

Introduction

Nowhere in the New Testament is my wife *commanded* to love me. Don't get me wrong: *Dawnae* is commanded to love me and for multiple reasons. You might be thinking, "Wait a minute...Dawnae is your wife". That's true, so let me explain.

I am most certainly Dawnae's neighbor and she's commanded to love her neighbor. I am her brother in Christ and she is commanded to love her brothers and sisters in Christ, and that includes me. There have been times in our nearly 32 years of marriage that I've acted as her enemy, and guess what? She's commanded to love her enemies. Nowhere, however, is my wife as a *wife* commanded to love me.

Let me clarify something. In Titus 2 older women are commanded to teach younger women in the church "to love their husbands and children", which seems to contradict what I just said. There the word "love" is actually an adjective; the verb is the infinitive "to be". The adjective has more of the idea of affection: to be loving or *affectionate* toward their husbands and children. Older women are commanded to teach the younger women to be affectionate toward their families. That instruction has to do with a wife and mother's disposition toward her family, so my point stands.

What I'm saying is that Dawnae qua wife is not commanded to love J-T. Dawnae qua neighbor is commanded to love me. Dawnae qua sister in Christ is commanded to love me. Dawnae qua wife is not. The word "qua" means "in the capacity of" or "in the role of". Dawnae, in her capacity of being my wife, is not commanded to love me. She's commanded to respect me in her capacity as a wife, but not love me.

If you're a mother and you vote in the mayoral election, it is not you qua mother who votes, but you qua citizen and resident of Grand Rapids. If you're a doctor and you go to Meijer for grocery shopping, you don't shop for groceries in your capacity as a doctor. If you're a chef, you might shop in your capacity as a chef! Or you might shop for your personal groceries as an ordinary person who needs to eat.

The question I want to answer this morning is this: what is the role of the church qua church? I don't mean what is the role of the church in the sense the local church is made up of men and women and employees and neighbors and citizens and such. What does God expect of the church qua church?

In other words, what are we supposed to be doing in our capacity as a church? Some claim the primary purpose of the church is to engage in the mission of God and while this is correct, what many actually mean is the church's purpose is to engage in outreach. The problem with this understanding is for the first three centuries, the church had no real outreach strategy, yet churches all over the Roman empire were, in fact, engaged in the mission of God.

What is that mission? What is the church qua church supposed to do? Let's take a look. This morning we're going on an excursus. We looked at 1 Peter 4:12–19 last week and I mentioned we'd look at the idea of meddling this week. We're going to take a more focused

look at verse 15 and through that answer the question about the role of the church in this world.

1 Pet 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.

1 Peter 4:15

Grasping

We've spent a lot of time looking at the problem of suffering, for it is a major point of Peter's letter. These elect exiles were suffering and Peter was assuring them their suffering was not evidence that God had abandoned them. Instead, they were being like Jesus when they faithfully endured suffering and he makes it clear that by suffering well they were engaging in the mission of God through their faithful presence.

In this paragraph Peter tells them they shouldn't be surprised when they suffer, for they are following in the steps of Jesus. The Spirit's presence and activity in their lives shows them they belong to the Lord. Peter is calling them to be sure they suffer for the right reasons, which is to say, they must be sure they are suffering for being faithful to Jesus.

He presents this in the negative. Do not suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer, or as a meddler. Many have wondered why he chose these four. Some have suggested they're in descending order of seriousness. Murder is worse than stealing, and stealing is worse than evildoing, which is a general sense of being a bad person, and evildoing is worse than meddling. The grammar suggests this is not what Peter is doing. He groups the first three together and sets meddling apart.

He says don't suffer as a murderer or thief or evildoer and do not suffer as a meddler. If anything, Peter seems to be putting meddling on the level of murder. He's not suggesting meddling is the same sort of social evil that murder is but rather than meddling has the same sort of impact on the church's mission. Why? Everyone in the first century—as today!—would regard meddling as a terrible thing.

