

How Did The Early Church Grow?

By B. D. Tate

Great Power—The Beginning Began With A Bang!

It grew by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost and showed signs and wonders. The rushing mighty wind caught everyone's attention that day and they came running to the scene. When they arrived, they saw cloven tongues of fire upon one hundred and twenty people who were filled with Spirit and praising God! Furthermore, they were speaking loudly in tongues (languages) that they themselves did not know. The others heard this small crowd praising God and magnifying His wonders in their own languages and interpreted what was being said.

Then Peter stood up and began to explain the event before them. He quotes from the prophet Joel and others that God through Jesus Christ had reconciled the world to Himself. Peter preached (Prophesied) many words that day as the scripture testifies and the result was three thousand received Christ and were baptized.

Then the disciples met daily in the temple and from house to house praising God and hearing the teaching of this new church from the apostles.

Act. 2:43 And fear came upon every soul: **and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.**

The church grew from seeing miraculous things not just on the Day of Pentecost but daily as the apostles were doing the works that Jesus said they'd do (John 14:12). Many wonders and signs were being performed to confirm the word of God. For the gospel of grace is not in word only but in power and demonstration of the Spirit.

Mr 16:20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

Then discipleship training began as:

Acts 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

The church began to meet daily listening to teaching, fellowshiping and sharing their faith, breaking bread in meals and being in prayer. The scripture testifies:

Acts 2: 44 **And all that believed were together, and had all things common;**

45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

46 And they, **continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,**

47 Praising God, and having favor with all the people. **And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.**

The Bang Continued Daily!

As they began to be the church, they were learning from the apostles who were also learning what it meant to be a

Christian. They were exercising their new faith and authority and performing many wonders and signs. I take this to mean that as new believers gathered and some were sick or lame, or had other issues, the apostles began to set them free. The apostles first practiced their faith within the community of believers and gained in confidence. They had seen Jesus minister as an example to them. They had also been sent out and experienced success by Jesus on two separate occasions that are recorded. The first time Jesus sent out the twelve. The second time He sent out seventy:

Mt 10:8 **“Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons.** Freely you have received, freely give.

Luke 10:9 **“And heal the sick there,** and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’

The apostles were in charge and it was proper for them to set the atmosphere and direction of the church. How did they do this? They began to exercise the authority of Jesus’ name. They taught the people as they were commanded by Jesus to do:

Mt 28:20 **"teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;** and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

Then they began to take authority and heal, deliver, and set free those who were in bondage. They performed many signs and wonders. They didn’t just exercise a few miracles, but, just as Jesus healed multitudes again and again, so the apostles showed the great compassion of the Lord to touch everyone.

Acts 5: 12 **And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people.** And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch.

13 Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly.

14 And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,

15 **so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.**

16 Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, **bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.**

Jesus told the Pharisees:

John 10: 37 **"If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me;**

38 **"but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him."**

This same standard applies to all believers and the apostles proved that God **was in them** by healing in Jesus' name.

Great Fear—The Fear of the Lord

It grew in the fear and awe of the Lord! In several places early in the book of Acts we find this testimony:

Acts 2: 43 **Then fear came upon every soul,** and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

Ac 5:5 **So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.**

Ac 5:11 So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

Ac 9:31 Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. **And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit**, they were multiplied.

The Word fear is the Greek word “phobos” which means terror, dread, reverence...that which strikes terror! We don’t often associate walking in the Lord with terror or dread; however, we have used reverence religiously. It is the fear of the Lord that purges and cleanses us from sin (Pr, 3:7); it is the beginning of wisdom (Pr. 9:10). The one that walks in the fear of the Lord walks in deep respect, awe, and highest regard for His word, power, righteousness, and holiness. At the same time, this fear produces in us a deep comfort because we know that in Jesus all our judgment has been paid. It is seeing and living to the Word as supreme! It is first, foremost, that which we rely on; **the fear of the Lord purges us from all other fears.**

Pr 14:27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, To turn one away from the snares of death.

It is the fear of the Lord that leads us to repentance, change, and making our ways straight.

Ps. 55:19 Because they do not change, therefore they do not fear God.

Great Grace!

They were taking care of their own! They didn't consider anything that they possessed to be their own. The early chapters share this twice to reinforce the truth of it. The first is Acts 2:42-45 and this passage:

Acts 4:32 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; **neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.**

33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. **And great grace was upon them all.**

34 **Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.**

I don't think any of us can imagine this kind of response from the people. There was such an awe of God and reverence for the new life in Christ that they were literally sold out for it. We find it hard to see any of us contributing land, possessions, let alone a tithe. This shows that great grace is not happening yet among us. We live in America the land of the free and the brave; the early church lived under Rome the land of idolatry, worship of the emperor, and eventual persecution from all sides. We believe in God; they depended upon Him. When Jesus prophesized:

Mark 10:29 So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, **for My sake and the gospel's,**

30 "who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life.

