1:13).
2. **The early church followed the Apostle’s word as the authoritative, and final word from God.** This word was authoritative *when spoken* by the Apostles and as written, was equally authoritative. Paul told Corinth they were not to exceed what was written (1Corinthians 4:6). The reason is that when the Spirit guided their spoken words, He also guided the result of their written words. The Scripture is inspired of God (2Timothy 3:16-17) or “God breathed out.” As noted before, this gospel is “one” (Ephesians 4:5); it is the final expression from God (Hebrews

1:1-3), that has been “once and for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). There will be no other because there is no other gospel (Galatians 1:6-8). And so, the early church was consistently told that “everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son” (2John 9).

3. **They distinguished the authoritative message from the Old Testament of Moses.** Several times these Apostles said the New Testament replaced the Old Testament (2Corinthians 3:1-11; Ephesians 2:14-15; Hebrews 8:6-13, 10:9). Especially when efforts to use the Old Testament rule or practice as a binding aspect on Christians, the Apostles disavowed the practice as wrong (Galatians 5:1-4). All the writers expressed that there was value in the study and understanding of Old Testament Scripture (Romans 15:4). However, Christians considered their normative patterns belonged to the new covenant alone (Colossians 2:13-17).
4. **They were told the message of the Apostles had a uniformed pattern.** Paul spoke of his ways that he taught in “every church” (1Corinthians 4:17; 7:17) – just as he taught evangelists (2Timothy 2:2) and elders (Acts 20:28-32) – that the words delivered were the pattern for their thinking and their actions (2Timothy 1:13). And Paul clearly said to Timothy, “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” Even the practice of the custom, Paul said was to be uniform as he had “directed the churches of God” (1Corinthians 11:16). Further, Paul directed the Corinthian church in regard to the contribution for the saints to follow the same practice as he had taught the “churches of Galatia” (1Corinthians 16:1). If the teaching Paul delivered was uniform, then the practice of churches that Paul instructed should be the same as well. It was, in fact, handed down as authoritative tradition or teaching (cf., 2Thessalonians 3:6; Philippians 4:9).
5. **The early church learned they were to speak the oracles of God** (1Peter 4:11) and if there is no instruction, they should not speak (Acts 15:24) and not exceed what is written (1Corinthians 4:6). The principle that only what God reveals is authoritative is modelled in the Old Testament, is used to teach in the New Testament (Hebrews 7:17) and is implicit to the walk as a Christian (2John 9). If God is silent, there is no authoritative word to empower us with God’s approval to do in the name of Christ. If churches would just listen to this truth, there would be much greater unity among disciples.

The early church received these Apostolic writings to resolve their difficulties (i.e., 1Corinthians, 2Thessalonians, Hebrews, 1John). Notice how Paul addressed the problems that the Corinthian church had. Regarding marriage, Paul cited Jesus’ teaching (1Corinthians 7:10-11 with Mark 10:9). When the Lord’s supper was being misappropriated, Paul appealed to what the Lord had said to him (1Corinthians 11:22-25). Consequently, if we are to solve our problems in churches, then we must turn to Scripture – not tradition – not culture – not conscience – and to Scripture alone – to resolve our differences because the authority for the church is in the word of truth delivered by the Apostles from the Holy Spirit. For us today, the New Testament is the only Divine solution to our problems or grievances.

The only solution to our problems as churches is to return to the New Testament because the only place we should start when we become a Christian, when we start as a church and when we do the works that we do for Jesus Christ’s sake is to finish with the New Testament. It alone is the authority to, for and of the New Testament church.



## HOW CHURCHES GREW IN ACTS

*Governance for Growth and Stability*

## Lesson 3 | 6/27/2021

### The Arrangement of a New Testament Church.

Local churches had organization just as God gave instruction for families to have organization. But just as a family is a relationship and not an organization, neither is a church an organization.

But in that organization a church has, or arrangement, there is a group of men called elders that Paul appointed in "every church" (Acts 14:23) and instructed Titus to appoint in "every city" (Titus 1:5). When Paul told Titus to "ordain elders in every city" (kata polin), some contend this means only one church per town. Of course, it could as well mean elders in every church in every city. Greek scholars (Robins, Lenski) say that kata her is distributive and cite passages for comparison (Lk. 8:1; Acts 15:21,26; 20:23, Expositors, Alford, Meyer). They translated "city by city," and indicate it means "all over the island," "of the church in several cities," etc. Lenski says "the placement of elders in each congregation." These men are not quoted as final authority, but their expertise in Greek is respected.

And in that arrangement, these elders were appointed to rule, or "lead through example" but also to "maintain oversight" and to "shepherd" (1Peter 5:2-3). As Paul said to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28, "the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God." In 1Timothy 5:17 where it speaks of "directing the affairs of the church" (NIV), the NASB & KJV translate this as to "rule". The CEV translates it as "doing their job well." Which begs the question, what is their job? This is the arrangement of responsibility, order, and rule God has placed in a local church in the eldership.

Yet, in that arrangement, the elders shepherded only those Christians that were "among them" (1Peter 5:2-3). This, coupled with "elders in every church," clearly teaches that elders of one church or congregation have no business in another congregation or have any rights to oversee any part of another congregation's work. Church historians agree that the early apostasy began with the Metropolitan system, where overseers of one church controlled other churches around them, forming a diocese. This is a change in God's plan for independent churches and is as wrong today as it was then.

Still, in Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul said, "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." The Greek "he himself gave some," etc., could be understood to mean "he himself gave (to the church)," etc. The statement he appointed some to be may be rendered as "he chose some to be." But often a more appropriate rendering is equivalent to "to some he gave the task of being..." or "...assigned the task of being...." (from the UBS New Testament Handbook Series. Copyright © 1961-1997, by United Bible Societies.)

