

WHAT IF'S OF EVANGELISM...#5

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I was at a conference lately and someone said something that I have heard before but it really resonated with me this time. The comment was relating to a paradigm shift in evangelism that has occurred over the last number of years. That paradigm shift is from a “Believe to Belong” reality to a “Belong to Believe” one.

The old paradigm saw the church being effective in a culture that was more “believe to belong” oriented. In other words, church was a place you went to and a community you relationally connected with after you made a commitment to Christ. Therefore, during an era of crusades and tent meetings people came to Christ and then entered the church. In our world today that looks different...maybe because of our longing for relationship/family/community or just the fact that people want to see faith in action rather than hear someone they don't really know talk about it. With that reality being very evident in our culture and world it is no wonder people want to connect at church and discover Christianity. It is also in this new paradigm that we see people make quick decisions to receive Christ less often and more frequently we see people look at Church as the beginning of a journey and they, at some point in that journey, discover that they are a Christian. That is our new world and I think it is important to also state that it is not better or worse than the old paradigm it is just the way things are. What needs to change, however, is how we look at Church and people in Church.

Church is not supposed to be a place where we need to believe to feel loved and accepted or a place where that belief is required before we will love or accept others. Church is a place where we are to love and welcome everyone and show them Christ's love even when they look and act differently than we do.

Here is a good question to ask yourself to get a sense of your personal response to this reality: What would you honestly feel/do/say if you saw two men holding hands in church, a young teenage girl in church pregnant and alone, or a convicted drug dealer sitting at the back. What makes them different? Would you respond by asking them to sit with you, have them over after church, seek them out and have a conversation after church with them? Why would you respond that way? What makes them different? How did Jesus teach us to respond?

We are not called to judge others but to love everyone. When we start looking at the sawdust in someone else's life we may need to start looking at the log in our own. All sins are equal to God – public and private alike – and we are all loved by God equally and are called to love others equally and to treat them with respect.

Some of you reading this will tell me that we have to be separate from the world and I would agree but also say that our separateness is in how we act and what we take in, not

who we show God's love to. Jesus is our perfect example and he did this perfectly. (Women at the well, Zaccheus, etc.).

Church does not just exist for Christians, in fact our mission is not about us at all – The Great Commission is to go and make disciples...What if we were that kind of place... a place where people would feel loved, accepted and forgiven...a place of healing and hope...a place where it is okay to struggle with belief and what it means to live it out...

In our world today...people want to belong to believe...the question is: will we let them?

Like always, this article is meant to promote thought and discussion and if you disagree, it resonated with you, or you were challenged, please feel free to let me know. I am always open to talking - feel free to call, drop in, go for coffee or email me (bryce@devonalliancechurch.ca).