

Defining Our Role and Our Goal in Church Growth

Introduction

1. Teaching and converting non-Christians was my number one priority when I first began preaching full-time.
 - a. I have always found personal evangelism the most rewarding of all activities associated with teaching.
 - b. I hope it remains an important priority, even if the last four and a half years have yielded little fruit.
2. Over the years, my thinking on our role and goals in evangelism has changed somewhat.
 - a. Evangelism provides a teacher with his highest highs and his lowest lows. **3Jn. 4; 2Co. 2:4; 7:5**
 - b. A Biblical understanding of evangelism is critical to defining and achieving true success in it.

I. Church Work and Church Growth

A. *Jesus is Looking for the Few*

1. What is our role in evangelism? Are we charged with teaching and converting the lost?
 - a) Jesus sent His disciples into the world to preach the gospel. **Mk. 16:15-16; Mt. 28:18-20**
 - b) This command is extended to as many new disciples as are taught the way of Christ.
2. It is evident, however, that teaching the gospel and converting sinners are two different matters.
 - a) Few will respond favorably to God's teaching and be saved. **Mt. 7:13-14; 13:18-23**
 - b) Even Jesus was rejected far more often than He was received. **Jn. 1:11-13**
3. Jesus is not interested in numbers; He is looking for genuine faith. **Jn. 2:23-25; 6:60-69**
 - a) Despite His love, He understands such faith is only found in the minority of men.
 - b) Jesus is looking for the few who are fit for His kingdom – the committed, not casual.

B. *Our Task in Evangelism*

1. How would you feel if a preacher said, "Go teach your neighbors, but none of them will obey"?
 - a) That was the charge God gave to the prophet Ezekiel. **Eze. 2:1-7; 3:4-9**
 - b) Noah preached for a hundred or more years, but only his family joined him on the ark.
2. Though our task may not be quite as grim, we may feel little hope of success in evangelism.
 - a) How can we feel inspired to teach others when so few will study and even fewer obey?
 - b) Our solution may be to do nothing and dismiss our duty because of the obstacles to success!
3. The sower's work was to broadcast the seed, literally fling it that it might find good ground.
 - a) He knew much of it would be wasted or lost, but he trusted the Lord for a sufficient harvest.
 - b) Our task in evangelism is to plant and water the seed; God gives the growth. **1Co. 3:5-7**

C. *Defining Success*

1. We will grow as a congregation of God's people if we do the work God has assigned.
 - a) Our job is not to convert others; our job is not even to set up Bible studies with unbelievers.
 - b) Our task is to sow the seed whenever and wherever we may be able. **Ac. 17:17; 20:20-21**
2. God is not looking for numbers; He seeks kingdom people. **Ac. 18:9-11; Ro. 2:28-29**
 - a) Philadelphia only had a little strength, but they were commended by Christ. **Re. 3:8**
 - b) Wealthier and established churches like Laodicea and Sardis were rebuked. **Re. 3:1, 15-16**
3. We can be confident that we will grow if we do our part in seeking the lost.
 - a) Speaking the word helps us grow stronger and develop the qualities God is seeking.
 - b) Numerical growth may result, but there will certainly be spiritual advancement.
4. How should we measure evangelistic success?
 - a) Christ does not appoint preachers to baptize; He appoints preachers to preach! **1Co. 1:17**
 - b) The question is not "Are we growing numerically?" It is "Are we working?" **Eph. 4:11-16**

D. *Addition by Subtraction*

1. God's people sometimes grow stronger even while becoming smaller.
 - a) Was the church better for having a man like Diotrephes in it? **3Jn. 9-10**
 - b) Was Thyatira stronger for having a member like Jezebel? **Re. 2:20**
2. Christ values the quality of disciples more than the quantity. **Ro. 16:17-18**
 - a) Professions of faith and religious activity will not be enough to save anyone. **Mt. 7:21-23**
 - b) Jesus is looking for those who will accept the demands of discipleship. **Lk. 14:26-35**

E. Why Teach If No One Wants To Hear?

1. What is the purpose of evangelism when no one is willing to listen or respond?
 - a) It affirms the sovereignty and priority of God in the world. **Da. 5:17-23; Mt. 28:18-19**
 - b) It affirms the authority and validity of God's word. **Eze. 2:4-5**
 - c) It brings the opportunity of salvation to those who are willing and receptive. **1Ti. 2:3-4**
 - d) It glorifies God in the condemnation of the wicked that reject His way. **He. 11:7**
2. Noah, Elijah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel fulfilled their mission, even if they made few converts.
 - a) God's word will accomplish the purpose for which it is sent. **Is. 55:10-11**
 - b) God's word is a message of both salvation and condemnation.

II. What is Our Motive in Evangelism?

A. Carnal Motives in Teaching

1. Sadly, many church growth approaches focus almost entirely on numbers.
 - a) Though they may say numbers are not important, it quickly becomes apparent that they are!
 - b) Some may even think that a lack of baptisms is equivalent to a lack of effort or faithfulness.
2. The danger in being numbers-oriented is that you can eventually seek it at any cost.
 - a) If numerical growth is the priority, one can begin to embrace whatever makes it happen.
 - b) Thus doctrines that obstruct numerical growth become less important. (e.g. MDR)

B. Incomplete Motives in Teaching

1. As previously noted, there is more to declaring God's truth than just saving souls.
 - a) Like discipline, evangelism serves multiple purposes in the plan of God.
 - b) God desires all men to be saved, but He recognizes that the word drives some men away!
2. If saving souls is our only motive in teaching the lost, we can be easily discouraged and quit.
 - a) What would men like Noah or Ezekiel have done if saving souls was all that mattered?
 - b) We must realize that some men do not want to be saved.
 - c) We also must realize that our success does not depend on anyone accepting the gospel.

C. The Spiritual Motive in Teaching

1. Our primary motive in teaching God's word ought to be to serve His purposes and glorify Him.
 - a) Yes, we want souls to be saved, and we rightly work and pray and plead for it to be so.
 - b) But we also appreciate the value and purpose of teaching even when no one obeys.
2. It is this God-toward focus in our ministry that can help us continue on when times are tough.

Conclusion

1. Are we working to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ and expand the borders of His kingdom?
 - a. Are we content to serve as messengers of God's truth regardless of the outcome? **2Co. 2:15-17**
 - b. Will we do our part to share God's truth and shine as lights in a world dark with sin? **Php. 2:14-16**
2. Have you believed in Jesus and obeyed the conditions of salvation in Him? (Mk. 16:16; Ac. 2:38)