It seems there is a strong connection from this statement to the two I just presented. When we come to Jesus we come to a new family with brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers, where we all have the same Lord. We are all stewards of our master's possessions *that when great grace is manifesting* we share in common with everyone who is born of God. **Our prosperity is God's prosperity is everyone's prosperity.** There is a saying among us, "Blood is thicker than water." This refers to the bloodline supposedly being more important and strong in relationship than even marriage. Nothing is supposed to be stronger than the new birth it supersedes all bloodlines and any other lines. We live to the new life and die to the old (II Cor. 5:17).

The Teaching of the Word with Power

The early Church was experiencing many signs and wonders as God worked with them to confirm His word and prove that He was in them. Daily they were meeting, praising, teaching, fellowshiping, and breaking bread together. **They were experiencing the power of God every day!** Their confidence grew as they practiced the Great Commission which is to heal the sick and preach salvation in Jesus' name.

The apostles were teaching and training the disciples about the new life in Christ. It centered on the resurrection of Christ, forgiveness of sins, and the power of God.

1Co 2: 4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, **but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,**

5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

1Co 4:20 **For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.**

The Power Spread Outside of the Church!

Within a short period of time, maybe weeks or months, Peter and John come to the temple to pray and came across a familiar situation. A paralyzed beggar was brought to the temple daily to ask of the people alms. They would have seen this man regularly because they went to the temple daily. Maybe they'd seen this man during Jesus' ministry. Jesus healed multitudes but not everyone was ministered to.

Jesus was at the *Sheep Gate* He met a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years. He asked Him, "Do you want to be made well?" Then Jesus commanded Him, "'Rise, take up your bed and walk." The man got up and was healed that very moment (John 5); however, there were others, many others, waiting at the *Sheep Gate* for healing. Why Jesus healed the one man and not the rest is a curious thing. The point is that Jesus was limited by time and space and had a mission to fulfill which led Him to the cross. Jesus referred to the cross in many ways but this verse speaks to His ultimate purpose clearly:

Joh 12:24 "**Most assuredly**, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, **it produces much grain.**

The apostles knew that Jesus had produced much grain and it was the born again believers! As Peter and John entered the temple the man ask them for alms. They turned and Peter said,

Acts 3:4 "Look at us."

5 So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.

6 Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: **In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.**"

Then Peter took him by the right hand and raised him up. Immediately the man's ankles, legs, and feet received strength and he got up leaping, walking, and praising God. This miracle was performed on a man who was not born again, did not expect to be healed, and like Jesus did at the *Sheep Gate*, Peter commanded it so. Peter didn't pray to God in Jesus' name for God to do something; he commanded it done in Jesus' name. They had seen Jesus do this, they had been sent out to do this, and now empowered by the Holy Spirit they were led to do this.

Peter and John were convinced that it was God's will and they were enforcing the will of God to destroy the works of the devil. In demonstration and in power they worked the works of Christ. The major point I'm addressing is that this was the gospel of grace being brought to the unsaved people. This notable miracle astonished and drew the attention of everyone in the temple. For they all knew the man on whom this healing had taken place. Peter responded to the people by saying,

Acts 3:12 "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? **Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?**

Then he went on to use the occasion to preach Christ to them and many believed and were added to the church. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not just for the church but to be used mightily to reach the lost. The people and the rulers all knew this man and this notable miracle could not be denied.

Today, we look at this account as something special. We believe it had taken place because Peter and John were special. We disconnect it and think this was for their day and not ours. The response of Peter says they were ***not special in any way***. It was not their power or ***godliness*** that made this man well. Peter explains it this way:

Acts 3:16 "**And His name, through faith in His name**, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. **Yes, the faith which comes through Him** has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

Faith is a Gift

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is faith. It takes this gift for everyone who is born again to become born again! When we received the Holy Spirit we get this gift of faith with all of the rest of the gifts because we get the Spirit!

