

## The Jerusalem Keys to Victorious Church Growth (Part 2)

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PM Assembly

### Introduction:

Brothers and sisters, I want to share with you a dirty little secret that plagues supposedly “sound” American churches. Most churches want a church growth they can control and maintain instead of disciple-making that is empowered by God and led by His Holy Spirit. Why don’t more “conservative” churches experience the kind of unlimited growth that Jerusalem did? It’s not because the Gospel we teach is no longer powerful enough to produce that kind of growth. It is because the moment something like what Jerusalem experienced gets discussed among our brethren as potentially happening today, some well-meaning Christian says, “But how on earth could a group of elders know everyone and keep things under control in that kind of church?” Did you catch the goal in that? We have to have churches that small groups of men can maintain and control. Guess what that means? That means growth-limited churches. At some point, these churches will have too many members to control and the church will unconsciously shut down its evangelism and will justify it with the noble motive of maintaining the purity and soundness of the congregation. But I have to admit to you that since “sound” actually means healthy, I’m not sure we can defend stagnant, dormant, non-growing churches as sound and healthy.

Jerusalem knew no such limitations. They started with about 3000 disciples being led by just 12 men. Have you ever asked how those 12 men knew everyone and kept the church under control? I don’t know. But I do know how they kept the congregation growing. We’ve already learned four of the keys they pursued. 1) They were devoted to God. 2) They were of one heart and soul. 3) They couldn’t help but point others to God. 4) They lost no one in the crowd. Let’s consider some of the other keys of their victorious and seemingly limitless growth.

### Discussion:

- I. Key #5: **Acts 6:1-6**—The Jerusalem church knew nobody can do everything.
  - A. When the Jerusalem church resolved the racial conflict it faced in **Acts 6**, the leadership of the congregation demonstrated a fundamental understanding of how to lead any corporate body. They knew nobody can do everything. The apostles had to delegate duties and provide for a division of labor.
  - B. Have you noticed why this problem came about? **Acts 6:1** says it came about “when the disciples were increasing in number.” They could have avoided this problem by not growing. But, now that they had grown, they had to make special assignments to fulfill special needs. (BTW: This is why many churches quit growing, they start having problems and decide it is better to be problem free than to grow.)
  - C. Considering why this assignment came about, I am puzzled that so many in churches today say, “I want to be a part of a small church, because there is more opportunity for work.” In this passage, seven men received an opportunity to work because the church grew. Think about this, the larger the congregation the more contacts there will be to follow up on, the more new converts to help grow, the more widows to visit, the more sick to care for, the more struggling to strengthen, the more physical needs people will have. Can I just be painfully blunt with you? When someone says they want to be part of a small church because there is more work to do, the thing they really mean is they have more opportunity to participate in public roles where they can be seen.
  - D. Paul taught this in **Ephesians 4:16**. We are all different, suited for different aspects of the work here. We are each responsible to develop our own individual abilities in order to build up this body, serving the Lord and serving others. Too often we are all made to feel guilty because we see a picture of a super Christian who excels at every aspect of the church’s work. But there is no such Christian. Even Paul could not do that. We should not feel guilty nor make others feel guilty simply because we cannot do what someone else can. Rather, we should feel guilty only when we are not doing what we can to the best of our ability.
- II. Key #6: **Acts 5, 6 and 15**—The Jerusalem church aggressively dealt with problems.
  - A. This picture of unity was marred by serious problems several times.
    1. In **Acts 5**, they faced a fly in the ointment when Ananias and Sapphira did not share the love and unity, but rather lied to the church and the Holy Spirit. It is the first recorded case of church discipline. If you thought mentioning a withdrawal in public assembly was harsh, read **Acts 5** again sometime.
    2. In **Acts 6**, the church faced a racial dilemma because the Hellenistic widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. This threatened to blow the church apart. Luke describes the problem as being

far greater than just with the widows. He says, "...a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews..." (**Acts 6:1**). The apostles quickly established a plan to overcome the problem without allowing to fester and destroy the unity of the congregation.

3. In **Acts 15**, they faced a doctrinal controversy when some in the congregation claimed Gentiles had to be circumcised and observe the Law of Moses (**Acts 15:5**). The congregation gathered to discuss the issue, settling it based on the revelation of the Spirit. But they did not allow the doctrinal division to simply exist. They worked through it and resolved it.
  - B. I am sure the church probably lost some members in each of these instances. But on the whole, the Jerusalem church was strengthened by working through and overcoming these problems. In fact, the Bible records that the church grew and was strengthened as a result of overcoming these problems (**Acts 5:14; 6:7; 15:32**).
- III. Key #7: **Acts 4-5**—The Jerusalem church was bold in the face of rejection.
- A. In the first part of this lesson, we learned that the Jerusalem Christians couldn't help but point others to God. Sadly, for all the people who accepted that teaching, there were many who rejected it. Not only did many reject it, but that rejection led to imprisonment (**Acts 4:3**) and beating (**Acts 5:40**).
  - B. How did these early Christians respond? Did they cower in fear? Did they back off? No, they kept teaching (**Acts 5:17-21**) and even rejoicing that they had been allowed to suffer.
  - C. The Jerusalem church did not allow the threat of persecution to deter them from teaching the truth boldly, let alone the threat that someone might visit their assembly and then never return. Let alone that someone might hear what they taught and not like them anymore. Amazingly, despite their apparent lack of concern with rejection, the church continued growing (**Acts 5:14; 8:12-13; 12:24**).
- IV. The Open Door: **Acts 8:4; 11:19-21** – The Jerusalem church set the world ablaze.
- A. In a sense, we are here today because of the effectiveness of the Jerusalem church. One of the most amazing aspects of the growth of Christ's church in the book of Acts is found in **Acts 8:4**. "Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word." So much teaching and grounding had been done among the congregation in Jerusalem, that when the members of this church moved, they positively impacted the church in other places.
  - B. Of course, there was one fundamental difference between what these people did in **Acts 8** and what Christians do today when they move. When the brethren in **Acts 8** moved, they didn't have the luxury of taking a few months to determine the sound church of which they would become a part. They didn't get to say, "Oh, I can't move there. I would have to drive two hours to meet with a faithful church." They were forced into other cities without churches and they started new ones (**Acts 11:20-21**).
  - C. The Jerusalem church was effective, not just because it was successful in Jerusalem, but because it blazed the trail for churches everywhere.

#### Conclusion:

I want to end with a wonderful little secret. The apostles didn't grow the Jerusalem church. The disciples didn't grow the Jerusalem church. God grew the Jerusalem church. They simply did their job and let God do His work. Do you know what that means? That means if we simply do our job, God can grow this congregation just like that. Are you ready for it?