

Evangelism

The Outward

In the previous two articles, we have looked at what a church should be. First, a true church is a group of people each of whom has come to believe the unique claims of Jesus Christ as Son of God and Savior of the world. The church is, then, a gathering of believers; anyone not a believer in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord does not rightly belong as a member of a church.

Then we focused on what a church does when its members come together. We highlighted worship and edification. We also took a look at the "one another" passages in the epistles and thought a bit about what it means to be committed to one another in such a way that we give, receive, and grow spiritually, and progressively become like Jesus.

Now let's be hypothetical and say we are perfectly fulfilling all these things. Let's say that every one of us is solid in our commitment to Jesus, and have the assurance that if we died

before this day was over, we would go to be with our Lord. Let's say, too, that when we go to church Sunday after Sunday, we consciously feel God's presence and always give him our praise, honor, and adoration.

What's more, let's assume that we all understand what edification is, are committed to it, and do it. We only have to look at one another for the verse from Ephesians 4:13 to come to mind (where it reads, "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"). To become like Jesus and to help everyone else do the same is our highest priority. In other words, I'm assuming for the moment that we all know Jesus, we regularly worship him, and we're helping one another grow in spiritual knowledge and obedience.

As glorious as that might sound, and would be, we would not be faithful as a church if that alone described us. The church does not exist only to give us a means of corporate worship, or as a place where we can come apart from a sinful world and learn a

new way of life. The church is also God's way of bringing hope and life and peace to that sinful world. We have a task to do that takes us outside the walls of the church. That's why I say that evangelism is the outward look.

Too often our outward look is not motivated by evangelism. We look out on a world full of perplexity, hostility, and immorality, and are glad that we have a relatively safe place like the church where we can, in a sense, hide away. At its worst, non-Christians are threats to our security; at its best, they are people with whom we have an uneasy detente. Maybe we work with them, live beside them, or even share in some common activity with them, but there's an unspoken agreement to leave religion out of the relationship. It's altogether possible that we do not even think in terms of Christian and non-Christian with our close acquaintances. Then, non-Christians become only those people who do all the terrible things we hear about, but never see. Maybe we have even fallen into the popular way of thinking that says

This is the third and final article in the series by David Hall, pastor of the Elizabethtown, Pa., congregation.

church to really put their faith in God to the test. The priority for all of life—even church life—is personal peace and security. Church life, in those circumstances, is usually ingrown. The one criterion that judges all decisions, at least subconsciously, is whether a particular program or ministry will leave people comfortable. In short, it is the difference between life merely governed by static religion or life that is in dynamic touch with the living God. And only those lives who are in touch with God understand his purposes and make them a part of their lives.

One of those purposes is that the whole earth will be full of God's glory. That was God's design when he created man and woman. God's glory rested on those human beings, and an earth full of a humanity of that nature would have meant an earth full of God's glory in a very unique way. Rather than be defeated in his purpose, God designed another way for people to know his glory once the earth was subjected to the fall. Let me just affirm once again, the world as we now know it is not what God intended. We can only glimpse by faith a bit of what it will be like one day, as God has purposed. One day it will be remade in the order of what God first had in mind.

But for that to happen, people belonging to God must fill the new earth, because the one thing that it seems God isn't going to create again is people. He will fill his new earth with the old earth people whom he has redeemed. That's one way to look at the whole unfolding story of salvation in the Scriptures. God has worked to turn the chaos we've created into something consistent with what he wanted from the very beginning. Let's consider a few examples from the Bible.

When Adam and Eve first sinned, God could have destroyed them and started over. Instead, he promised the woman that she would bring salvation to her offspring. When God judged the earth in Noah's day he could have made a clean sweep and started over. But again he purposed to save the human creation. By the time

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

(2 Corinthians 3:18)

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

(2 Corinthians 4:4-6)

Look

by David L. Hall

my faith is good for me, but whatever makes the other person happy is OK too.

One of the main reasons that we lose our evangelistic perspective is that, for one reason or another, we get closer to the world than we are to God. To see people from God's point of view—even a little bit—means we have to be close to God. How is God's purpose of an earth full of his people going to happen if those who already belong to him do not share that vision? Perhaps no other activity of Christian people reveals their true spiritual state better than their commitment to evangelism. A church full of people who have no vision for evangelism is a church that has lost touch with the heart of God.

Other things can be substituted so that there is a semblance of life. A big emphasis can be placed on the Christian lifestyle. A lot of activity can be generated within programs for both the church itself as well as the community. Usually, the one characteristic of those programs is that they are safe and easily managed. There is little to cause offense. There is little that calls for the people in the