Peter and John tell the people that they are just men and it was faith that comes through the name of Jesus' that made this miracle happen. Peter and John were willing to take God at His word to be bold enough to heal this man. How did they do this? It

is important to realize that the apostles had been performing many signs and wonders daily before this happened. Their confidence had been built up. Further, the scripture says that Peter took the man by the right hand and lifted him up. Peter didn't wait to see if anything happened but acted on his own command. As he picked the man up, the man's legs, ankles, and feet received strength. It was after Peter made the first move. Smith Wigglesworth said this:

There comes the natural, and then the spiritual. For instance, when it is on your heart to pray, you begin in the natural and your second word will probably be under the power of the Spirit. You begin and God will end. It is the same in giving forth utterances under the Spirit's power. You feel the moving of the Spirit within and you begin to speak and the Spirit of God will give forth utterance. **Thousands have missed wonderful blessings because they have not had faith to move out and begin in the natural, in faith, that the Lord would take them into the realm of the supernatural.** (Smith, pg 91 EIF)

It is also important to understand that Peter and John had envisioned working the works of Christ. They could see themselves doing what Jesus did. The apostles knew that signs, wonders, and miracles were a major aspect of the Great Commission. They knew it was the power of the gospel of grace that confirms the word! As Jesus said, "though you do not believe me, believe the works!" At another point Jesus said,

John 4:48 Then Jesus said to him, **"Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe."**

The early Church grew by signs, wonders, and miracles to confirm the Word!

It wasn't just a side issue or special moment in time, it is the gospel! The gospel of grace preaches forgiveness of sins and to prove it healing takes place to reverse the curse. Sin caused the curse of the law; Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law and to prove it healing takes place!

Mt 9:6 **"But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"** —then He said to the paralytic, **"Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."**

Jesus reasoned with them saying, "For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk?'" We know that powerless Christianity would immediately say, "It is easier to say your sins are forgiven you." God never intended for us to witness to the gospel without His power to bear witness to its truth.

There are over fourteen New Testament Biblical reasons why signs, wonders, and miracles were performed and only one refers to God wanting to show that Jesus was the Messiah. Let me list the others now:

1) To Show God's Compassion to reverse the curse in the earth!

Mt 14:14 and when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and **He was moved with compassion for them**, and healed their sick.

2-Signs are so that our faith would be not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Mt 22:29 Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, **not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.**"

1Co 2:5 "...that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men **but in the power of God.**

3-Signs are to show us the way...

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "**I am the way**, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Ac 2:22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, **a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—**

4-Signs are to demonstrate that Jesus is Lord...To Confirm His Word!

Mt 10:1 and when He had called His twelve disciples to *Him*, **He gave them power** over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.

Mark 16:20 And they went out and preached everywhere, **the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs.** Amen.

5-Signs are to show The Son of man has power to forgive sins!

Lu 5:23 "**Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk'?**

24 "**But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins**" —He said to the man who was paralyzed, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."

6-Signs are to overcome darkness, confusion, doubt, and unbelief...

John 20:27 Then He *said to Thomas, "Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; **and be not unbelieving, but believing.**" (overcome unbelief)

John 10:37 "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me;

38 "but if I do, though you do not believe Me, **believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.**"

7- Signs are to show us that nothing is impossible to those who believe!

Lu 1:37 for **nothing is impossible with God.**"

Mr 9:23 Jesus said to him, "**If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.**"

8-Signs are to glorify God.

John 15:8 **"By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.**

John 17:4 **"I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.**

9-That **our joy may be full** & pleasing the Lord...

John 16:24 **"Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.**

1Jo 1:4 and **these things we write to you that your joy may be full.**

10- Signs are meant to turn the people's **hearts towards God in repentance!**

Matt. 11:20 Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, **because they did not repent:**
21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, **they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.**

11- Signs are meant to prove that the **kingdom of God has come among us** (for God's will to be done on the earth as it is in heaven!)

Matt. 12:28 "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, **surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.**

12- Signs are to convince the world that God sent Jesus and **is in Him** and then in turn to **prove God is in us!**

John 10: 37 "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me;

38 "but if I do, though you do not believe Me, **believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him."**

John 17:18 "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

13 – Signs were given by the Father to the Son **so that we would marvel** (To wonder, have in admiration)!

Joh 5:20 "For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, **that you may marvel.**

We Must Believe the Right Things!

It is vital that we have the right believing when it comes to the Great Commission. If we think miracles were just for the apostles then we believe the wrong things. If we don't expect; if we are not convinced; then we will not experience the same things. The enemy wants us in doubt about what caused the early church to grow. The enemy wants us to believe those powers passed away. When we try to fulfill the great commission without the understanding that signs, wonders, and miracles are part of the gospel, it is like trying to wrestle with one arm tied behind our back. It has caused us to be powerless.

If we cannot see ourselves doing the very works that Christ did then we are not equipped. Until we can see, envision, imagine, and plan to do the same works, by the same Spirit, for the same purposes listed before, we will remain powerless.

