MISSION, THE LOCAL CHURCH AND GUILT MANIPULATION

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Please would those who are involved in promoting worldwide mission, stop making people feel guilty?
Category: Observations

I really don't think that guilt is a great way to motivate people to do stuff. Despite this, advocates for Christian mission have a tendency to use guilt manipulation to try to encourage people to get involved in their particular cause. I wrote this in one of my recent blog posts about famous missionary sayings:

> *Firstly, Iâ€™m not entirely convinced that guilt is a great motivation to anything in the Christian life. Saying that if you donâ€™t do X you are being disobedient may well be true and it is certainly a classic strategy of many evangelical teachers. However, in my experience, saying this sort of thing just makes people feel bad and doesnâ€™t do much to change behaviour. It is far better to demonstrate the joy, and privilege of being involved in mission work than it is to make them feel guilty for not being involved.*

However, I've recently found myself reflecting on this theme again after a couple of quotes about mission were shared on my various social media feeds.

> *â€œIf God wills the evangelization of the world, and you refuse to support missions, then you are opposed to the will of God.â€ Â â€• Oswald J. Smith*
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> *"A congregation that is not involved in the worldwide proclamation of the gospel does not understand the nature of salvation." â€" Ted Engstrom*

If you are not involved in world-wide mission then you don't understand the nature of salvation and you are opposed to the will of God. There is nothing ambiguous or wishy-washy about these quotes, is there? But how well do they stack up against reality?

I think the first thing to say is that statements like this, at best, reflect a particular context for the church. In many places in the world, the church is in its first generation and just getting to grips with evangelising in its own context. It is remarkable that many churches in this sort of situation do have a vision to reach the wider world, but many don't - nor should we necessarily expect them to. At the other end of the scale, are churches in places where Christianity is declining. Many of these would love to support mission, but they lack the people and resources and are struggling to survive. Blanket statements like these are simply not fit for purpose in a world where the church exists in so many contexts.

One of the interesting things about these statements is that they emerge from a school of thought which places a huge amount of stress on the "individual call", but much less on the role of the church in discerning that call. If an individual is called to mission, then it is the church's role to support them.Â Churches, on the other hand, don't seem to have the option of a calling to a particular ministry - they have to fit the blueprint of our blanket statements or they are opposed to God. The notion that the individual is sovereign is a peculiar feature of our contemporary Western

society and doesn't really reflect Scripture very well.

For my part; I believe that it does churches immeasurable good to be involved in what God is doing around the world. This may be through supporting traditional mission workÂ or some other creative way of reaching the nations. I'm also sure that there are some churches who could do more than they are doing.

Most church leaders that I know feel snowed under by the demands of their work. Pastoral issues, meeting preparation, the nitty-gritty of keeping the organisation function in a legal fashion; these all take time and effort.Â They would love to do more, but they only have so many hours in a dayÂ and so many church members who can be asked to do stuff. Quite frankly, the last thing they need is mission people saying to them that if they don't get more involved in what the agencies do, then they don't understand their faith and they are opposing God. That sort of thing is pretty self-serving and only discourages people.

Those of us who are involved in promoting mission in churches need to take a long hard look at ourselves. If we have nothing positive to say about the privilege of being involved in what God is doing around the world and we have to fall back on making people guilty in order to motivate them; then it is us, not the church leaders, who have not understood our salvation.