Murder and theft were crimes. Murder in particular was a capital crime; such a criminal would be executed. Theft was also a crime and there were laws for dealing with this. Being an evildoer was not necessarily a criminal activity. Doing evil may or may not have been criminal. Think of a person you know who is generally regarded as a horrible person. What makes him horrible may or may not be criminal. He's just an *evildoer*. At the very least an evildoer would be met with *social* punishment. Think of a liar or a gossip or one who is always stirring up trouble. No one in the first century liked an evildoer.

Neither did they like meddlers. A meddler is one who grasped for authority over another, an authority that was not granted to him or her. It's a word that Peter appears to have coined. It's a combination of two words: *ἀλλότριος* and *ἐπίσκοπος*, forming *ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος*.

This is the only place this word is used. Other than two guys in the fourth and fifth centuries, there are no other uses of this word in the ancient world. So what does it mean? The word has two parts. First, *ἀλλότριος* means “belonging to another”. Second, *ἐπίσκοπος* means “overseer”. We have the word overseer used in 1 Timothy 3. Paul says if anyone desires to be an overseer he desires a noble task. The context there is the office of overseer or more commonly, the office of *elder*. Overseer implies authority. The elders are overseers

of the church. This includes all aspects of the local church. This is not an authority a man grasps for; it is granted by the Lord and his church.

To be a meddler is to be one who grasps for authority over that which belongs to another. It is to interfere in another person's life and affairs. Inherent in the idea of grasping is you have no business trying to control these other people. When a police officer pulls you over for speeding, he's not meddling. He has been vested with authority over you to enforce traffic laws. If that police officer bothers you while you're eating a burger at Burger King and cannot articulate reasonable suspicion you have committed or are committing a crime, he's meddling. He's going beyond his authority. That's the idea of meddling, of being an overseer of another person's life.

Just like today, no one in the first century would like such meddling. Mind your business! The question is how this functions in this text and in this letter to these elect exiles.

Faithful Presence

A major theme in this letter is faithful presence in a foreign land. Peter writes to these believers to instruct them how to live faithfully where they are when the culture around them rejected Jesus. There is remarkable agreement between Peter's instructions and Paul's instructions! Consider Paul's words to the Thessalonians.

¹ 1 Thess 4:9 Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, ¹⁰ for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, ¹¹ and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, ¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

1 Thessalonians 4:9–12

Paul wants them to continue loving one another. Isn't that what Peter says in chapter 4? Keep loving one another earnestly. Show hospitality. Serve one another with your spiritual gifts. Faithful presence begins *in the local church!* Paul tells them to aspire to live quietly. Don't live a loud life filled with ruckus. Don't be a rabble-rouser. Instead, *mind your own affairs*, and work. Why? What is the purpose of living quietly and minding their own affairs and working? The purpose is to walk properly before outsiders! He's concerned about their public witness! Peter says to keep your conduct honorable before the outsiders so that when they see your good deeds they will glorify God.

You might recall Paul's instructions for Timothy and the church in Ephesus.

¹ 1 Tim 2:1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

1 Timothy 2:1–4

Paul wants them to lead a peaceful and quiet life. Why? Do you see the connection he makes? This is good, that is, a peaceful and quiet life is good, precisely because God desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth! God wants to save people. Numerous times in the Old Testament we read that God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. The New Testament expresses this by saying God desires to save people from every tribe and language and people and nation. He's still merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love!

Because God desires to save many, we must lead a peaceful and quiet life. We must aspire to live quietly, to mind our own affairs, to walk properly before outsiders. As Peter puts it, we must keep our conduct *among* the nations honorable, so that when—*not if*—when they rail against us, they may see our good deeds and ultimately glorify God!

This is another major emphasis in Peter's letter. Why does the church *exist*? Peter says in chapter 2, once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. He tells them God is building them up into a spiritual house. Why? What is the purpose of this? What does he say? You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. Why? So that we might *change the world*? No. So that we might improve society? No. So that we might control both houses of Congress? No. "...that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light".

