

Right or Wrong? Irrelevant outreach

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When we discuss outreach, we describe why people have marginal connection to our church. But we almost never talk about issues common to all people, much less what to do about them. Does our approach diminish the gospel?

If the question is, “Does our concept of outreach diminish gospel commands enunciated by Jesus?” the answer may be yes. Perhaps the more relevant question for your church should be, “Does our church have a marginal connection to people?” Christ’s message is not to talk about issues but to act on his love.

Consider what you mean by outreach. An examination of your goals might be a good starting place. Look at the motives of your membership and the meaning ascribed to “outreach.” If the focus is how we reach “those people,” sinners who are not like us, you may have your answer. In considering others’ marginal connection to your church, is there frustration that you are unable to change people. Is the goal to get people to come so you can grow membership in your congregation?

The need for love, acceptance and grace

The issues common to all people are the need for love, acceptance and grace. Christ compels us to demonstrate those values to the world. If there is a reason Christianity may be on the road to becoming a minority religion, it may be because the Christians who are shown as examples of Christ’s followers in popular culture are greedy, ugly and judgmental. A church known for what its members are against will have difficulty forming a connection to its community.

Christ compels us to look outward, to move out of our comfort level and to demonstrate his commands by tackling issues not common to all, but to the poor, marginalized and strangers who have the least of the comforts American Christians take for granted. Should not service, rather than outreach, be your goal? Talk is cheap, and faith without works is dead.

Forget discussing “issues” common to all people. List the needs of the people in your community. Formulate plans to meet those needs and move to actions to implement them.

Regardless of its size, your church members can find food for those who are going without meals and find ways to mentor those who need to obtain meaningful work. Are your members engaged in advocacy for the least of those around you? It is not partisan to vigorously oppose laws that allow predatory lending to ensnare people in cycles of debt from which they cannot get free. It is biblical.

Walking in God’s footprints

During his recent visit to America, Pope Francis urged all Catholic parishes to adopt a refugee family. If all churches did the same, would God not smile as we welcome the stranger? During a televised interview, a child said the pope is neat because he walks in God’s footprints. All Christians should strive to walk in God’s footprints alongside the poor and disenfranchised. If we do, the concern of people not connecting with churches may disappear because we will be following Christ’s command to connect to people.

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