Appointing biblically qualified elders to lead churches is important in any context for at least three reasons. First, God is the one set in order the role and the work of elders. Second, God uses elders to maintain church health. And third, the only model for any arrangement in the New Testament is a leadership of "elders in every church" that "oversee the flock of God."

Elders are needed in every church... BECAUSE OF THEIR FUNCTION

They are described most frequently as elders. It means "aged, advanced in years." The word is "presbuteros" indicating maturity, not just in age because maturity doesn't always come with age. It's a maturity of experience and wisdom. They second word used to describe their function is shepherd or pastor. This word carries with it the sense of care and tender attention needed of shepherd to truly guide

the flock of God. In fact, this is the same term Jesus uses to describe his relationship with those who follow Him (John 10). This word is "poimen" which is one who leads, feeds, and protects the flock. Other significant translations use the term pastor which is the Latin word for "shepherd".

The least used word in the New Testament is bishop, used only five times in the NT, one of which refers to Jesus as the Shepherd and Bishop of Souls (1Peter 2:25). The Greek word is "episkopos" often translated "overseer." – The term refers to a manager-supervisor or in modern synonyms - director or superintendent. It's another New Testament word that gives the same sense of meaning as "steward" -- "One who runs or oversees the master's household." It means "to care for as a protector or guardian, to be out in front leading and guiding."

Ultimately, their function mimics the Master. They are not redeemers, Saviors, Lords or anywhere close to His rightful place. But in Acts 20:28, Paul told Elders to "shepherd or tend to the flock of God" all of which fits quite well with the leadership style of Jesus. This Leading, guiding, shepherding and teaching of God's people leads to a greater relationship with God. It points us back to Jesus, the Great Shepherd. That's why in the qualifications, an elder is a man who models Jesus' will.

Elders are needed in every church... BECAUSE OF THE SYNERGY OF THEIR COLLECTIVE WISDOM

The Apostles appointed for each church a plurality of godly leaders who met God's criteria (1Timothy 3:1-6/Titus 1:5ff). Here is an example of how multiple gifts, abilities and perspectives can synergistically work together for a greater total effect than the sum of several individuals. Without plurality, a church can be led astray by one personal agenda. Look how the Scriptures refer to them:

1. In Jerusalem, the elders (plural) were as plural as the Apostles (Acts 15:4).
2. James instructed sick believers to "call for the elders" (5:14, plural)
3. Paul appointed elders (plural) at each new church (Acts 14:23)
4. Paul calls "elders" (plural) from at Ephesus to meet him in Miletus (Acts 20:17).
5. Peter views the same plurality in each congregation (1Peter 5:1-4)

The eldership is comprised of a council of equals --Each one has the same authority and works together for the betterment of the church of Christ. And with each man creates a synergy of benefit for the congregation. Without a plurality, there would be no synergy.

Elders are needed in every church... BECAUSE OF OUR NEED FOR LEADERSHIP.

Of course, they need to be qualified leadership and in those qualifications, we get some idea why we need them. They are to be living examples for people to follow. Simply put, if elders are leaders – then it is because we need to follow. Even Paul acknowledged such in 1Corinthians 11:1 of himself. As Hosea said, 'Like people, like priests.' (Hosea 4:9) Jesus said, 'Everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher. (Lk. 6:40) Biblical history demonstrates that people will seldom rise above the spiritual level of their leadership.

So, if elders are contentious, the congregation will become contentious. If elders are inhospitable, the congregation will become unfriendly and cold. If elders love money, the congregation will become worshippers of money. If elders are listless and cold in their service, churches will grow cold. The qualifications for elders can be divided into three categories of leadership we need (1Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9).

Ultimately, churches need elders because God placed them there (Ephesians 4:11). If we are to be a New Testament church, we must follow the arrangement of God and have elders in every church.



## HOW CHURCHES GREW IN ACTS

*Governance for Growth and Stability*

# Lesson 4 | 7/4/2021

## The Growth of New Testament Churches.

We began our study asking, “How did God intend disciples to view their governance?” so that we don’t just do things the American way – but the way God intended for growth and stability. And first, we learned that the

governance of churches that flowed from Christ as Head of the church would be congregational. And that governance from Christ would be through the authority of the revealed word in Scripture. And then through elders within that local church is where the limit of human governance would come. What we have discovered as well is that churches in the New Testament were, because they were instructed to be, independent, local and self-governing bodies. If we will remember that the book of Acts tells the story of how a small group of Jewish disciples grew to become a multi-ethnic movement sweeping across the Mediterranean world, all within the span of a single generation (Colossians 1:23), then seeing how Apostles, elders and churches behaved then becomes a pattern for our behaviors today.

The passages that most powerfully convey their growth in Acts are the statements that refer in general terms to the ongoing *numerical* growth of the church (Acts 2:47; 5:13–14; 6:1, 7; 9:31; 11:21, 24; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20). These statements are often considered to be merely summaries (perhaps with the exception of 6:1) because they consistently follow a detailed narration of actions, events, and circumstances, that advanced the early church’s pace. We shall find churches that grew by doing right, by being dedicated to the authentic gospel and by remaining faithful to God.

**Look first at Acts 2:47.** After Peter had preached the gospel in Jerusalem on Pentecost, Luke tells us that those who heard “gladly received his word” and were baptized. And then he goes on to tell us that three thousand souls were added. In verse 47, he will go on to say that the Lord was adding to “their number” daily from those who were being saved by that gospel. The numerical growth began because the number of times the gospel was being shared was increasing. In application, a local church will grow only by the expanding number of times that the story of the gospel is retold. While it is true that “preaching the gospel” is the same as “preaching the Christ” and “the faith” in Scripture (c.f. Galatians 2:2, 1:16; 1:23), it should be self-evident that the message that began to be shared in Jerusalem was the telling of the story of Jesus’ life and what He came to bring to humanity. They filled Jerusalem with the teaching about Christ (5:28). “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (5:42). **It is only in that telling of the story of Jesus that the Lord will “add to our number”** those who are being saved.

