

Some Things That Accompanied the Church's Past Progress

Acts 14:21-28

Introduction:

- A. How we love talking about the past growth of the church!
 - 1. In first century.
 - a. In Jerusalem. (Acts 2:40,41,47; 4:4; 6:7).
 - b. In Antioch. (Acts 11:21)
 - c. In Asia Minor. (Acts 14:21-28; 16:5)
 - d. World wide - whole creation. (Col. 1:23).
 - e. Secular History.¹
 - 2. In 19th century - Restoration movement.
 - a. First 50 years, 2-3 hundred thousand.
 - b. Churches in communities all across nation.²
- B. How we would love that kind of progress today!
 - 1. Maybe if we recaptured things that accompanied that progress.
 - 2. Maybe we are hindered by modern ideas of winning others over.
 - 3. Maybe we need to quit blaming church problems - had problems during period of great growth.
 - 4. Maybe we need to look at the Message, Methods and Minds of Christians during these great periods of growth.

Discussion:

I. They Preached a Strong Message.

- A. An inherently powerful message. (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18; Rom. 1:16).
 - 1. Could win people without "persuasive words of human wisdom." (1 Cor. 2:1-5).
 - 2. Could win people without powerful speakers. (cf. 2 Cor. 4:5-7; Phil. 1:15-18).
- B. A definite and distinctive message. (cf. Acts 4:12; Eph. 4:4-6; 2 John 9-11).
 - 1. In 1st century.³
 - a. Emphasized things that made Christianity distinct from Judaism - Jesus is Christ.
 - b. Emphasized things that made Christianity distinct from paganism - One God, Jesus His Son, morality.
 - 2. In restoration movement - emphasized what made them distinct from sects.
 - 3. Today - Down-play distinctiveness in favor of common interests.

II. They Demonstrated Strong Minds.

- A. Determination. (Acts 20:24)
- B. Conviction. (Acts 4:20; 2 Tim. 1:12)
- C. Courage. (2 Tim. 1:7-8).
- D. Enthusiasm. (2 Cor. 9:2)

III. They Used Strong Methods.

- A. Seized opportunities to evangelize.
 - 1. Both publicly and privately (Acts 20:20).
 - 2. Formally and informally. (Acts 13:13-16; 16:32ff; 17:22ff).
- B. Aggressive in their evangelism -- went into synagogues, homes, marketplaces, etc.
 - 1. Provoked revival or rebellion. (Acts 13:42-53; 14:1,2; 17:1-5; 32-34)
 - 2. Modern preaching too weak, mild and passive to do either.
- C. Militant in their defense of the gospel. (1 Pet. 3:15; Phil. 1:17).
 - 1. Paul and Hellenists. (Acts 9:29).
 - 2. Paul and Elymas. (Acts 12:8-12).
 - 3. Paul, Barnabas and Peter. (Acts 15:2,7).
 - 4. Paul and Alexander the Coppersmith. (2 Tim. 4:14-16).
- D. Wisely used the variety of abilities available. (Acts 6:1-6; Eph. 4:11-16).
 - 1. Responsibilities distributed according to ability or gift.
 - 2. Sought those best qualified for each responsibility. (cf. Jas. 3:1)
 - 3. Though different, All considered necessary, no big I's and little you's. (1 Cor. 12:22)

Conclusion:

- A. If we captured what early Christians and restorers had, might see more progress.
- B. If we listened to Bible more and less modern "how to" instructions might do better.

¹ "...when the great evangelist [Paul] died, there were Christian communities in all the important cities of the empire. By the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180), Christianity had become the dominant religion in the eastern part of the empire." (Civilization: Past and Present.)

² Chapter on "The Progress of the Cause" in book "The Search For The Ancient Order" by Earl West.

³ "Other elements which influenced the growth of Christianity were the definiteness of its teachings, the enthusiasm and zeal of its converts, and the courage with which they faced death and persecution". (Civilization: Past and Present, p. 228).