This is why he says we must keep our conduct honorable. Our conduct—our *conduct*, our *behavior*, our *manner of living*—proclaims the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. In chapter 3 he tells wives married to unbelieving husbands that their *conduct* may win their husbands to the Lord without a word. How? They were saved that they may proclaim the excellencies of him who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light. Peter indicates this proclamation is made *without a word*.

In chapter 3 Peter says in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy. He doesn't say "in your mouth" or "with your lips". He means to live in such a manner that the Lord Jesus is glorified. To what end? You must, therefore, always be ready to give a defense—here's where you actually speak—to anyone who asks for a reason for your hope in the midst of suffering. The world sees your good deeds, your faithfulness to Christ, and is confused and amazed by your hope. He says in the beginning of chapter 4 that unbelievers are surprised when those in Christ do not join them in their flood of debauchery, their idolatry and excess and immorality.

He says to not be surprised by suffering when it comes, for suffering is a primary means God has determined for the salvation of the world. The Lord Jesus suffered as the true Passover Lamb for the sins of his people. We follow in his footsteps, suffering as he suffered and not responding in anger and insults just as he did not respond in anger and insults.

Suffering is part of faithfully following Jesus. How we suffer is a significant part of our witness to the world. What does Peter say? You're *going to suffer* for faithfulness to Christ. However, let none of you suffer as a murderer, for this would be contrary to the purpose of the church in the world. Let none of you suffer as a thief, for this would be contrary to the purpose of the church in the world. Let none of you suffer as an evildoer, for this would be contrary to the purpose of the church in this world. Let none of you suffer as a meddler, for this would be contrary to the purpose of the church in this world. *What is this purpose?*

The Mission

How does the church operate rightly in its capacity as the church of Jesus Christ? What is the church qua church? The contrast between verses 15 and 16 tells us.

¹ Pet 4:15–16 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

1 Peter 4:15–16

Rather than suffering for being insufferable, suffer for Jesus and thereby *glorify God in that name*. We saw last week that we can neither add glory to God nor take glory from God, for God is simply glorious. Our behavior doesn't change God's glory. It can, however, make it less obvious. When we cause others to scorn God for being foolish, we rob God of his glory but when we cause others to recognize his goodness, we glorify him in the name of Christ. Peter recognizes how the church exists in a world hostile to Jesus can affect how the world sees Jesus. We are his body, after all.

Peter says our role in this world is to proclaim the excellencies of the Lord Jesus, to make his name known. The church qua church exists to praise and honor the Lord, both in our words and especially in our actions. Through this the Lord Jesus works to build his church, to draw many to himself in faith and repentance. Gordon Selwyn remarked about how Peter sets apart “meddler” from the other three reasons believers should not suffer in order to reveal something profound.

The repetition of ὡς between ἡ and ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος indicates that our author has passed from his catalogue of legal crimes to the social nuisance of interfering in other men's business and professing to put them to rights. Tactless attempts to convert neighbours, or to improve those who are already converted, are faults not confined to the Church of apostolic days.

Edward Gordon Selwyn, First Epistle of St. Peter

Inserting yourself into someone else's life with an air of authority that you do not have is a problem that existed in Peter's day and continues still today. Peter's point isn't that it's merely a social *nuisance*—it is that—but that this particular nuisance negatively affects the church qua church. One scholar said meddling is “an attitude or pattern of behavior likely to bring reproach on Christians as a group” (J. Michael Ramsay, WBC). In other words, meddling affects every church's witness.

Peter is very concerned to protect the church's witness. This is why he said believers should not be surprised by suffering, but also said they should not suffer for being foolish and sinful. Instead, if they suffer as believers, they should glorify God in the name of Christ. Peter's concern is the church's *witness*. The church testifies to the goodness of God and the power of his gospel by living transformed lives. To glorify God is to affect others' opinion concerning him. This happens by keeping our conduct honorable, by being self-controlled and sober-minded, by loving one another earnestly, by serving one another with the gifts God has given each of us. We do this while remaining faithfully present among the nations

so that our neighbors and co-workers and unbelieving family members see the gospel alive in us.