Then We Must Be Prepared

Until we believe the right things we will never access the gifts of the Holy Spirit within us. They will be limited, weak, and even lay dormant until we begin to acknowledge and act on the truth. Once we are convinced then we must prepare. **I want to share a new illustration to communicate how we should prepare.**

We Must Be Immersed; We Must See it!

When it comes to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the power of God, signs, wonders, and miracles, we must become immersed. When it comes to believing God's word about healing for example, it must be central to our heart. We can't fly by the seat of our pants so to speak and expect the same results that Peter

and John had. We can't be referring to healing promises as somewhere in the Bible it says so. We can't have read a book about it sometime in the past and think we're ready to go. I can't be mixed up with questions and act in faith.

Going Into the Waters Deeper—A New Illustration

When believers in Christ begin to understand the power of the name of Jesus they need to wade in deeper. If I want to go swimming which represents being fully immersed, I need to get into the water more than ankle deep. Believers who are somewhat familiar with scripture on the power of God have come into the waters of faith only so far. If I'm only into the power of God through the gifts of the Spirit up to my ankles then trying to exercise faith would be like trying to dive into those shallow waters. I'm not going to swim; I'm going to crash into the bottom. Trying to swim in shallow waters doesn't work well. This may explain why some believers have had mixed results when praying for healing.

Some have even injured their faith by diving into shallow waters. They become disillusioned and even back away completely from ever swimming. When I speak about going deeper into the waters of grace and faith, **I'm not talking about works in order to earn it.** I'm talking about our focus and attention to these things. If I give little or no attention to God's grace and power then I'm simply not ready to swim. Furthermore, I can't base what I'm about to pray for in healing by another's faith. I can't jump in to swim in the deep waters if I've never been swimming—I might drown. I can't base my ability to swim on another's ability to swim.

Peter and John had prepared and were deep into the gospel of grace. They were swimming and had already practiced and grew in confidence in the power of God. When they healed

the paralyzed man they were not jumping in over their head. They were already fully immersed in focus of the Spirit; they had been swimming and were ready to swim.

How do we know if we are ankle deep or in the waters ready to swim? We can look at many worldly examples such as athletes who practice daily for weeks and months preparing to play in a game. When an athlete stops practicing they lose their competitive edge. When we stop meditating, seeking, envisioning God's power in our life we lose our edge too. When we have studied and meditated on the works of Christ happening in our life enough we'll begin to dream, envision and see ourselves (imagine) doing those works. We'll begin to sense a rising up of confidence as we flow into the waters of faith.

It is the waters of faith that will produce in us the right believing, the right seeing, and the right visions. We simply can't do anything we haven't seen ourselves do. Take any project in your life, any job, any assignment; we are dead in the water until we can see ourselves do it in our mind. I was working on a "grandbaby" fort when I was stymied. I couldn't see how what I had in front of me could come together into a fort. I had the materials, I had certain types of wood in different sizes, etc...but to get started I needed to see how they could fit together. I actually sat by the stuff waiting for some type of vision. I went into the house and worked on something else when it finally dawned on me how I could do it. Then I went outside and began to act on what I saw within me. **It is the word of God that will produce in us the willingness, the desire, the vision, and the compassion to start swimming.** Our part is to wade in deeper.

When believers try to swim when they are not in deep enough that is when we get discouraged or feel overwhelmed by the power and promises of God. It would be better to wait until we are in deeper waters spiritually than to assume the power of

God and pray for healing. Some of us are simply not that interested for whatever reasons and remain in shallow waters. Let's just be honest about it and not put it on God's failure to answer or it's not God's will. Let's not say that healing, deliverance, signs, wonders, and miracles only happen because God acts in His own time and ways. God has commanded us to heal the sick but if we are not swimming in the deep waters of faith then our results will be mixed at best.

Concluding

I share this illustration to help explain why some appear to get results while others flounder. Some may feel obligated to go deeper into the waters when they honestly are content where they are. We do this with so many other things in life. I don't want to study and work at being an accountant for example, I have no interest. I don't feel obligated and I don't feel guilty for not becoming one. I admire the focus and effort of those who have become accountants. In a way, the body of Christ probably has those who are not into the power of God and wading deeper into the waters of grace and faith. The problem comes when those who don't wade in deeper run into life's curse. When loved ones get sick or they come down with something...it's harder to build a house during the storm. We are called by the Lord to prepare and heal the sick...it is a part of the Great Commission given to all of us.

The early church grew by great power, great fear, and great grace... May we grasp and understand that this is what God wants today. He's already decided and provided, we are the ones who are slow in understanding. We are the ones who have not believed Him in what He's done in the new birth. When we believe right then these same characteristics will manifest among us as well...great power, great fear, and great grace.

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