

Are We Teaching People to Fall in Love With Jesus or Conform to Religion?

I recently witnessed a social-media interaction that looked to be a triumphant and encouraging celebration of enlightenment.

A young woman, new in her Christian journey, who for the most part, goes largely unnoticed online, had posted a status regarding a certain behavior she'd been engaged in. She declared that she'd received new revelation of how damaging this behavior was, then publicly renounced it, and encouraged others to do the same.

In turn, she was rewarded with multiple virtual thumbs-up and comments of encouragement from other well-meaning Christians.

On the surface, this seemed like a beautiful interaction, filled with praise and exhortation, and I have no doubt whatsoever that this is what her encouragers and congratulators were feeling.

However, further reflection upon this scenario, had me asking myself this question: Are we teaching people how to fall in love with Jesus, or are we just teaching them to behave like good Christians?

Look, I can see why my thinking and questioning may seem critical, but I'm really just trying to prompt us to mindfully assess the motivations behind our actions, even those that carry the very best of intentions.

In my humble opinion, I see so much of what we do in the church as simply Behavior Modification obstinate children.

I hope that makes you cringe as much as it does me.

And I don't for a second stand in judgment; I cringe because I've done the same thing with people with whom I've been journeying.

I've rewarded "good" behavior with my praise, approval and affection and shunned people as they've displayed poor or unhelpful behaviors. Shamefully, I also have been guilty of distancing myself from people who, in my flawed opinion, were just "not getting the whole God thing."

Self-righteousness isn't a good look on me, and yet for a while there, I accessorized every outfit with it.

The thing is, the church was never designed to be a congregation of pop psychologists.

We often think so highly of ourselves and our righteousness that we forget why we have it in the first place!

I don't believe that the body of Christ was ever designed to be a peer support group for Behavior Modification.

Have we forgotten that it is God alone who is able to bring about such a complete transformation that it alters mind, body and spirit?

Our behavior is merely the out-working of intimacy with our Creator!

Our job as fellow journey-people is to introduce people to Jesus, to facilitate relationship. Sometimes that means giving Spirit-led directions, sometimes it means walking with them (for as long as it takes!), and sometimes we pick up their weary butts and drag them to Jesus' feet.

But let us never forget who it is that does the real work, and how it occurs, inside out.

By all means, go, encourage! Heaven knows we need more exhorters; it's a precious and much-needed gift!

By all means, reward; we certainly need more givers!

But let us also remember, not just with our minds, but also our hearts exactly where it is that we have come from, and the grace that stops us from going back. So often when we stumble, trip or face-plant ourselves directly into a pig's sty, all we need is the presence of a companion.

A companion who will just sit with us in the filth, ignoring the smell, not caring that their feet and clothes are now also covered in crap, just being.

There will come a time for the clean up, for words of healing, and perhaps where relationship allows, even reprimand.

But this is the profundity of intimacy with Jesus: It brings about positive change, oft without a word of correction ever needing to be spoken by us. So again, I ask, gently, and implore you to ponder: Are you teaching people how to fall in love with Jesus, or are you just teaching them to behave like good Christians?

Bek Curtis *is an Australian-based blogger.*