Have you noticed how little Peter connects our public witness with our *words*? Words are important; we must be ready to give a defense for our hope in Christ, but this is less important to Peter than our actions. I suspect because we are Americans and have the right to free speech that we assume our public witness begins with words rather than deeds. We tend to approach our public witness from the perspective that we must speak, and our behavior should match. Peter indicates our public witness begins with our behavior. It is only when our behavior is witnessing properly to the Lord Jesus that the time for words may come.

I want you to hear this very carefully: if your unbelieving neighbor has not witnessed your love for God and his people and your love for your neighbor, your neighbor probably should not have a clue who you vote for. You are not witnessing and testifying to the goodness of God by putting a political candidate's sign in your lawn. Again, listen carefully: I'm not trying to meddle and tell you that you cannot put a sign in your yard. I'm suggesting that may not be the path to a faithful presence that leads to a gospel encounter.

When your neighbor is struggling in some way, she's not going to you for the reason for the way you vote. "My marriage is really struggling and you and your husband seem to have a great marriage. Is it because you're voting for So-and-so?" You know what she might ask? On that first Wednesday in November she might ask why you aren't crushed—or elated!—at the outcome of the previous day's election. That's when you get to say, "My hope is in something far greater, far longer-lasting than someone's term in office". Or your neighbor might ask, "Why do you always shovel the sidewalk for that mean ol' cuss across the street? He's the meanest, grumpiest person on the block! Why are you so kind to him?" What is the reason for the hope that is in you?

Peter urges believers to engage in good works as a witness to the world. He expects your actions to be many and your words to be very few. If anyone asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, you offer them the reason for your hope. That reason has nothing to do with your circumstances or who's in power or how the stock market is doing. The reason for the hope that is in you is the Lord Jesus Christ, for he has conquered sin and death. This victory of Jesus over the grave is the reason you can rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings. This victory is why should not suffer on account of bad behavior, including meddling. You are not the overseer of what belongs to another! You are witnesses to the victory of the Lord Jesus, not guardians of your personal preferences and desires.

When the church has no authority in a particular realm, the church should not grasp for authority it does not have. Hear what I'm saying: not only do you represent Jesus, you represent the church, and since the world cannot see Jesus, the world is looking at you on behalf of his body. The church has not been given a role in setting public policy, either by our government or by the Lord himself. The church, therefore, should not grasp for authority God has not given. There is a real and divinely appointed separation of powers, and this is not something we as Americans like to hear. We tend to think first of our rights as citizens and view the world through the lens of rights, rather than through the lens of the mission of God.

Let me give you an example of this. The government establishes the laws and policies for immigration. What is the responsibility of the *church qua church*? When the church is

operating in its capacity as the church of Jesus Christ, what is the church's responsibility when it comes to immigration policy? We are called to love the immigrant. We gotta stay in our lane, and our lane is loving our neighbors. Nowhere does Scripture suggest we have the authority to determine to whom that applies, whether "legal" or "illegal" immigrants. In fact, the story of the Good Samaritan shows us we don't get to determine who our neighbor is. We must love our neighbors regardless of their legal status. The church in its capacity as the church must love its neighbors even when those in power claim those neighbors have no right to be there. The mission of the church is to be a witness to the crucified and resurrected Lord. *Period.* The church is not the overseer of government policy.

Meddling

Too often when we hear the word "meddling", we do not give it the seriousness that Peter gives it in verse 15. We're more likely to think of some bad guy shouting, "And I would have gotten away with it, too, if it weren't for you *meddling* kids!" Meddling is more than being a nuisance. Peter indicates meddling is contrary to the mission of God in this world. We're not just annoying others when we're meddling; we're interfering with God's work!

Let's keep in mind what meddling is: it is the grasping for authority over that which belongs to others. This can happen between believers as well, though Peter's interest here is the church's witness to outsiders. Faithful presence begins *in the church*, so let's take a moment and look at how meddling occurs in the church.