**Second, notice in Acts 5:13-14** that the addition of men and women to the numbers of the church in Jerusalem was the result of the church’s witness in the community. They were held in “high esteem” because they were in 1) one accord in Solomon’s portico (12) and 2) in fear of “these things” (11) which were the demonstration of standard of fidelity to Christ to which all believers were held. Peter stressed the gravity of their sin in their actions (i.e., lying to God, 5:4) because falsehood ruins fellowship. Churches grew because their relationships were based in not only following truth – but in being truthful with each other. He also focused on the conscience where Christians should live transparent lives before God, without guile, like their Savior (Hebrews 4:15) and what their Savior praised (John 1:47). And the event itself authenticates what it called church discipline. We cannot oscillate between the extreme severity of disciplining members for trivial things and the extreme laxity of avoiding significant violations of God’s will for Christians (1Corinthians 5:1). Secret sins should be addressed secretly, private sins privately, and public sins publicly. But note, **it was their fidelity to truthfulness that provoked the growth.**

**Then, in Acts 6:1 and 6:7,** Luke tells us again that the church is increasing in number from the last report of five thousand men (4:4). Thus far, it is a reference to the Jerusalem church. The first problem was

deceitfulness. The second here is prejudicial treatment. And when the church saw its continued commitment to equitable treatment of all – manifested and maintained – “the word of God kept spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase.” It cannot be emphasized enough that growth was the result of their **doing**. They were doing what the Apostles had asked them to do locally.

**Continuing on in Acts 9:31**, the Jerusalem church that had continued to grow even through persecution would bring the gospel to the churches in Galilee. First, there was the martyrdom of Stephen (6:8-7:60) that was followed by Luke’s testimony that this “young man named Saul” (7:58) who imprisoned many Christians (8:3). But the church in its persecution scattered in force to continue to proclaim the good news (8:4). And in the next summary, Luke says, “So the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed peace, as it was being built up; and as it continued in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it kept increasing” (9:31). They did not stop doing what God told them to do. They remained committed to the **doing** and kept preaching the gospel. It is also significant to note that Peter describes five characteristics the church that was connected to their increase. They had 1) peace, 2) strength, 3) encouragement, and they continued in their 1) fear of the Lord and 2) in the comfort they received from the Holy Spirit.

**Now notice Acts 11:21, 24**. The same people who left Jerusalem under the persecution of Stephen went further abroad to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Syrian Antioch and took the gospel to Greeks. Perhaps they had heard about the preaching of Peter to Cornelius (c.f. Acts 10) but Luke tells us that they were scattered by the martyrdom in Acts 7. The church at Antioch will become another model of growth because “considerable numbers were brought to the Lord.” Jerusalem helped Antioch by sending Barnabas to them (11:22). Here is a powerful point that a church saw the need for the gospel and generated of their own assets (ie. Sending Barnabus) to a church who never “asked” for help. When Barnabas arrived (at Jerusalem’s sending), he saw what the Lord was doing through Christians who were teaching others and he encouraged them in it. And then Barnabas went to Tarsus and brought Paul and the two evangelists worked together with these highly evangelistic Christians to share the gospel. They are to be praised because they were committed to the **doing**. And here they were first called Christians (11:26).

The last summary of Luke in Acts 12:24 says, “But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.” The chapter began with what appeared to be the triumph of the severely brutal and hostile King Herod and ends with the dramatic reversal that the tyrant king had now been consumed. Luke’s last summary report here concludes that now the Word of God remains triumphant. The ominous reality that James is now also dead was countered with the freedom of the once imprisoned Peter. And the reason for the reversal is the power of the word of God to keep growing. The positivity that concludes Luke’s narrative on the mission to the Jewish world will continue on in the narrative of Paul’s work to the Gentile world. But the lesson that should be finally seen in all of this is that the growth of the kingdom is in the Seed, the word of God. We are but farmers – sent out into the world with a powerful message. But that seed will never accomplish its purpose if the farmers will not be active in their **doing**.

**The growth of the New Testament church will always be in the doing. And the doing that we have focused on was done by the individual in those churches.**



## HOW CHURCHES GREW IN ACTS

*Governance for Growth and Stability*

# Lesson 5 | 7/11/2021

## The Way Churches Grew.

**Evangelism is always personal, or to put it another way – person to person.** In the New Testament it was a four-tiered as illustrated by Paul in his letter to Timothy in 2Timothy 2:1-2: “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many

witnesses, entrust these to faithful people who will be able to teach others also.” It looks like this: 1) Paul (taught by the Holy Spirit) 2) Timothy (taught by Paul); Faithful People (taught by Timothy); Others (taught by faithful people). It is not biblical to envisage evangelism accomplished more effectively than how the early church did it – person to person.

Yet, evangelism was supported, and should remain supported today, for the likes of Paul’s, Timothy’s and faithful people. Paul received support from the church at Philippi more than once (Philippians 4:15-16) when he was departing from Macedonia and even into Thessalonica. When some in Corinth undermined his Apostleship, Paul wrote, “My defense to those who examine me is this: Do we not have a right to eat and drink? Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife...? Or do only Barnabas and I have no right to refrain from working? Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not consume some of the milk of the flock?...

Or does the Law not say these things as well? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses: “You shall not muzzle the ox while it is threshing.” God is not concerned about oxen, is He? Or is He speaking entirely for our sake? Yes, it was written for our sake, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing in the crops. If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share the right over you, do we not more?... So also, the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.”

And while this support for evangelists and teaching elders\* (1Timothy 5:17) was going on in these churches, there was personal evangelism being engaged by persons. And in this lesson, we want to consider how these churches were growing within themselves to grow outwardly evangelistically.

