

Dis-enculturation: Keep it between the ditches!

Bethany Assembly of God

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Central Proposition: We must learn to engage cultures without engaging in a culture's sin.

Introduction

This morning, we're going to talk about dis-enculturation. I know that may sound like a word you hear on the National Spelling Bee and wonder if it's ever actually been used in a sentence. Dis-enculturation means *disconnecting from cultural elements that separate us from God and that hinder us from effective evangelism*. Most of us will immediately think about separating ourselves from sinful elements of culture, but there's another culture that can become a hindrance to the Gospel: church culture. We're going to consider these two cultural problems in more detail.

1. We can remain distinct where the Gospel calls for distinction. See John 17:11; 1 Cor. 10:25-29; 1 John 2:15. God's Word gives us guidance on how individual Christians and churches are to be separate from the world, but this dis-enculturation intentionally relies on applying the Word of God in new situations under the direction of the Holy Spirit. We are not supposed to detach from the world, but we are supposed to be distinct from it. God loves the people of the world, but He calls us out of the sinful culture of the world. Consider a modern example in church culture in which many so-called churches have not only remained in the culture, but have become part of the culture. We all know what it means if you drive by a church and their sign says: "Welcoming and affirming." We want to be welcoming. Jesus welcomed sinners and we want to welcome them as well, but we don't affirm sin. We are welcoming, not affirming, not just concerning one particular sin, but concerning all sin. God calls us to be set apart.

2. We cannot become fossilized in old forms. See 1 Cor. 9:19-23.

On the opposite side of the road from becoming indistinguishable from the world's culture, there lies the ditch of church culture that hardens and crystalizes into rigid forms until all we have is legalism and sacred cows. This is where we lose all adaptability in our attempts to evangelize or reach the world with the message of the Gospel. We start out with the correct, doctrinal formulation: **Faith in Jesus + Nothing = Salvation**. Perhaps we don't intend to add anything to this formula, but over time, cultural forms become encrusted or fossilized in a church and they become silent addendums to this doctrine. The solution must begin with the Holy Spirit breathing new life into a congregation and the people responding with willing hearts that see God's mission as a priority and are willing to lay aside their comfort and their preferences in order to pursue a partnership in mission.

Conclusion: Frontier Church, not Fortress Church.

We want to be a Frontier Church, not a Fortress Church. Bethany has been around a long time. We could easily be a fortress church. We're in a partnership to see an overflow of God's Kingdom in the Pioneer Valley and around the world. A group like ours will inevitably produce a culture. Will that culture be defined by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit's move in our midst that stirs us to use new means to proclaim the

unchanging good news about Jesus? Being a Frontier Church is a culture that says, “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.”