In Romans Paul addresses the issue of eating meat that had been offered to idols. In most cities that were largely non-Jewish, most meat markets were connected to temples. The temple would sell the meat to the public after a sacrifice, otherwise there would be colossal *waste*. And you might as well make a little money.

When a sacrifice was offered to Zeus, for example, blood was poured out for Zeus and a portion of bones and fat were burned. The priests and those offering the sacrifice received some of the meat and the rest was sold. Much of this meat was sold in markets. There really weren't meat markets in the sense we have today, where a butcher buys an animal specifically for the purpose of butchering it into cuts and selling them.

As you can imagine, this created a bit of crisis for new believers. Should they eat meat purchased from the market? Obviously they shouldn't participate in the *sacrifice*, but could they stop by the corner store on the way home from work to grab a couple ribeyes?

Paul's position, explained in Romans and in 1 Corinthians, is clear: an idol is nothing, therefore, meat offered to an idol is meat offered to nothing. The earth, the whole, entire earth, belongs to the Lord, so eat the meat while giving thanks to the one true God. Some, however, had weak faith and though they may have known this was true nevertheless struggled with the source of the meat and so ate only vegetables, unless a *Jewish* meat market were available. Paul is concerned for meddling between these two groups in the church.

Rom 14:1 As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. ² One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. ³ Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. ⁴ Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?

It is before his own master that he stands or falls. ~~And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.~~

Romans 14:1–4

Paul says there is a right view. Some are not able to handle that truth yet, so *do not pass judgment on that person*. Paul is saying do not meddle! You are not the overseer of that person’s diet! Your brother or sister in Christ does not stand or fall based on *you*.

This text was a profound source of relief to me when I was a new believer. I praise the Lord for the fundamentalist Baptist church that proclaimed the gospel of Jesus to me. I will be eternally grateful for that church. However, that church was constantly meddling. Our hair length somehow mattered, and we were told when to get hair cuts because as a man your hair wasn’t allowed to touch your collar. Huh? Where is that in Scripture? We were told certain styles of music were off limits for Christians. No Petra, because drums and electric guitars. Real Christians listened to Steve Green. Huh? *Have you heard Steve Green?* The only thing *metal* in Steve Green’s music was the brass section in the orchestra!

It is meddling to try to control a person’s conscience in matters that are clearly personal opinion. Even something as significant as the issue of meat that had been offered to an idol was relegated to the status of an opinion. Paul said don’t quarrel over *opinions*.

Let me add, it is not meddling to call out a brother or sister in Christ who is in sin—but only if it is in the context of a relationship. In the church we’re called to confess our sins to one another, to encourage one another, to teach one another, to exhort one another. To exhort a sister in Christ to greater faithfulness is not striving to be an overseer of her business, for the authority to exhort her has been granted by God, provided that this authority is exercised in love and compassion, filled with gospel truth, and is in the context of relationship. We are witnesses *to the Lord Jesus* even in the church, and meddling is contrary to God’s mission.

Faithful presence begins in the church but this witness is to those outside the church. John Elliott, citing the Gordon Selwyn quote I shared earlier, explains the real nature of meddling.

Censuring the behavior of outsiders on the basis of claims to a higher morality, interfering with family relationships, fomenting domestic discontent and discord, or “tactless attempts at conversion” could all have fallen under the label of “meddling”. Seen in this light, the proscription of meddling may well have been intended to warn the addressees to respect the social boundaries distinguishing them from outsiders, to keep their own house in order and beyond reproach, and to focus on attracting others rather than on criticizing them or meddling in their affairs.

John H. Elliott, 1 Peter

Attracting others. To what? This is what Peter has been talking about the entire time! When unbelievers see the good works of Christians, they are drawn to these good works and may well ask about them, providing the incredible opportunity to proclaim Christ and his gospel. This was the closest thing the early church had to an evangelism strategy!

In his book “The Patient Ferment” Alan Kreider shows the early church had no strategy for evangelism. None. They didn’t write about it. They didn’t talk about it. They didn’t

plan for it. It...*happened*. Unbelievers would ask believers for a reason for the hope within them and believers would respond. What brought up the questions in the first place?

