

Being and Doing

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The pious have often gotten a bad rap from those less inclined to religious things. This is so common in the discussion forums of the major news networks on the Internet. One of the criticisms leveled against Christian believers is that they are hypocrites. There is a recent movie with an interesting title: “Lord, Save Us from Your Followers.” This film explores the idea that people like Jesus but do not like Christians. Mahatma Gandhi is famous for having said that he liked Christ but did not like Christians because Christians were so unlike Christ. The church stands in the way sometimes of people believing in Jesus. This is a critique that needs to be taken seriously.

The challenge for the church today is no different from any other point in the history of God’s people. As Paul the Apostle wrote, we know what is right, and we want to do it, but we end up in failure (see Romans 7:15-20). Ancient Israel had the same problem, especially in the later years of the kingdom period when many of the prophets had their ministry. The people had become so focused on doing religious things that they had forgotten relationship with God. They had gotten caught up in offerings and sacrifices, but what they needed was to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God (Micah 6:6-8).

The problem is that we put the cart before the horse. We put the *doing* before the *being*. Any time we do this, we will end up in failure. The natural tendency over time is to replace the law of love with the law itself. Another example from the Bible is when Israel was first given the law in the Book of Exodus; in particular what is called the *Ten Commandments* of chapter 19. If

the commandments are viewed as what we need to do to be in relationship with God, we will only end up in empty legalism. No one can keep the commandments perfectly, though we fool ourselves into thinking we can. Like the Pharisees, we set up our codes of behavior by which we define what it means to be a follower of God. Israel discovered very quickly that they could not keep the law. The power of sin in their lives constantly compelled them to disobedience and failure.

The important point for us to remember is that Israel was already in a relationship of grace evidenced by salvation from Egyptian slavery. God had already offered to them a relationship of **being**. The **doing** of the commands was to be a reflection of who they were as God's people. They did not become God's chosen people by obedience to the law but by God's grace. The law was the guide to help them live out their faith in God.

The application of this thought to the church today is powerful and much needed. What defines us as the people of God is not the doing of our laws and code of ethics but first and foremost our relationship with God. What we **do** as believers in God should flow from who we **are** as believers.

Peace can be brought to the polarized religious scene in America through living authentic lives of love. The church ought to be the instrument of God's grace and forgiveness. We are to be the catalysts of redemption. We serve as God's hands and feet, so to speak, by offering hope to those not yet in this relationship.

Some people may raise the question, is not there the danger of watering down the morality of the church? Is it not dangerous if we do not keep the law? My response is, no, not in authentic relationship. The genuine **doing** of the commands of God can only be done in a spirit of freedom, joy, and peace, when the **being** is in place. There is something very attractive about a person not bound by the law but who also keeps the law out of love for God and love for people.

The church really has two options. The first is to retreat to the safety provided in the **doing** of the law; the law defines what it means to be the church. The natural tendency when the society around us begins to accept moral relativism (anyone can do anything he or she likes) is to retreat to the safety of legalism. This has happened many times throughout history. The result is what we are seeing in many places today where the church is rejected as being irrelevant and hypocritical. The other option is to live authentic lives of **being** followers of Jesus Christ. This is a dangerous proposition because it makes the church vulnerable to culture because we are no longer in our safe zone. It means we have to get ourselves dirty as we engage with a fallen world. It does not mean we compromise but that our **doing** is always under the control of love. This is our goal, though we do not always reach it. We need to be constantly drawn back to what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:14: “the love of Christ compels me.”