

#86 "Christ's Mission Is Our Commission"

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"It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all."

-1 Timothy 1:15

A danger that the church can sometimes fall into is the "holy huddle" syndrome. There can be an ignoring or even a disdain toward visitors or to those in need of Christ in the community. It is easy to be deceived into a false sense of comfort in being in a body of Christ where the Word is being taught and where we feel like we are growing in our faith. Satan can use these times of "safe haven" to lull us to sleep in terms of our mission. Yes, we need to be instructed in the Word, and we should be in a Bible-teaching fellowship that loves one another. But the church must not neglect its call to evangelize. Christ came into the world to save sinners, including Paul, who viewed himself as the worst, given all that he had done against Christ and the church before his conversion. Christ pursued Paul such that He intervened in his life in an inconvenient time and way, at least from Paul's perspective, in order to save his soul. For the unsaved and for us, there is never a convenient time to share the gospel. It is hard, it is uncomfortable, and there will be much spiritual warfare. But let us not neglect our calling and our commission because reaching out to save even one lost person is near to the heart of God (Luke 15:7).

Evangelism must be the discipline of the church and of the pastor himself. He should be devoting himself to prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4), but part of this involves doing the work of an evangelist. As Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:5, "But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." Part of Timothy's call as a shepherd was to evangelize, and he must fulfill this calling in order to fulfill his ministry. Ministry is incomplete if evangelism is lacking. Pastors will have opportunities to share the gospel from the pulpit, but they should also try to create opportunities to interact with the lost throughout his week. They, along with the rest of us as believers, can be friendly to the clerk at the gas station, the waiter or waitress, the barber, and the mechanic. There are many contacts that wouldn't be offended at being invited to church or in taking a tract. We should also pray for opportunities for evangelism, for God is in the business of creating divine appointments if only we have eyes to see and hearts to look. The point is that the lost person matters to Christ, and he or she must matter to us as well. Christ's purpose was to save sinners, and our purpose as His church, built on Christ as our foundation, is to carry on His mission. We, too, must be active in doing our part to save sinners. We can't actually save a person, but we can give them the message of the gospel which can save them (Romans 10:17). We must not be ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). It is not good enough to just be nice to people, but they must hear the verbal or written truth of the message of the gospel. The gospel is to be incarnated into our lives,

but it is fundamentally a message. Niceness doesn't offer a free gift of salvation, but words, a Bible, or a tract can.

Shepherds must be willing to make evangelism a priority in the church. Yet they must not swing the pendulum too far such that they make evangelism an idol by perverting the gospel in order to gain more "members." They cannot use unbiblical means that simply appeal to fleshly, sinful desires for pleasure and entertainment rather than drawing people into an encounter with God, which is never boring or irrelevant. God's Word is always powerful. We can't give up on truth even if it seems to lack results that would impress the business world or a business-savvy church world. God never promised that many would come to faith; in fact, Jesus said the way was narrow with few who would find it (Matthew 7:14). Numbers are in God's hands, but we must sow seeds and water the plants which do spring up into new life. We as a church body need to find a healthy balance of evangelism and discipleship, and the results we can leave up to God (1 Corinthians 3:6).

A purpose of the gift of preaching and teaching is for the building up of the saints to maturity and service (Ephesians 4:11-13), but we must not mistake this for the overall purpose of the church. The purpose of the church is given to us by Christ when He commissioned the disciples to carry on the mission which He Himself had begun. Matthew 28:19-20 says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." As we go and live our lives in the world as light among darkness, we are to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them all that Christ commanded. This provides us with a healthy balance for the mission of the church.

Teaching the Word to help the saints grow to maturity is essential, but so is evangelism. Without both, our churches will be out of balance. May God give His people such balance as we seek to honor Him by fulfilling His commission to go and make disciples.