R. Allen wrote two books early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century after his work in preaching in fields that were largely unevangelized in the first half of the last century. What efforts had been made are often a discussion point in his books on how they failed. And in these books, that elucidated principles of indigenization which are still discussed today. His two main books, **Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?** and **The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes Which Hinder It**, focused on the theme that Paul founded churches rather than missions. He would note that in little more than ten years Paul would establish the Church in four provinces of the Empire, Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia and Asia. And before A.D. 47 there were no churches in these provinces but in A.D. 57, Paul could speak as if his work there was done (Missionary Methods: Paul's or Ours?, 6th ed; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).

This is what Luke shows us in Acts (which we have studied in earlier lessons) when he returned to each congregation that began meeting after he had preaching and brought people to become Christians (c.f. Acts 14:23). Yet, the point is, shown in Allen's primary thesis, is that Paul did not leave them without resources upon which they could build their churches.

**Their path was set.** When Barnabas and Paul returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, for example, the believers were encouraged **"to remain true in the faith"** (14:22). There was a pattern of sound teaching (2Timothy 1:13) that Timothy was urged to follow; that Titus was instructed to teach (Titus 2:1) and Timothy was urged to preach (2Timothy 4:2); and Corinth was instructed to find in Timothy because Timothy had found them in Paul (2Corinthians 4:15). Very clearly, Timothy was commanded to keep the

pattern of sound teaching that he had heard from Paul. He wasn't charged to PRODUCE new content, but to PRESERVE and PROCLAIM the content with which he had been entrusted, all the truth in God's Word that the Holy Spirit delivered to the Apostles (John 14:26; 15:13; 16:13). And Paul said, "GUARD the good deposit," (2Timothy 1:13).

**They would always be the “they.”** The “faithful men” who would “teach others” would be people “**from among**” the indigenous peoples of the community of believers (c.f. Acts 20:28) and become the leaders as shepherds and servants because that was always the pattern (Acts 6:3). While Titus and Timothy were often “sent” or “left” in different places (1Corinthians 4:17; 1Timothy 1:3; Titus 1:5), local churches were shaped to be self-perpetuating. Such indigenization of the early church made the work they partnered in with God. While the doctrinal guidelines from the Apostles provided to the leaders and the delegation of the Spirit’s influence was given to many until the complete writing of their insights given by the Spirit would be showed, the true step for a congregation’s maturation was to be self-perpetuating through self-governance (or, autonomy, 1Peter 5:1-2) and self-sufficiency (Ephesians 4:11-16). So, when Paul (or anyone) felt they could walk away and leave the church in the care of God, it was the objective of what God was trying to accomplish. From a human perspective such a venture is risky because a new church left to fend for itself without Apostles or a written document of teaching, most would think them an easy prey for doctrinal aberration, division, heresy, and moral failings. But instead, God left them to mature on their own, proving His faithfulness by supplying their need in the structure of the local congregation. And that’s how the early churches grew – the Lord’s way. In future lessons, we will show how through the history of Christianity, people have modified, radically changed or even abandoned any semblance of likeness to what began in Acts.

In a world that is becoming increasingly more complex, secular-minded, and technologically advanced, Christians of our era should be encouraged that many of the evangelistic principles of the early church in Acts should be normative for churches today. Instead, many follow business models, advertising models and power models to force the growth of the Kingdom.

The failure of many churches to grow today is often a failure to realize and to practice these principles that spring from within the congregation. The church is “sufficient” was the rhetoric of the past centuries because it is true. The level for success to accomplish this aim of growth and evangelism is not meted out by any brotherhood standard to which all churches must attain and likewise, it is not a nebulous, unknown thing that no church can not know when it reads the Bible because in the message of that good news is not only the power for salvation, it is the power to share salvation.

The history of the early churches demonstrate that the gospel is a message for all the people, and that the local church is a family whose responsibilities and directives are best handled the way God modeled in the Apostles: with the very people who are there. We would do well to contrive the same today as they did then. They did not set up colonies of their cultures. They did not follow the structures of even Rome. And we will see how later generation will ruin the local church with attitudes that are completely opposite of the spirit of Acts. ***The way churches grew is that a local church grew.***

How then can these principles of a local church with their evangelism and growth be applied to our congregation today? Consider this:

1. Congregational independence is less about self-rule as it is about self-care: We are responsible for our future and our present.
2. Congregational leadership determines the health and maturity of the body: Elders and deacons are not leading and serving to merely get jobs done.
3. Outside influences often lead to ruin. When a church takes it lead from outside sources it often disembowels the gut of courage, of determination and ultimately of faith.



## HOW CHURCHES GREW IN ACTS

*Governance for Growth and Stability*

# Lesson 6 | 7/18/2021

## The Way Churches Grew.

The passages we mentioned in lesson 4 often called “growth summary” passages (Acts 2:47; 5:13–14; 6:1, 7; 9:31; 11:21, 24; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20) show the numerical bursts in the early church because they consistently follow a detailed narration of actions, events, and

circumstances, that advanced the early church’s pace.

While the growth summaries do not clearly say “the church grew because,” the preceding context (as noted in that lesson) suggested some of the causes to be the work of God directly: The miraculous manifestation of the Spirit and the Apostles’ preaching (2:47); The miraculous manifestation of judgment against unrighteousness (5:13-14); The hand of the Lord was with them (11:21); and the Divine decree through the Apostles and Elders delivered (16:5). However, some of the contexts indicated the work of God indirectly, that is through the medium of the people of God. And that is the study for this lesson.

