

The Biggest Barrier to Intimacy With God

Besides sin, the primary problem with the way people think and operate is performance orientation. It is regarded as a virtuous way of living that fits very nicely into the American work ethic. From day one, we are programmed for performance orientation as we learn to work for good grades in school, for plaques and trophies based on athletic performance and for raises and promotions at work. Performance orientation is everywhere, and it does help motivate us to do our best. The problem is, however, that people carry the performance mode into their love relationships and try to earn the love of God and others.

What's the matter with performing for God?

– We will fail.

If I try to prove myself worthy before God by being a “good and faithful servant” through my own wisdom and power, I will eventually demonstrate just the opposite and end up feeling condemned. Performance orientation is a snare designed by Satan to keep us filled with feelings of defeat that we will not go to God for fear of His wrath or disappointment.

– Performing for God's love creates a form of religion that Jesus rejects—a worldly version of loving and serving God.

When we're trying to earn God's love and acceptance by performing for Him, we are, in a sense, trying to pay Him back for the cross. We're uncomfortable with the idea that we didn't do anything to earn God's forgiveness. In other words, our motivation for obeying and serving Him is not love so much as it is an attempt to return the favor or pay the debt we feel we've incurred by accepting His offer of salvation. We don't mean to do this but are so steeped in performance mode

that we don't even realize what and why we're doing it.

– Performing for God's love is tantamount to living by sight rather than by faith.

It's unbelief! The assurance of His love for us will never come from any performance of righteousness on our part. It will only come as we gaze with the eyes of faith on the cross, which is God's awesome demonstration of love for mankind.

It is hard to believe in unlimited, unconditional, unearned, unsolicited love and forgiveness. If I were God, I wouldn't do it that way. Since I'm prone to cast God in my image, this makes it truly inconceivable that He could still love me in the face of my ongoing failure to love Him. So we tend to find ways to atone for it ourselves. We bathe in thoughts and feelings of condemnation, as though we were in some way helping to balance the scales of justice. Oh, we'll confess our sins all right, but many of us will refuse to actually embrace the forgiveness that God offers.

Performance orientation is a key foundation for the strongholds of most sin. It is a direct attack on the cross, which is the power source for holiness. It is a gateway sin, or a key root of sin, that feeds most of the sins man commits. It is what generates the need or desire to sin.

– If you are performing for Him, you are not having an intimate relationship with Him.

Putting it another way, if you are not abiding in the vine and receiving His life-giving love and affirmation, you are probably striving to earn the same. If you are not experiencing His affirming, healing presence on a regular basis, you are probably...

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