**I. Introduction**

Christians today often see evangelism as 100% the job of the church or 100% their own job. On the one hand, we think of evangelism as getting people to come to church—and then we structure church around the needs and interests of non-Christians. On the other, we might think the church has nothing to do with evangelism—swinging too far in the other direction. So evangelism and evangelism training become the responsibility of para-church ministries.

There’s a problem with that first model: the church is not in its essence only about outreach. It’s a community of Christians, designed to model the character of God to a watching world. If we turn Sunday morning into an apologetic lecture series, we wind up failing to grow and mature the church, which itself stifles evangelism. But the second model is no better. Because the church *is* one of God’s primary tools for evangelism.

Think of Peter’s description of the church in 1 Peter 2:9. He describes the people of God as a “chosen race,” “a royal priesthood,” and “a holy nation.” And what is the purpose of God’s people? Peter goes on to say: “that you may proclaim the excellences of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Jesus says in John 13:35 that “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” This is a love that is among Christians, but that speaks powerfully to those who are not Christians.

And Peter saw this in action. We read in Acts 2 (vv. 44, 47) that:

“And all who believed were together and had all things in common . . . And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

These early Christians had a life together that became a display of love. And God used this witness to draw people to Himself.

As Christians we are called to live our life together in such a way that the world will see the power of the gospel. Christians, not just as individuals, but as God’s people bound together in churches, are the clearest picture that the world sees of who God is.

One of the most colorful early church scholars was Tertullian, a North African who lived from around 160-225 A.D. Tertullian wrote his famous work *Apology* to Roman magistrates to defend Christians against slanderous charges. In it he noted the unity of Christians saying: “We are a body knit together as such by a common religious profession, by unity of discipline, and by the bond of a common hope.” He then noted the impact that the love of the church had on unbelievers around them. He says: “But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See, they say, how they love one another.”

A conspicuous, congregational love in a loveless world will not be ignored. By living the Gospel as a distinct community, the church accomplishes the important mission of displaying the transforming effects of the Gospel for the world to see. And that’s our topic for today: A display of God’s goodness through our corporate witness.

This morning, we’ll begin by first looking at **the unique power of congregational witness**. Then we’ll consider how we can **apply that to our life as a church**. And finally, we’ll end our time today with some **thoughts on our life together in this church**.

**II. The Unique Power of Congregational Witness**

How can our life together empower evangelism? We saw from those passages a few minutes ago that our inward unity and love provides outward witness to God’s power through the gospel. But practically, how does that happen? Lets consider five ways.

***1) The display of unity among Christians is a powerful witness***

A congregational witness enables unbelievers to see evidence of God’s power that they just can’t see in our lives as individuals. Think of John 17:20-23. Here’s what Jesus prays:

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”

So our unity in the Gospel testifies to Christ and his love for His people.

The impact of your relationships with others in this church extends far beyond those small circles. In fact, it can impact the reputation of Christ in this city.

***2) The display of love among Christians is a powerful witness***

Second, related to this idea of unity is the power of a congregational witness through Christians’ love for each other. What marks us out as Christians in the eyes of the world—more than sound doctrine, more than passion in worship—is our love.

This love is often manifested in good deeds. So in Matthew 5:16, Jesus says "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." Similarly, Peter states in 1 Pet. 2:12 – “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” According to Jesus, the good deeds of his disciples are the window through which the world comes to see and glorify God.

What might that look like for us? Here’s where these passages are so different than our natural inclination. The witness Jesus has in mind isn’t our love for the world, it’s our love for the church. If we love each other well—and the world sees that love—that is profoundly compelling. So should we love the world? Yes. Of course. We should love our neighbors as ourselves. But it is love *for each other* that Jesus says will mark us out in this world.

***3) As a church, we help each other witness***

Third, another great advantage of evangelism in the context of a congregation is that we help each other witness. In this way, our evangelism as a church is more powerful because many members with different gifts, and different opportunities to use those gifts are involved in witnessing to unbelievers.

When you talk with folks who have become Christians through the ministry of this church you will find that while an initial contact was made by one person, what happened wasn’t so much one-on-one, but *group* evangelism. Now, there are many relationships in which you alone can make that initial contact. So in no way should you remove yourself from responsibility for boldly sharing the gospel. But what happens from there can follow many different paths as we help each other witness as a church.

***4) A corporate witness glorifies God in a unique way***

Fourth, God is uniquely glorified when we bear witness to Him together. The broader the testimony, the more God is glorified. An assembly of believers can give glory to God with greater volume and variety than the individual can.

So, let’s say that you’re out at dinner with a group of Christians from the church and there are one or two non-Christians in the group. An opportunity arises and you begin talking about how you became a Christian. One person talks about how God used a difficult event in their life to draw them to Christ. Another person talks about being raised in a Christian home, and so on. God is glorified by this type of congregational witness because it testifies to the manifold ways that He extends His saving grace. And it presents to a non-Christian a much richer picture of how God works in this world than simply talking to you alone.

***5) Christians work together through the church for global missions***

The last way we’re involved corporately in evangelism: church planting locally and church planting around the world. In our church, we can pool our wisdom, experience, financial support, prayers, and callings—and direct those resources to making God’s name great in our broader community and among the nations around the world. As a church, we do this by training and sending pastors along with church members and funding.

