

2nd Opinion: Prioritize equipping & edifying

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By Woody Hambrick

The “Great Deception” within the church is the prevailing belief that evangelism itself is the answer to the unchurched state of our nation and the cure for the anti-Christian social agenda. Christians have institutionally neglected equipping and edifying the saints.

This is not to say no churches value discipleship. But you cannot deny our primary initiatives center on evangelism. We have mission boards that are well worth funding, but what about a discipleship board? We have some very well-prepared discipleship tools—but no real discipleship initiatives. Christians have focused the lion’s share of our energies, time and finances on the wrong impetus—outreach. Not that outreach is wrong in itself, but it should not be our first priority.

Most churches need to refocus on inreach rather than outreach. Yes, I am painting with a broad brush. But I am looking honestly at a nation that is no longer “one nation under God.” America is one nation under “self.” This change in emphasis from biblical values to moral relativism has been made possible by the failure of the local church. We must admit we collectively have failed as a church at the local level. This has not been a failure to

evangelize. We often hear of salvations in large numbers. It is a failure to develop pure faith through equipping and edifying the saints.

Evangelism is the job of every Christian. With that in mind, it is impossible then to expect to have any grouping of Christians, such as a church, that does not have some intent in evangelism. The problem is that the church, the association, the state convention and the national convention have had an almost-exclusive evangelism focus to the detriment of the health of the church.

The purpose of the local church is to equip and to edify the saints, not the lost. The lost can neither be equipped nor edified in Christ. The Apostle Paul makes that clear in 1 Corinthians. Only after the saints are equipped and edified, and the local body is healthy, should the purpose of evangelism have a distant third place in the church. Outside the church, each individual Christian should have evangelism as their primary focus.

Let me illustrate it this way: If you had a church whose sole purpose is evangelism with no attempt at discipleship, it would flourish with new growth. The reason is obvious. It flourishes because we all would rather focus on other peoples' spiritual needs than our own. But there will be little, if any, spontaneous discipleship.

Take another church and have it solely purpose on equipping and edifying the saints. Let there be no evangelistic motor within the corporate mechanism. This church may atrophy initially, due to the discomfort many will feel from the inward focus, but spontaneous independent evangelism will be the product. We can have church growth without evangelism. But there can be no spiritual growth without discipleship.

We have failed in keeping our nation as "one nation under God." That failure is a product of not properly equipping and edifying the saints. It is not a product of not having enough evangelism initiatives. Each generation

has seen a decline in how their children view the importance of a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. A faith that is a constant work-in-progress looking inward daily is a faith that will cross generational boundaries. A faith that is focused on personal spiritual growth is a faith that infects. It no longer becomes the faith that we tell our children about. It becomes the faith our children witness in us. And that is a faith they will more likely take with them from the homes of their parents.

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