
Church Evangelism – Its Location

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(Start by noticing Acts 18:9-10 and how the LORD encouraged Paul in his pursuit of lost elect)

We can bridge the growing chasm between the church and the world¹ without distorting the Word. But it is challenging. Last week we listened to the second message in a three-part series called *Church Evangelism – the why, how & where of Clearcreek Chapel outreach*. This message escorted us into the theme of contextualized evangelism.

By contextualization we don't mean just giving people what they want to hear. Rather, it is giving people our lives and the bible's narrative and specific answers to their questions in ways they can understand and even feel. At least if they reject and not receive the Christ, they are doing just that and not rejecting Christianity based on unnecessary and inaccurate reasons. In other words, contextualizing the mission is simply taking our unaltered message (i.e. gospel) and altering our methods to adapt to unbelievers particular culture/context.

So, this is what we've learned. Clearcreek Chapel is expected to evangelize because we are expected to follow Christ. Following Jesus is not optional. And Jesus goes where the gospel is not. People need the gospel to be saved and secure in Christ. The way we follow Jesus is not merely as a learner but as a lover. We follow him into people's lives and we become known as "friends of sinners". Here, we show them what the gospel does and tell them what the gospel is with a well-timed call to repent and believe.

In doing this, the scriptures tell us that one of three things will happen. Unbelievers who hear the gospel will either: 1) Reject the message, 2) Reflect on the message, or 3) Receive the message.² Results are not up to us. They are fully up to God.³ We are simply called into "faithful flexibility" in our effort to get the gospel out in order to save some.

Tonight, in the 3rd and final message, we explore *Church Evangelism – its location*. This message answers the question, "where" – where do we go to find the lost elect? Are there places in our vicinity that we can enter intentionally to show people what the gospel does and tell people what the gospel is? The answer to this question provided in this message is a resounding "Yes". Tonight, we will look at three locations nearby in which we may find lost elect in order to see them saved.

¹The disappearing of cultural Christianity noticeably is on the rise. Contextualization of church mission is a discussion rising too. For help in understanding and entering into the discussion see Michael Goheen & Craig Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989); Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

²For a clear communication of the gospel and an example of the three ways people respond to it, see Paul addressing the Areopagus in Athens found in Acts 17. The key paragraph for noticing various responses to the gospel is Acts 17:32-34.

³See 1 Corinthians 3:5-9.

This will be done as we remain in 1 Corinthians and notice three locations where believers and unbelievers meet. <pray>

Its Location (answers the “where”)

7:12-16; 10:23-30; 14:20-25

Tonight, I want us now to shift our thinking from why we are participating in *Church Evangelism* and how we are to do this and now think briefly over where this takes place. As we respond in obedience to follow Jesus into the world, we will adapt our schedules and priorities to live life with unbelievers. We will watch over our hearts closely that we enjoy life with unbelievers without thinking their sin is enjoyable. We will in other words be known as “a friend of sinners” and thus reflect Christ (cf. Matt.11:19).

In our homes

7:12-16

Please open your bibles to 1 Corinthians. In the first letter to the church at Corinth, we spot some unbelievers in three locations. The first location is seen in 7:12-16. Take a listen as I read for us this paragraph.

To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

(1 Corinthians 7:12-16 ESV)

In this passage on instructions for those married to non-Christians, we gain insight into our theme tonight. First, we notice that Paul expected converts in the Corinthian church to imitate him. We heard in our summary paragraph for this series that Paul “tries to please everyone in everything he does not seeking his own advantage but that of many that they might be saved” (10:33). We see in 7:12-16 that these Christians desire the salvation of their non-Christians spouses. They long for them to come to Christ in repentance and faith. In some cases, the unbelieving spouse wants nothing to do with their believing spouse. They want out of the marriage. After much prayer, attempts to maintain the marriage, and pleading with the unbelieving spouse, Paul says that (s)he let him/her go. Now listen to the basis for this instruction. “For how do you know whether you will save your spouse (v15-16).

We are asking the question “where do we find lost elect?”

Point #1 – HOME. The first location for this evening’s message is your home. As we set out to increase in Church evangelism *Clearcreek Chapel may be seeking the salvation of non-believers in our very home.*

In this passage notice v14-16 and the presence of unbelievers at home. We find both children and spouses in this passage who are unbelievers. These unbelievers have a privileged position. They live among believers. They can see “the shining light of good deeds”. They notice change in your life. They hear you talk about Jesus. They watch you loving him. They see you reading the bible and praying. And

they also have you entering into their world to listen lovingly, to speak winsomely and to communicate the gospel freely and fervently. This is the first place we look for lost elect as we think on church evangelism.