Notice in 6:1-7, that the growth of the church was the result of their response to the Divine will for compassion. When Grecian widows were being overlooked, the Apostles instructed them how to respond. They were to appoint seven men, who have Grecian names, which suggests that they responded to each need as each need required. The growth was the result of immediate and urgent response. It would be Paul who would later continue to urge Corinth to follow through with the same earnestness that they had shown in following in the same work of benevolence (2Corinthians 8:6-8) even though it had been about a year since they had promised to help Christians in Jerusalem (8:10-12). Even though the initial work of benevolence was for the needy among the saints in the Jerusalem church by the Jerusalem church (4:32-37). The elders were the recipients and the managers of the distribution of those gifts in the church there. But when Paul sought from Gentile churches to assist the poor among the saints in Jerusalem (Romans 15:22-29; 1Corinthians 16:1-2; 2Corinthians 9:2, 10-15). The church’s growth was connected to their eagerness to remember the poor (c.f. Galatians 2:10). By caring for people in their need, it reminded them of their own.

Also, notice in 9:31, the growth of the church was the result of “going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit” (NASB). Of course, the beginning of the verse said the church (or churches) enjoyed peace. The leading antagonist had now been converted (9:18). But Josephus adds, "Caligula sent Petronius to go with an army to Jerusalem, to set up his statues in the temple, enjoining him if the Jews opposed it, to put to death all that made resistance, and to make all the rest of the nation slaves. Petronius therefore marched from Antioch into Judea, with three legions, and a large body of auxiliaries raised in Syria. All were hereupon filled with consternation, the army being come as far as Ptolemais. The Jews, then, gathering together, went to the plain near Ptolemais, and entreated Petronius in the first place for their laws, in the next place for themselves. Petronius was moved with their solicitations, and, leaving his army and the statues, went into Galilee, and called an assembly of the heads of the Jews at Tiberias; and, having exhorted them without effect to submit to the emperor's orders, said, 'Will ye then fight against Caesar?' They answered that they offered up sacrifices twice every day for the emperor and the Roman people; but that if he would set up the images, he ought first of all to sacrifice the whole Jewish nation; and that they were ready to submit themselves, their wives and children, to the slaughter." It appears, then, anxious for their own safety, thee stopped the persecution, and with the conversion of the main instrument in persecution, and by the universal alarm for the welfare of the nation, the trembling and enfeebled church was permitted to obtain repose. Thus ended the first general

persecution against Christians, and as a result, they were encouraged. But they grew because of their fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

The NRSV and NIV, note that they were “walking” or “Living” in this. The word is often used to denote “Christian conduct, or manner of life,” (Col 1:10; Luk 1:6; 1Thes 4:1; 1John 2:6). The idea of “in the fear of the Lord” would denote their reverence for him and his commandments. It is also used to denote “piety” (2Chro 19:7; Psa 19:9; 111:10; Pro 1:7; 13:13). This no debilitating fear of the wrath of the Lord or damnation for sin committed against him; Rather, this edification in faith and holiness came because they did not “fear which is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18) but with perfect love.

“In the comfort of the Holy Spirit” means that they found consolations, not only in the manifestations of his approvals (Mark 16:20) or in the revelations He was making in the speech and later writings of inspired men (Ephesians 3:1-5), but also in their own sharing abroad the love of God in them (Romans 5:5) refreshed and revived them (Ephesians 4:13-15; 1Thes 5:19). That they were “walking” in those comforts from the Holy Spirit indicates that there was on their part a continuance of them, a long enjoyment of them. Paul adds: “For as many as the promises of God are, in Him they are yes; therefore through Him also is our Amen to the glory of God through us. Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge” (2Corinthians 1:21-22). Can you identify a greater tenderness for your bedraggled soul?

And the third aspect of this growth was evidenced in “completing missions” (12:24-25) and in genuine repentance (19:20). Growth was connected to the human responses to the demand God had placed on them. Growth happens when we finish His work. The work of growth does not explode with volcanic urges but in the mundane pursuit of work and completions. And no greater and powerful example is in the work of repentance wrought in the hearts of individual Christians and in local churches as evidenced by what Paul told Corinth: “For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while— I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything [c]through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter. So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the offender nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness in our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God. Because of this, we have been comforted.”



## HOW CHURCHES GREW IN ACTS

*Governance for Growth and Stability*

## Lesson 7 | 7/25/2021

### The Way Churches Grew Together.

In each of the previous lessons, we have considered: 1) Acts shows that the governance among New Testament was executed among churches as “congregational,” namely that each congregation was intentionally self-ruling;

2) Acts shows that the Apostles, as they expressed the will of God given to them through the Spirit of truth, were the “power to act” or authority in each church; 3) While the Apostles’ had authority among all Christians through the Word given to them, a local church had organization, or arrangement, with men called elders that Paul had appointed in “every church” (Acts 14:23) and had instructed Titus to appoint in “every city” (Titus 1:5); 4) The passages often called “growth summary” passages (Acts 2:47; 5:13–14; 6:1, 7; 9:31; 11:21, 24; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20) show numerical bursts in the early church through the work done by individuals and through the support of churches as they consistently followed the Apostolic pattern; 5) Self-care within a local church generated leadership and the ability to provide for the work God had assigned each local church and 6) Acts shows how the church grew because they were responsive to God’s will to be compassionate to all (including Grecian widows), they persevered “in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit” and they completed the missions or works they promised to do. Growth that is Divinely approved cannot do any less than these.

As noted before, the way churches collectively made evangelism reach further was to support preachers in other places, just as Philippi did with Paul (c.f. Philippians 1:5; 4:15-16). We should note that Paul reminds them that from the “first day” until “now” they have **participated** “in the preaching of the gospel.” The NIV and ESV translates this as “partnership”. Their partnership was in the sharing of participation in the preaching of the gospel. In chapter 4, Paul says that they sent “more than once” for his needs which creates the conclusion that their partnership was more than just doing the same thing as Paul (i.e., preaching to people) but in “supporting” the preaching to people (i.e. 1Corinthians 9:14). But notice what was true of the Philippian church “from the first day” in Acts 16.

