

IN GOOD FAITH: BASIC CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

Church: The Living Apologetic

THEME: The church exists as God's missionary presence *in* the world and *to* the world. William Willimon puts it this way: "If we have . . . no visible foretaste of the kingdom of God in the church, then we have nothing to say. . . . The mission of the church to embody the good news of Christ to the world is not an activity of the church, but rather is the church."

ICE BREAKER

1. Share something of the experience of church you had growing up or in the early days of your Christian life. Would you characterize that experience as essentially positive?
2. What negative experiences of church have you witnessed? Do you know of people who are no longer part of a local church because of some negative experience(s) they had?
3. What is the most attractive feature you see in the life of Grace Chapel?
4. What is your impression of the view people have of Grace Chapel in the community nearest to us? How do you feel about that impression?

THINK

1. Rubel listed several reasons "why people don't like church" in our time. How many of those (seven) can you recall?
2. Why do *you* think there is such a negative attitude toward church in the contemporary culture? What elements (e.g., media, press, etc.) promote that negative image? What attempt to counter it with positive information?
3. Are there specific things you can name that you believe would help churches have a more positive image before unbelievers? Have you seen churches attempt these things? With what effect?
4. Comment on this statement from Samuel Shoemaker: "We must know people – like them, enjoy them, make friends with them, take trouble for them – before it may ever be right to 'speak' to them about spiritual matters." Do you agree with Shoemaker?

EXAMINE

Read [Acts 2:41-47](#) to answer the following questions:

1. This short text is a summary description of the life of the church in Jerusalem. Notice that Luke points out that it had "the goodwill of all the people" (2:47b). What do you understand that to mean?
2. From the text, does it appear that this "goodwill" arose from campaigns into the city? Or by the community observing the life of the church? Explain any lesson we might learn from this.
3. What are some of the specific things Luke identifies that seem to have had a positive impact on the "outsiders" to the Jerusalem church?

4. Does reflection on these verses help you clarify the notion of a “living apologetic” that Christians can offer the world?
5. What do you think of this statement: *“The glory of the gospel is that when the Church is absolutely different from the world, she invariably attracts it”*? (David Martyn Lloyd-Jones).

Read [1 Corinthians 9:19-23](#) as background for the following questions:

1. In some degree of contrast with the Jerusalem church just discussed from Acts 2, Paul was a church-planting missionary. (We still need both models today, of course!) In this text, he is instructing a church he planted about how to influence its culture – by using his method of respecting and integrating into a culture (where possible). Read and explain his method.
2. What are the obvious limits that Paul had to observe about accepting the culture and lifestyle of people with whom he wanted to share Christ?
3. Do we sometimes use the idea of “separation from evil” as a judgment of others? Alienate people by some of our statements or actions? Give a few examples of how this might happen.
4. Can you think of cultural and social events Christians can share with our non-Christian acquaintances that might build a bridge that could lead to evangelism? (Warning: Ladies, be careful of all the men shouting “Golf!” at the same time in your small group! Don’t let it scare you.)
5. Finally, with regard to people who don’t have positive feelings toward the church, reflect on this statement from Earl Palmer: “In evangelism, people do not need admonishment as much as they need to be carefully heard. Once I’m listening, I range through their arguments to find out where I can agree with them. Very often the ‘God’ they’re rejecting I would reject, too. Why not let them know that?”

THIS WEEK: Because the church is not a place but a people, the “living apologetic” for faith that people in your world will be exposed to this week is *you*. Be very conscious of the fact that people need to see a demonstration of the difference faith makes. Specifically, they need to see things like joy and patience, kindness and self-control – things Paul calls “the fruit of the Spirit” – in order to believe that Christianity really is true and makes a difference in the lives of those who embrace it with sincerity.