

Performance Versus Brotherhood

There are many different views of what is normal for New Testament church life. Among others, there is the Liturgical view, which seeks to imitate, in part, the rituals of Old Testament temple worship, especially with a leadership of priests. There is also the Pentecostal/Charismatic view, which seeks to recreate the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the period when God's Word was confirmed with command miracles. Then, because of the Free Grace doctrine of unconditional eternal security, we are also surrounded by the Permissive view that maintains all obedience comes under the "works" category and is to be disregarded.

This article will focus on the differences between the Performance focus and the Discipleship focus. While these two have many similarities, they also have distinct differences that need to be understood.

In both Performance and Discipleship church life, behavior, appearance, and speech matter. We understand that a person must be obedient to Biblical directives to experience salvation. This is why we have standards for dress, daily conduct, and behavior in church services, among other things.

But there are distinct differences between these goals.

In Performance church life, it is important that one leaves a proper impression; that he gains a good reputation and has no actions or faults that people can criticize. This produces unspoken rules of behavior which have been summarized as:

1. Don't reveal too much about yourself (keep your chatter on a non-personal level or about the rest of the religious world who don't measure up to your standards).
2. Don't trust (keep your guard up because motives will be read into how you act).
3. Don't make any mistakes (for they will always be held against you, so make sure you walk the expected line, whether there are principles in focus or not).
4. Don't show your true feelings (because it's all about leaving a good impression, not about sharing who you truly are).

In Discipleship church life, since a person is called to the foot of the cross in brokenness and humility, the rules given above are unnecessary. Since the foundation for coming to Christ is confessing our sins, the foundation is not "looking good" but being genuine. Even after becoming Christians, we are told to confess our faults one to another, so the relationships look like this:

1. Be honest with your struggles and your failures. (You may be a Christian, but your human nature is still very much alive.)
2. Trust your brother/sister in the church. (Since we love each other, we know they will choose to see us in the best possible light, like the verse says, *Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much* (Jas 5:16).
3. It is okay to make mistakes, even acknowledging our sins not unto death, for that will enable us to live without committing sins unto death.
4. Express your emotions and be real with them. "Is any merry, let him sing"... if worried, pray, etc. We all have the full realm of human emotions. Expression of our deep emotions is welcomed and proves to be a blessing.

We understand that God has created individuals with diverse personalities. Some are more reserved than others. But we all are called to work with Jesus' and the New Testament pattern. Think about the difference this made in John the Baptist and Jesus' day.

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God (John 3:19-21). As

a church, we need to help people be transparent about their needs so that we can all be Christ's church.

For those involved in administration, we also need to understand the different levels of involvement in sin and use our most severe response for the most severe failures. Let's clarify this a bit. Jesus taught that if a man looks upon a woman with lust, he has committed adultery with her in his heart. We should not leave any room for lust, not even a hint. But James tells us that the journey from temptation to death is taken with progressively downward steps. This implies that when a person comes in humility and brokenness for "thought sins," this is not treated with the same severity as "sinful action sins". Ponder this verse: *But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death* (Jas 1:14-15).

When church members feel safe to share in confidentiality about their temptations or their emotional journey, they can be helped to walk in victory. When we publicly shame persons who are humbly admitting their struggles brothers feel justified in keeping these things hidden away. Then there will be sins unto death and even crimes committed among our membership. (A person who confesses he struggles with lust will not be the one to make arrangements for child prostitution, or a person who is open with his emotional struggles will not be committing suicide.)

Pretending to be something we are not will continue to be a temptation in churches that emphasize obedience and the holiness of life. Let us ensure that our walk with Christ is genuine and that our collective walk as His body is of such a nature that He will receive honor as we strive to be Jesus' disciples. The words of the Apostle Paul are still true and relevant: *For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise* (2 Co 10:12).

~Stephen Ebersole