1. The first members were Lydia and her household (16:15) and the jailor and his household (16:33).
2. The first members were Jewish and Gentile.
3. The first members were small in number.
4. The first members were willing and able to support Paul in his ministry.
5. They were not told “they were too small” and they were not asked to send their money elsewhere. They provided locally and later internationally.

This later action is exhibited by Paul’s reception of their funds. While it was true that Jewish rabbis had a saying: “Whoever does not teach his son a trade is as if he brought him up to be a robber” and (even as a celebrated scholar under the celebrated Gamaliel, Acts 22:3), on his second missionary journey when he came to Corinth, the first thing that Paul did was seek work to sustain his needs. He was able to connect with Aquila and Priscilla, who, having recently arrived from Rome, were of the same trade. While Paul may have made tents during the week, or perhaps at night (cf. 1 Thes. 2:9), on the sabbath day he went to the Jewish synagogue, there reasoning and attempting to persuade both Jews and Greeks (Gentiles who were attracted to the Hebrew religion) of the validity of Christianity.

In Acts 18:5, Luke says, “But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word (constrained by the word, ASV) testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ” (NASB). The KJV suggests that Paul was “pressed in the Spirit,” but the better manuscript evidence has the term “word,” rather than “Spirit.” The grammatical form of the verb “constrained” is an imperfect tense, middle voice. Thus, literally translated, the phrase suggests that Paul “started holding

himself to the word” (cf. A.T. Robertson, Greek Grammar, 808). Some have suggested the meaning: “[Paul] was wholly absorbed in preaching” (Arndt & Gingrich, Greek Lexicon, 797). The common view is that the apostle “restricted himself” to preaching—as opposed to continuing his involvement in the tent business. But how was he able to do this since other passages make it clear that he was not financially supported by the church at Corinth? In fact, he refused such (2Corinthians 12:13).

The best answer is this: When Silas and Timothy joined Paul, they brought support from other congregations, so that the apostle would later say to the Corinthians: “I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to serve you; and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden on to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia, they fully supplied my need” (2Corinthians 11:8-9). Of course, “Robbed” is hyperbole (an idiomatic exaggeration for emphasis), suggesting that Corinth may have been unable to sustain him and others provided the lack. And by such hyperbole, there was the expectation that this would be their charge and responsibility. Still, Paul would not be a burden to them. And so, though the apostle supported himself for a while in Corinth, the time came when he had sufficient funds, and so could forego physical labor, and devote himself completely to preaching the gospel.

As we have noted, there is from Scripture (1Corinthians 9), the divine precedent that men who preach have the “right” (exousia – “authority”) to be sustained in their work (v. 4); the “right” of support (v. 5); the “right” to forebear secular work (v. 6) and not have to labor at his “own charges” (v. 7); Even the Old Testament foreshadows God’s “care” for preachers (vv.8b,10,13) and Paul says it is “directed” or ordered by the Lord himself (v. 14).

Consider how churches in Acts engaged in their works through their governance within the local congregation.

1. With benevolence,
  - a. People received them from individuals.
  - b. Paul had a congregation send it (by whom they chose) to the recipients: “whomever you may approve, I shall send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem” (1Corinthians 16:3).
  - c. Earlier, when the famine arose in Judea, the disciples in Antioch determined to send relief to destitute brethren. The money was sent directly to the churches in need (Acts 11:27-30): “This they did, sending it in charge of Barnabus and Saul to the Elders.”
2. With evangelism,
  - a. Paul received support from individuals.
  - b. However, he received support from Philippi (4:14-18) and when he was in Corinth, from several “churches” (2Cor 11:8-9) and that too was sent directly from church to the recipient, via messenger.

Churches grew together by each congregation engaging in their work. In benevolence, the churches acted together when they participated within their own in helping the churches in Judea (Acts 11) and in Jerusalem (2Corinthians 8-9; Romans 15:26) did so on their own accord, in their own time, and with their own messengers – per Paul’s instruction. In evangelism, based on the conversation between Paul the supported and Philippi and the other supporting churches, we find that churches acted together when they each acted on their own to send support evangelists

When churches today follow this pattern and send their support directly to the recipient (by maintaining their own governance and self-rule), they act with the authority that the Apostles did.



## HOW CHURCHES GREW IN ACTS

### *Governance for Growth and Stability*

## Lesson 8 | 8/15/2021

### The Challenges to Biblical Growth and Stability.

In previous lessons, we have studied in the book of Acts how New Testament churches were governed, namely that each congregation was intentionally self-ruling; And how each congregation was subservient to the rule of

the Apostles where the “power to act” or authority in each church was in what the Apostles taught. Yet, within in local structure, a local church had organization, or arrangement, with men called elders that Paul had appointed in “every church” (Acts 14:23) and had instructed Titus to appoint in “every city” (Titus 1:5). But the growth within those churches were illustrated in the “growth summary” passages (Acts 2:47; 5:13–14; 6:1, 7; 9:31; 11:21, 24; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20) where the work was done by individuals and through the support of churches as they consistently followed the Apostolic pattern; Self-care within a local church generated leadership and the ability to provide for the work God had assigned each local church. Growth that is Divinely approved cannot do any less than these. And in the last lessons, we studied how the early church carried at their mission or work in evangelism, edification and benevolence.

As we noted in lesson 1, there are currently three approaches to church governance in modern Christianity: Episcopal; Presbyterian and Congregational.

1. **Episcopal** is the strong hierarchy of ordained clergy, namely the bishop, above the local congregation and closely tied to the idea of apostolic succession. The bishop supervises the clergy within a local jurisdiction (Orthodox, Methodist, Anglican, along with some Lutherans, and the Roman Catholic Church). The authority is placed in the bishop *where the authority is shared downward* in the structure.
2. **Presbyterian** is a governance by the rule of assemblies of elected presbyters, or elders, or a church board. Groups of local churches are also governed by a higher assembly of elders known as the presbytery (or classis), often grouped into a synod. Presbyteries and synods nationwide join together in a *general assembly*. Presbyterian polity was developed as a rejection of governance by hierarchies of single bishops (episcopal polity). (Presbyterian, Reformed and some Bible churches.)
3. **Congregational**, often known as congregationalism, is a system of church governance in which every local church or congregation is independent, ecclesiastically sovereign as some churches would describe or as brethren would say, “autonomous”. Among *contemporary* churches, perhaps the most popular form of government is the congregational church government where the final governing authority resides within the congregation itself.

