

The Church's Role in Evangelism



“The most evangelized, the most reached area in your community is the building in which your church meets on Sunday. There’s only one problem: this is also the place where the fewest number of lost people are likely to be.” –Alvin Reid¹

The day I got married I felt like the luckiest guy in the world. If you know my wife, you know exactly why I would say this. She has a radiant smile, a contagious laugh, a strong and compassionate heart, a sweet personality, a selfless

attitude, a passion for family, a... well...I could go on and on about this woman. She makes my life so full of joy and beauty. But when I think about who she is, I can never pinpoint just one aspect of her that is the sole reason I married her. I didn’t marry her just because she has an incredible personality. I didn’t marry her just because she is fun to be around. I married her because of who she is...the whole package. All of these qualities that I love about her make her who she is. All the parts make up the whole.

When we talk about the church, we must understand something similar.

Christ didn’t die just for you or just for me. Christ died for His bride, the church (Eph 5:25). So when we look at individuals, we are all parts of the whole (1Cor 12:12-31). In saying this, know that this does not negate the fact that Christ deeply cares for each of us individually. But just like I love my wife’s smile particularly because it belongs to her, so too, Christ loves us particularly because we belong to the greater body, the church (His bride).

Stop Going to Church

Something has gone wrong though. I am not sure when it happened or how it happened, but it has happened. Somewhere along the way the church went from being identified by the people to being identified by the building. The problem with this new understanding is that we begin to focus everything on what happens *in* the building instead of what happens *through* the people. One has a centralized focus (building) and one has a decentralized one (people).

There are countless references in the New Testament that affirm this idea of the church being the people (cf. Eph 1:23, Col 1:24, 1Pe 5:13), but I want to draw our attention to one particular conversation in the Gospel of John. This story is familiar to many, it is the story of the woman at the well. In this story, a woman begins to have a conversation with Jesus about water when Jesus flips the conversation around and speaks to this woman about salvation. The way He teaches her about living water is incredible on so many levels,

¹ Reid, Alvin. *Evangelism Handbook*. B&H Publishing, Nashville: 2009, 287

but I want to draw our attention to what happens next. At the end of their conversation the woman mentions a disagreement between people as to where they should worship. For Jews, the location of worship was extremely important. Jesus responds with a profound statement, saying the time has come when true worshippers will not worship at this place or that, but worship the Father in spirit and truth (Jn 4:21-24). Do you see what is happening here? It may not seem like a big deal to us in the 21st century, but what Jesus is doing is completely changing the idea of worship for Jews. It is no longer about the place you go to, but about the spirit inside you – the attitude and heart behind worship.

I do not want to downplay the importance of the Sunday gathering. Gathering on Sunday is Biblical and should not be neglected. What I want to do is make clear that instead of gathering *in* the church on Sunday mornings, we need to understand that we gather *as* the church. So on Sunday mornings we are the church gathered, worshipping together and celebrating Christ, and throughout the week we are the church scattered, bringing the hope of the gospel to those we interact with. This may just seem like a word game to you, with merely changing the word IN to AS, but it is far more.



Understanding this makes being a Christian about others, about a mission, and about a lifestyle. Not understanding this makes church about an individual and about an event. Christ isn't found in a church building until the people show up. Christ is found working through us as we work, as we fellowship, as we go about every aspect of our lives. We are the church, and the vehicle Christ has chosen to reach the world is the church. This is why Bill Hybels has rightly said that "the church is the hope of the world."

The Body

Inside of my body are cells that are constantly multiplying to keep pace with all the cells that are damaged or dying. If my body ceases to replenish cells, my body will cease to live. Multiplication is key to my survival, and it is no different with the church. Without evangelism, the body of Christ will not multiply, and will eventually cease to exist.² Evangelism, in a sense, is one way we keep the body of Christ alive, healthy, and growing. We are a part of that body, so choosing to not multiply is suicide.

Another aspect of the body that Paul draws our attention to is the distinctness of each of us (1Cor 12:12-31). Paul compares us to different parts of the body, showing that a hand is necessary, but a hand can't be a foot. All of us have different gifts and abilities that God has given us, so reaching people in evangelism isn't some mass produced methodology we follow. It is unique to each person. If we understand this rightly, than we begin to realize that we need each other, for one person's gift is another's weakness. Individually we are gifted, but

2 Reid, 288

limited. It is together, with the whole body, that we can reach the world for Christ.

In football you often hear of the announcers talking about the "arm" that the quarterback has, meaning it is strong and accurate. But without a beating heart, functioning legs, the



ability to see, and a mobile neck, than that arm would not fulfill its purpose in the football game. The arm is dependent on everything else in the body. The difficult part is that the arm gets all the praise, while the rest of the body works so hard for little recognition. Paul tells us how the body of Christ is no different (1Cor 12:21-25). We have pastors of mega churches that are constantly praised and honored for their work, while missionaries in small villages in Africa sacrifice everything and get little recognition. Both are necessary to reaching all nations for Christ. The mega church pastor is no more important than the missionary, God has just given them different gifting, passions, and roles. For the body to grow and thrive, we must both use our gifts to reach people as well as depend on others. So if God has called you to be a hand, don't neglect that role and don't try to be a foot. Others have been called to be a foot. Whatever your role looks like,

one thing is clear: we are all called to evangelism. And because of where God has placed you and how he has gifted you, you can reach people that no one else can, and we need you to. We need each of you to play your part, and play it well.

In Summary:

- All believers make up the church, the bride of Christ
- Christ has chosen to reach the world through the church
- God has wired and gifted us differently yet purposefully so we can fulfill our individual roles in the body
- Fulfilling our role helps the church fulfill hers which brings glory to God as Christ reaches the world.