

EVANGELISM:

how the whole church speaks of Jesus

Week 7 - What is the church?

Perhaps this question seems peripheral at best to the topic of evangelism. Isn't evangelism something done in stadiums by big name evangelists or para-church ministries like FCA and CRU? What does it have to do with the local church? The mere fact that we don't see a *necessary* connection between evangelism and the local church is part of our problem.

The church is the gospel made visible.

Jesus told his disciples, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). This is not a theoretical love, it is a practical love for particular people in a specific context. We display the gospel as we display Christ's love for one another "in a local congregation of people who have covenanted together in love to be a church" (64).

This is the astounding thing: in order to become a culture of evangelism, we don't have to remake the church. "Instead, we allow the things that God has already built into the church to proclaim the gospel. Jesus did not forget the gospel when he built the church" (64).

Question—How do elements of the local church show forth the gospel? (e.g., baptism, Lord's Supper, singing, preaching, etc.)

Misunderstanding the church.

At High Pointe Baptist Church in Austin, TX, a question was raised by a well-meaning member at an evangelism conference: "Many Vietnamese are moving into the community around our church; what is the church going to do to reach out to them?"

The question betrayed a perspective that evangelism could only happen through some kind of programmatic outreach. Mistakenly,

they thought it was *the church's* responsibility, not the responsibility of the *individual* who had noticed the great opportunity.

Here was the response from the author: "I would recommend you learn something about the Vietnamese culture...reach out and invite Vietnamese friends you make to come with you to your homes, a small-group Bible study, or church...and when you bring your new Vietnamese friend, everyone is 'on game': you are all reaching out. That's a culture of evangelism." (66)

"The problem with the question at High Pointe was not that the woman didn't understand evangelism; the problem was that she didn't understand the church." (66)

Defining church.

Question—If someone asked out of the blue, 'Define church for me', what would you say?

We don't have the freedom to make church whatever suits us. Jesus is the architect and builder. We define the church according to his blueprints. It's easiest to break down the definition into three parts:

What the church is: A local church is a gathering of baptized, born-again Christians who covenant together in love to meet regularly under the authority of Scriptures and the leadership of the elders (pastors) to worship, be a visible image of the gospel, and ultimately, to give God glory (Acts 2:41-47; Col. 3:16-17; Eph. 3:10).

What the church does: the people regularly gather in gospel love to hear the Word preached, sing, pray, give, and practice the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Members care for one another, even through church discipline (1 Cor. 12:12-26; Mt. 18:15-17).

The mission of the church: to go to all peoples to make disciples teaching them to obey everything Christ has commanded—including forming new churches (Matt. 28:18-20).