

An authorized church is Evangelical

09-01-19

The New Testament presents to us a pattern for the church of Christ. That local church focuses on the purposes that were given by Jesus. We see throughout the New Testament churches that either lost that focus or made their own purposes. We see those churches rebuked or even identified as unapproved. In order for a church to be approved, it must seek the purpose for which it was purposed. One of those purposes is to be evangelical.

This is a bit confusing for some. The term “evangelical” is used in a popular context to mean something different than the New Testament. Many think of “the Evangelical movement”, a loose grouping of conservative Protestant churches that are identified by their core philosophy of a “Born again” experience by Faith Only. 70.4% of Americans identify as (practicing) "Christian;" and Evangelicals make up 26.3 percent of that population according to a 2004 Pew Survey¹. This is NOT what we are talking about when the New Testament calls churches to be evangelical.

Instead, we speak to the meaning of the word “evangelism”, from the Greek *Ev – Angelos*: the Good Message (Gospel). Evangelism and being evangelical refers to the teaching of (the lost) the Gospel. This idea begins with the Great Commission found at the end of each of the Gospel accounts: Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15-17, Luke 24:47, John 20:21-23. TO be clear, we are not under the Great Commission today for several reasons. First, the Great Commission called the apostles to work miracles and signs with their teaching, and today signs have ceased. Secondly, the apostles testified to having accomplished their commission (Col. 1:6, 23, Rom. 10:18). Yet indirectly the church still carries that work, as seen in statements such as those in 1 Thessalonians 1:8, Romans 1:8, and Ephesians 3:9-10.

Fundamentally, the great work of the church in evangelism is in creating members who are equipped to do the work of evangelism (Eph. 4:11-16). This is the most effective way the church reaches the lost, by creating members who are able to reach out to the lost. Indeed members spread the Gospel most effectively by their active and inactive work of evangelism; consider Acts 8:4-5 as an example.

The church itself is still an organ that can work evangelism. In every sermon or meeting an invitation is offered to the lost, since we see that the assembly itself can impact the unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:16). We also know that there are specific works the church supports, including things such as a website, internet venues and even TV and radio.

But the church is mainly a resource for the works of the Lord. The church is a tool from God to serve the members in their work. It is there to equip in training and to strengthen in discipline. Members who are effective in evangelism have learned how to use the church tools such as preachers, elders, deacons, materials, and resources.

¹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20090304020453/http://pewforum.org/publications/surveys/green-full.pdf>