Contextualization: What might contextualization look like in this setting? Think upon the preferences, patterns, likes, dislikes, styles, etc. that your family member may enjoy. Enter these places – places like tv shows, hobbies, games, stories, bedrooms, playrooms (even teenage playrooms). Notice what’s good and true and beautiful about these things. Here, you can accept these things, enjoy them for what they are – God’s common grace. Notice, also, what’s false and ugly and twisted about these things. Here, you can challenge these things for what they are – God’s grace perverted into idols. How does the gospel apply here? Ponder. Pray. Participate.

At a friend’s home

10:23-30

The second location we catch sight of some unbelievers in 1 Cor. is found in 10:23-30. Listen and look for this location as I read this paragraph.

“All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.” If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else’s conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?

(1 Corinthians 10:23-30 ESV)

In this section we view Paul’s preference for liberty when commending the gospel to unbelievers. The setting is when a believer gets an invitation to eat over at his/her friend’s home (likely they would be serving meat sacrificed to idols). Their friend was an unbeliever whose desire was to have the believer over to their home and enjoy friendship. Paul tells the Church that they have freedom to take the invitation and enjoy the evening.

Point #2: A FRIEND’S HOME - The second location we see unbelievers in 1 Cor. is in a friend’s home. As we set out to increase in Church evangelism *Clearcreek Chapel may be seeking the salvation of non-believers in their very home. Church Evangelism may find us in unbelievers’ homes due to building friendships. This opportunity comes through invitations. People inviting us over to their home to share food, drink and conversation. Similarly, by way of implication, we may extend invitations to unbelievers over to our home for food, drink and conversation.*

Contextualization: What might contextualization look like in this setting? Well for one, accepting with genuine thanksgiving the food and drink they offer. It may not be your first choice but remember 10:32 – “give no offense to Jews or Greeks”. Their likings can be enjoyed by us who are involved in “faithful flexibility”. We are not out to please ourselves. We seek to please others. (10:33). And what is most pleasing on planet Earth is Jesus Christ savingly enjoyed.

So, be patient. Be praying. Be a friend to sinners. And as you get closer, more gospel can come out. Don't stay outside their world. Enter it by asking questions. Be wise. Be winsome. What's good and true and beautiful about their world? Well, talk about it. Enjoy it. Here, you are looking for God's common grace. Delight in these things with them. You may even be able to point out that this is God's common grace in their lives.

At the Chapel

14:20-25

The third sighting of unbelievers with believers in this letter can be found in 14:20-25. Listen to God's word and look for the location in which we find these unbelievers.

Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. In the Law it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord." Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

(1 Corinthians 14:20-25 ESV)

Notice the place we find unbelievers. We hear it in phrases like "...the whole church comes together", "an unbeliever enters", and is "among you". This paragraph is the classic text many mention when talking about worship services with an eye toward unbelievers. It is a powerful reminder that as we become more flexible and disciplined in our lives with unbelievers, we will want to invite them to the Chapel. We will want to see more and more unbelievers checking out this gathering of Christians. Here is a key location in which Church evangelism takes place. As elders, we long to see accessible, understandable and desirable singing and preaching in front of unbelievers. We pray and long to see our unbelieving friends converted as God uses the Word to bring them to their knees. This is a vital location in which Church evangelism occurs.

Point #3 – AT THE CHAPEL. Here, we find the third location in which unbelievers may be found.

What does this actually mean for us regarding church evangelism? As I see it, there are a few locations in the Chapel where you may find lost elect.

- 1) In the auditorium. What are ways in this location you can serve? There is praying – do you pray before, during and after gatherings?. There is welcoming – do you take the initiative and welcome people into your gathering? There is interacting – do you begin to get to know your new acquaintance? There is inviting – do you invite people over to your home for lunch? or invite them to read a booklet on the stand? Or invite them over to get a cup of coffee in the lobby? , etc.

- 2) In the lobby. What are ways in this location you can serve? There is praying. There is lingering talk. I was given a question to use in conversation by Paul Tripp. I use it all the time. It's simple. The question is not for your friend. You ask it to yourself. It goes like this: What is it that I don't know about my friend as a result of what I now know about him/her? As you ask this question in your mind good follow up questions will come to you. Ask those to your friend and watch the conversation gain traction and speed.

Conclusion To wrap up this message . . . (recap series for information/exhortation and tease out implications from 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1 for application).