

# Beloved

The Weekly Pastoral Letter of Dr. T.J. Gentry – August 24, A.D. 2008 – Evangelism XI

Grace to you and peace, beloved. May the Lord be with you!

In the last installment I stated that evangelism is the fruit of a healthy church. I then posed several logical questions that you might raise in response to my statement. We looked at the first three, which are: “Does he mean that if there is no evangelism, then the church is not healthy?” “Is evangelism the sole determiner of church health?” And, “What does he mean by evangelism?” I trust you read my responses and thought through the issues more on your own. (I usually don’t get much feedback, but I welcome yours – just as long as you agree with everything I say...) Let’s move on and consider the remaining questions related to evangelism and church health.

You say, “Does he mean that as long as there are some in the congregation who share their faith, the church can be healthy?” I say, “No. As far as evangelism relates to overall church health, it relates to every member’s involvement in evangelism.” Now I realize there may be serious disagreement with my answer. Some believe, for instance, that evangelism is the calling of a select few; those with the gift of evangelism or with a particular type of personality (usually the outgoing, thick-skinned type who could also sell ice to polar bears). Given this basic belief, most church members are “off the hook” when it comes to evangelism. Sure, they should pray for the lost but the actual work is the responsibility of the gifted few. This particular view is actually widely held in the evangelical world, if not consciously then subconsciously. At least that’s what I conclude when I consider how few Christians actually share the gospel with any frequency or intentionality. But, and this is always the key question, does the Bible support the view that only a select group are actually supposed to evangelize? I don’t think it does. Consider for a moment just one related passage from Peter. In his first epistle, Peter tells his audience to “always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.” (1 Peter 3:15, NKJV) Usually, this text is given as a basis for apologetics (i.e. the defense of the faith), and, to be sure, it is an appropriate text for such concerns. What I want you to consider, however, is the assumption Peter is making. He assumes that the average Christian, the letter’s original audience, is engaged in some kind of discussion with unbelievers about their faith in Christ. It is in this context that he urges their readiness with appropriate answers to questions about the “hope that is in them” (i.e. their trust in Christ in the midst of suffering and difficulty). While the text doesn’t actually use the word evangelism, it

sure does describe it pretty well. And what it describes is something every Christian is to be ready and willing to do. Thus, I believe that Peter’s explicit concern was that every Christian is to be about the business of preparation for evangelism, while his implicit expectation was that every Christian will evangelize.

So, back to my answer above regarding overall church health and its relation to every member’s participation in evangelism: If your church is healthy with regard to evangelism it is because everyone is involved. Yes, some will share the gospel more than others and better than others, but all will share the gospel. Those who share more often and with better results will probably help equip the others, but everyone will be involved. And everyone means everyone. Total involvement, by the way, is one safeguard against the division I previously described that exists in some churches between the doers and the non-doers. It’s also a great way to silence those who say that Reformed Christians, because of their commitment to Calvinism, are necessarily non-evangelistic. That’s hoey. My Bible teaches both. These great truths are not contradictory on the pages of Scripture and they should be in harmony in my life.

Before moving on to the final question, I want to offer some practical advice in this area. If you agree that overall church health requires a commitment by every Christian to evangelize then you may want to begin doing these simple things, especially if you are a pastor. One, keep a list of prayer requests that are focused on evangelistic concerns. Regularly discuss and pray for both the lost (by name) and your own and other’s opportunities to share the gospel. This type of regular prayer will lead to heightened awareness of evangelistic needs and opportunities. Try it and see. Two, regularly include in your church’s singing or your own personal devotion songs that are evangelistic in nature. This may seem odd to you, but consider how quickly words are retained when put to music. Pick good hymns and psalms that speak of evangelism and the promises of God to bring in His elect and sing them until you really know them. Try, for example, “We Have Heard the Joyful Sound” or “Christ Shall Have Dominion”, or metrical psalm 65, 67, or 110; these songs are evangelistic and serve as reminders and motivators for those of us who often need both. Third, and finally, make sure you have decent gospel literature available as a leave-behind. Remember that God works through means, and He means it. ☺

We’ll consider the final question next time, Lord willing. Until then, share the gospel often and with confidence. God is working through you. – T.J.