**III. Application: Congregational Witness**

There are all sorts of ways that our witness is amplified as a congregation. So how do we do that? How can we be good stewards of the wonderful blessings of unity and love that God has given to us in the church to reach others with the Gospel?

***Exposing non-Christians to our life as a church***

First, for our love and unity to be visible and real to non-Christians, we need to expose them to our life in the church.

The most natural place to begin is in our regular assemblies where non-Christians may be attending. Here are some questions for us to think about regarding our regular meetings: What might non-Christians see on a Sunday morning or evening? Do they see Christians that have an evident love and care for one another? Do they see church members who are quick to greet them, and express an interest in how they are? Do they see members inviting them to lunch after the service where they can get to know a cross-section of the body? One thing I hear over and over about this congregation is how friendly and welcoming it is to visitors. That’s great, we should keep doing that. But there’s always room for improvement, and unfortunately not everyone feels welcomed.

So, here are a few thoughts:

* Welcome: Make a point to talk with people you *don’t* know after today’s service.
* Invite/Include: Show hospitality to non-Christian friends and church members at the same time. Let your friends peak in on your relationships at church.
* Be Strategic: Wednesday night bible studies, Sunday’s with baptisms, Friend’s wedding ceremonies. Expose non-Christians to the everyday life of the congregation.
* Use Church Ministries: We are not super programmatic, but there are some outreach ministries that are formally organized that you can plug into ISM, CO, Christmas Tea.

***Talk to non-Christians about our life in the church***

Often it’s not possible for us to introduce our friends and colleagues to other church members or to our life in the church. Maybe schedules conflict—or they just don’t want to. What do we do then?

Well, people naturally talk about those things that they care about. And as Christians, that means a lot of what we’ll want to talk about is Jesus and this Church. So look for ways to talk about activities or ministries of the church that you’re involved in. Or maybe you heard a sermon recently that raised a particular issue that you know a friend or colleague is struggling with, or might be interested in discussing.

It could be as simple as asking your co-worker on a Monday morning about his or her weekend. That’s a great way to get to know more about them. But then, how will they respond? By asking about your weekend, right? And there, you’ll have an opportunity to talk about your church. And when that happens, don’t just say, “I went to church.” Talk about what church is like. Why do you care about these people so much? How do they show that they love you?

**IV. Life together in this church**

As we’re reminded in Ephesians 3:10: “[His intent was] that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” And as we consider our great responsibility in this area, we can take comfort in the knowledge that not even the gates of hell will prevail against Christ’s church. Why? Because it’s mission is to display before all the heavenly hosts the remarkable wisdom of God.

God in his wisdom has left the task of displaying the glory of his *perfect* character to his Church—composed of *imperfect* people. The question of how that can happen has been the focus of this class. And particularly, our goal has been to understand the opportunities and responsibilities that we as *church members* have to contribute toward that end. We have seen that our unity together as Christians in the local church acts as a compelling testimony of the Gospel to a watching world. Just as God’s manifold wisdom was displayed in the early church through Gentiles and Jews coming together as members of one body, it’s displayed in our church today when people who are different in so many ways unite in the body of Christ.

And what makes it such a display of God’s glory is that our unity is not just a unity in anything, but a unity in the ***Gospel.*** This unity is so powerful, it can only have come by the hand of God. And this unity is our responsibility as church members. It’s the church together that has been gifted by the Spirit. It’s the church together who is called to be completely humble and gentle, keeping the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

How can we exercise our responsibility to preserve unity within the church? This has been the topic of our discussions for the last thirteen weeks. Let me highlight two points as a summary of our time together:

***Preserve Gospel Message:***

First, preserve unity by preserving the Gospel message that creates it. Whether we are in this church, or in another church, we should always make sure that the teaching and preaching is true to scripture. Remember that in the New Testament, when error slipped into a church’s teaching, the apostles place the responsibility not on the pastor, but on the congregation. (2 Tim 4:3) “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.”

***Love each other:***

Second, our unity is furthered by sincere love for one another. In the way that God has loved us through Christ, we should therefore love others. We read about this love in 1 Cor. 13: 4-7:

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

So brothers and sisters, love like this. Love those who are different from you. Love through your service, and your prayers, and your encouragement, and your admonishment; love through your patience and forbearance and your humility; love by discipling and teaching others; love by being present in the life of the church; love by using your spiritual gifts to build up the church; love by being kind and compassionate, warm and generous toward each other. Love like that is a great witness to the Gospel. Love like this promotes unity, strengthens the body, and most importantly, displays God’s glory.

Our lives in the church are part of God’s eternal plan to display his glory, not just to this world, but to all heaven.

Human history began in a garden with a fellowship of a husband and a wife. It will culminate, as we see in the book of Revelation, as a city, an eternal society of light in which God Himself is personally present.

Today, the local church is a glimmering and growing picture of that coming reality. That is our calling in the nitty gritty work of crossing society’s boundaries to love each other in this church. And, praise God, that’s our future in perfection for eternity.

So in God’s power, let us walk worthy of our calling as we read in Ephesians chapter 4:2-3 “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”