The most reliable means of communicating the attractiveness of the faith to others and enticing things further was the Christians' character, bearing, and behavior.

Alan Kreider, "The Patient Ferment"

Did you notice he didn't mention their words? As Cyprian said, "We don't *speak* great things; we *live* them". In the early church real evangelism happened organically. It wasn't forced. It simply came about naturally through relationships with neighbors, with coworkers, between masters and slaves, husbands and wives, customers and suppliers. These ordinary, everyday interactions were essential to sharing the gospel and because they had no formal strategy, they simply relied on the Lord to open a door to share the gospel. To use the language we've been using, they did not strive to be overseers of others, to meddle with "tactless attempts at conversion". Instead, they trusted the Lord as they sought to be faithful witnesses.

The earliest believers trusted the Lord that by living as those transformed by the gospel, they were, through their transformed behavior, proclaiming the excellencies of him who called them out of darkness and into his marvelous light. They were showing those outside the church what they would look like if they, too, were Christians. This is what it means to be a witness, to glorify God in our lives.

When Christians meddle in others' business, they are not showing those others anything they would want for themselves. Meddling witnesses to the wrong thing and causes others' opinion of the one true God to go down, not to go up.

Application

Meddling is no mere nuisance. It interferes with God's purposes in this world for meddling, along with all irresponsible and illegal behavior, is contrary to God's mission. What is that mission? What has God been doing since before the foundation of the world? He has been revealing his glory.

God created the world and placed beings in that world who would be in his image—who would *represent* him, by showing one another what he is like. The mission of God is God's plan to reveal his glory. Everything he does has this as its ultimate purpose. Psalm 19 says the heavens declare the glory of God, hinting at their created purpose. In Isaiah the prophet sees the day God saves many from the nations and God declares, "Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, *whom I created for my glory*" (Is 42:6–7). What does Peter say?

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.

1 Peter 2:12

What is the result of our honorable conduct among the nations and what is the result of our good deeds? God will be glorified. Remember, glorifying God doesn't mean we create glory for him. It means we cause others to recognize his glory. What is God's mission? It is to reveal his glory. God wants to be known! When God rescued Israel from Egypt, he said he was doing this so that the Israelites would know him. It wasn't just about the Israelites, though!

Ex 7:5 The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them.”

Exodus 7:5

By stretching out his hand God revealed his glory. His display of power resulted in his glory. He seeks to share himself with others and invites them to participate with him. This, too, reveals his glory. Here's the incredible truth: the Lord invites his church to participate with him in his mission to reveal his glory. How do we do this? We do this by living transformed lives that reflect the truth of his gospel. When we remain faithfully present in our community, unbelievers see our transformed lives and will glorify God—even if that is on the day of judgment.

When we suffer for our own foolishness, whether criminal behavior or simply meddling, we work contrary to God's mission. We are supposed to show unbelievers what they would look like if they were followers of Christ. If we show them they would be meddlers, why would they want that?

Your neighbor who is living with his girlfriend—or boyfriend—does not need your scorn or your judgment. Do you know what his biggest problem is? His biggest problem is not who he chooses to sleep with. It is that he does not love the Lord Jesus. He does not trust in the Lord. Sharing your scorn or your judgment or presuming to be an overseer of his life is not pointing him to the Lord Jesus.

Like you, what I want most for my neighbors is for them to know the Lord Jesus—or rather, to be known by him. I want them to trust him and love him and worship him and praise him. I want Grand Rapids to become a *new city*. I want it to be transformed. This will not and cannot come about by me or you or anyone else insisting that others do as we do.

Rather, it will come about as we remain faithfully present in our community, as *we* trust the Lord and we love him and worship him and praise him. It will come about as we love our neighbors as ourselves and as we continue to engage with outsiders with a gospel presence so that they may ask for a reason for the hope that is in us. That hope is Jesus. It is only Jesus. The church qua church is only a lampstand and the light on the lampstand is Jesus.