The evidence of these different means of governance indicates that there have been large shifts of ideas within church history. And in the remaining lessons, we want to consider what those shifts were and why there are inherently harmful to the Divine Model of governance in Scripture.

Governance in New Testament teaching centers around the Divine Model of the “elder.” First, Acts 20 shows that Paul “Called to him the elders of the church” of Ephesus (20:17) that he addressed as “overseers” (20:28) or bishops who would “shepherd” or pastor the flock among them (20:28). And there is only one text in the New Testament that uses this latter term as the noun pastor where it must refer to an “office” (1 Tim 3:1). Likewise, Peter exhorts the “elders” (1 Pet 5:1) to “shepherd the flock of God, serving as overseers” (1 Pet 5:3). Since the verb “to pastor/shepherd” is the task of the elder/overseer, it is easy to see why such a person could be called a “pastor/shepherd.” Not only are pastors or elders/overseers given the task of shepherding, but they are also those who teach the congregation (Eph 4:11; 1 Tim 3:2; 5:17). Therefore, we can be reasonably certain that the office of pastor is identical to that of the elder or overseer. This position is strengthened by the fact that the term pastor is not mentioned in 1 Timothy and Titus, which are concerned about Timothy and Titus’ role as evangelist in the church.

So, in the first century, each local congregation had overseers (or, bishops, elders or pastors) who were always recognized as a plurality along with deacons (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1). Each congregation was led by these to engage in their work and to provide the self-care God had assigned them to do. There was no supervisory board, no superintending bishop and no convention of ideas to direct the congregations. They had one guiding force: The Holy Spirit in the Apostles, in the miraculously endowed granted by the laying on of the Apostles hands (c.f. 1Cor 12, Acts 8:17-18) who in turn recorded in words their insight into the revealed mystery of Christ (c.f. Eph 3:1-7).

Even at the end of the first century, there is evidence outside of Scripture that this was the practice among churches as evidenced in this letter of Clement of Rome: "For our sin will not be small, if we eject from the **episcopate** [bishops] those who have blamelessly and holily fulfilled its duties. Blessed are those **presbyters** [elders] who, having finished their course before now, have obtained a fruitful and perfect departure [from this world] ... (First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, Chapter XLIV).

But by the second century, there was evidence in the writings of Ignatius that things were changing: "Our earliest authority for the monarchical episcopate and the threefold ministry—bishops, presbyters, and deacons—is Ignatius (110-120 A.D.), and that only for Antioch in Syria and for Asia Minor. In 17 other places—e.g., in Rome or Philippi—it must have arisen a little later." (Paul Wernie, *Beginnings of Christianity*, [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org)).

But there was disagreement: **Jerome** (347-420): "**The presbyter is the same as the bishop**, and before parties had been raised up in religion by the provocations of Satan, the churches were governed by the Senate of the presbyters. But as each one sought to appropriate to himself those whom he had baptized, instead of leading them to Christ, it was appointed that one of the presbyters, elected by his colleagues, should be set over all the others, and have chief supervision over the general well-being of the community. . . Without doubt it is the duty of the presbyters to bear in mind that by the discipline of the Church they are subordinated to him who has been given them as their head, but it is fitting that the bishops, on their side, **do not forget that if they are set over the presbyters, it is the result of tradition**, and not by the fact of a particular institution by the Lord (Comm. Tit. 1.7).

But very soon this bishop's power and influence began to extend beyond the local congregation to a territory or district and being called a bishop suggested one had authority over a territory, or diocese. Later, these leaders, Diocesan bishops, would shape teaching over the churches through councils. If he lived and presided in a large city, so to distinguish himself from other diocesan bishops, he was given the title of Metropolitan Bishop. Five of these came to be known as Patriarchs. These five were in Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople, and Rome; they were considered superior to all other bishops.

It is important to notice that the organization that was developing did not yet have one supreme head over the whole church. That would come much later. However, in stair-step fashion, the hierarchy was growing. The pattern of change to present forms of the episcopate and presbyterian governances was ordered by a distinction between "Bishop" and other elders in the local church; second, the Diocesan Bishop; third, Metropolitan Bishops; fourth, Patriarchs.

The Council of Nicea, 325 A.D. the first ecumenical council, decreed that the bishops in the different provinces would be of equal rank and authority, that each one would be free to conduct his affairs independent of any other province or bishop. In the Council of Chalcedon, 451 A.D., a decree was passed giving to the See of Constantinople equal rank and authority with the See of Rome. The 28th canon of this council stated that "equal precedence" should be given to Constantinople and pointed out that Rome had been given precedence by the fathers "because it was the imperial city." And the rest is history.

The further their authority spread the less was their interest with "those among you" over which Scripture says a bishop's and an overseer's role is.

Next week: we will look at more modern manifestations that abandon the original intent of this governance.



## HOW CHURCHES GREW IN ACTS

*Governance for Growth and Stability*

## Lesson 9 | 8/22/2021

### The Departures of Doctrine from Biblical Growth and Stability.

In previous lessons, the book of Acts has shown us in the “growth summary” passages (Acts 2:47; 5:13–14; 6:1, 7; 9:31; 11:21, 24; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20) that the gospel grew

through the work of individuals teaching the gospel to people and it was carried on that way (2Timothy 2:2). Still, that growth was sustained by the oversight of the Apostles and the pattern that they placed in “every church” (Acts 14:23; 1Corinthians 4:17) when elders were appointed to oversee the flock among them (1Peter 5:2). They were charged to protect churches from those who would teach “perverse things” (Acts 20:30) to draw disciples away from the Apostolic tradition. Timothy was told to “instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies rather than the furthering of the administration of God” (1Timothy 1:3-4). These have “strayed” and “turned aside” (1:6) according to Paul. Elders were to be equipped in their qualification to “be able to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” that sound doctrine (Titus 1:10). While Titus was told to “shun foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the law,” he was to “reject factious men” after failing to repent after warnings. This was shared with the early church “by word of mouth or by letter from us” that churches were commanded to “stand firm [in] and hold to the traditions” which they were taught (2Thessalonians 2:13). Paul said that the Holy Spirit had told him that “people would fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons” (1Timothy 4:1) and told Timothy that he would be “a good servant of Jesus if he would point out these things to the brothers as he would be nourished on the words of faith and the sound doctrine” he had been teaching (4:6). Finally, notice Paul’s words in the letter of Ephesians 4:

*<sup>11</sup> And He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of **ministry**, for the building up of the body of Christ; <sup>13</sup> until we all attain **to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.** <sup>14</sup>As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of people, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; <sup>15</sup> but speaking **the truth** in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, that is, Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

The objective of God in a local church was quite clear: bringing each individual to **unity**, through **knowledge** that came from **the truth**. And according to Paul, this was the solution to the immaturity that led people then (and lead people today) to be “tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of people, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.” It should also be noted that in this discussion it was through the local associations or churches that Christians **could be** stable and mature because they **should be** within those people with whom they joined themselves. So, to be truly grow like churches did in Acts, we will be grounded because of:

1. **The truth.** Simply, truth is that which is consistent with the mind, will, character, glory, and being of God or, succinctly, **Truth is the self-expression of God.** Because this definition comes from God, truth is theological. Also, truth is also reality. Reality is what it is because God declared it so and made it so. God is the “God of truth” (Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 31:5; Isaiah 65:16). When Jesus said of Himself, “I am...the truth” (John 14:6), He was claiming Deity in Himself but also that all truth must ultimately be defined in terms of God and His eternal glory. After all, Jesus is “*the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person*” (Hebrews 1:3). But Jesus also said that **the written Word of God is truth.** It “cannot be broken” (John 10:35). He prayed: “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17). The Word of God is eternal truth “which lives and abides forever” (1 Peter 1:23). While the self-evident truths of who God is can be seen in what is made (Psalms 19; Romans 1:20), the revelation from God is truth because God is truth.

2. Through **knowledge**. In Paul's context, is the knowledge of Jesus, the Son of God. John warned that if "anyone who goes too far and does not about in the teaching of Christ, does not have God" (2John 9). It is clear that our lives as individuals are about what "you were taught" (Colossians 2:6-7)
3. The **source of unity**. It was Jesus who said it in this very context: "I have given them Your word; ... them in the truth; Your word is truth... I am not asking on behalf of these alone, but also for those who believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one; just as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me." (John 17:14-21). And the beginning of the context of Ephesians 4 is: I "urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called... being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

There will be no biblical growth and stability in a church without:

1. **Ministry of the saints**. All of what the Lord has instructed you and me to do as individuals and as a collective of people. All of this comes from the...
2. **Equipping of the saints**. The process of teaching saints what their work is. All of this comes from what...
3. **God gave**. The arrangement of the Apostles' work and charge; the work and charge of prophets; the work and charge of evangelists; the work and charge of pastors; the work and charge of teachers... engaged in the "*one faith once and for all delivered to the saints*" (Jude 3).

And what God gave was one gospel (1Corinthians 1:10-13); one way of doing things that matter to God (4:17). It must be part of every church's makeup to truly be committed to this reality that the matters of God must be absolute – only in this way can maintain the biblical growth and stability. There is one gospel. One teaching. One faith.

So how do churches maintain themselves when they do not quite know everything. Romans 14:1-15:6 was written to engage united interactions when individuals do not agree. And throughout centuries, many have understood that there are matters of essentials regarding this teaching, there has been a maxim or mantra of people aiming to keep unity among believers. It has been attributed to St. Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430), John Wesley (1703 – 1791), and to a number of theologians in between them. Mark Ross has said that while it is "Often attributed to great theologians such as Augustine, it comes from an otherwise undistinguished German Lutheran theologian of the early seventeenth century, Rupertus Meldenius ([www.ligonier.com](http://www.ligonier.com)) in a tract on Christian unity written (circa 1627) during the Thirty Years War (1618–1648)." In Latin, it is: "unitatem in necessariis, in non necessariis libertatem, in omnibus caritatem." Attributed to Marco Antonio de Dominis in his work *De Republica Ecclesiastica*, published in 1617, and it is translated into English as "Unity in necessary things, in non-necessary – liberty, in all things charity." The idea, and variations of the quote, have worked their way around theological circles for centuries. Thomas Campbell, in his *Declaration and Address* before the Christian Association of Washington in 1809, worded it: "In matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion liberty; in all things, charity." While charitable love must be the guide of this unity (c.f. Ephesians 4:1-3), there still remains a unity of the faith we are to hold (4:4-6). And there are plenty of absolutes that we should hold fast (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:2, 2 Timothy 1:13). So, with this maxim, we have to have the tough conversations about what are the "necessary" or "essential" things.

Paul says, "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:10; ESV)"

So, if we are to capture the spirit of the first century churches' stability in their growth, we must recognize that it is in their commitment to one truth and the reality that departure from that truth will only lead to unstable times – and corruption.

In our next lessons, we will evaluate the development of power structures of centralization beyond the local church and the development of social consciousness beyond the gospel are manifestations of this departure that will only destabilize churches from their foundation: truth.