



News and Current Events :: A Teacher's Testimony

A Teacher's Testimony - posted by savannah, on: 2018/5/14 9:30

A few years ago a female student wanted to visit with me about some difficulties she was having, mainly with her family life. As is my practice, we walked around campus as we talked.

After talking for some time about her family situation we turned to other areas of her life. When she reached spiritual matters we had the following exchange:

"I need to spend more time working on my relationship with God."

I responded, "Why would you want to do that?"

Startled she says, "What do you mean?"

"Well, why would you want to spend any time at all on working on your relationship with God?"

"Isn't that what I'm supposed to do?"

"Let me answer by asking you a question. Can you think of anyone, right now, to whom you need to apologize? Anyone you've wronged?"

She thinks and answers, "Yes."

"Well, why don't you give them a call today and ask for their forgiveness. That might be a better use of your time than working on your relationship with God."

Obviously, I was being a bit provocative with the student. And I did go on to clarify. But I was trying to push back on a strain of Christianity I see in both my students and the larger Christian culture. Specifically, when the student said "I need to work on my relationship with God" I knew exactly what she meant. It meant praying more, getting up early to study the bible, to start going back to church. Things along those lines. The goal of these activities is to get "closer" to God. To "waste time with Jesus." Of course, please hear me on this point, nothing is wrong with those activities. Personal acts of piety and devotion are vital to a vibrant spiritual life and continued spiritual formation. But all too often "working on my relationship with God" has almost nothing to do with trying to become a more decent human being.

The trouble with contemporary Christianity is that a massive bait and switch is going on. "Christianity" has essentially become a mechanism for allowing millions of people to replace being a decent human being with something else, an endorsed "spiritual" substitute. For example, rather than being a decent human being the following is a list of some commonly acceptable substitutes:

- Going to church
- Worship
- Praying
- Spiritual disciplines (e.g., fasting)
- Bible study
- Voting Republican
- Going on spiritual retreats
- Reading religious books
- Arguing with evolutionists
- Sending your child to a Christian school or providing education at home
- Using religious language
- Avoiding R-rated movies
- Not reading Harry Potter.

The point is that one can fill a life full of spiritual activities without ever, actually, trying to become a more decent human being. Much of this activity can actually distract one from becoming a more decent human being. In fact, some of these activities make you worse, interpersonally speaking. Many churches are jerk factories.

Take, for example, how Christians tip and behave in restaurants. If you have ever worked in the restaurant industry you know the reputation of the Sunday morning lunch crowd. Millions of Christians go to lunch after church on Sundays and their behavior is abysmal. The single most damaging phenomenon to the witness of Christianity in America today is the collective behavior of the Sunday morning lunch crowd. Never has a more well-dressed, entitled, dismissive, haughty or cheap collection of Christians been seen on the face of the earth.

I exaggerate of course. But I hope you see my point. Rather than pouring our efforts into two hours of worship, bible study and Christian fellowship on Sunday why don't we just take a moment and a few extra bucks to act like a decent human being when we go to lunch afterwards? Just think about it. What if the entire restaurant industry actually began to look forward to working Sunday lunch? If they said amongst themselves, "I love the church crowd. They are kind, patient and very generous. It's my favorite part of the week waiting on Christians." How might such a change affect the way the world sees us? Think about it. Just being a decent human being for one hour each Sunday and the world sees us in a whole new way.

But it's not going to happen. Because behavior at lunch isn't considered to be "working on your relationship with God." Behavior at lunch isn't spiritual. Going to church, well, that is working on your relationship with God. But, as we all know, any jerk can sit in a pew. But you can't be a jerk if you take the time to treat your waitress as if she were your friend, daughter or mother.

My point in all this is that contemporary Christianity has lost its way. Christians don't wake up every morning thinking about how to become a more decent human being. Instead, they wake up trying to "work on their relationship with God" which very often has nothing to do with treating people better. How could such a confusion have occurred? How did we end up going so wrong? I'm sure there are lots of answers, but at the end of the day we need to face up to our collective failure. I'm not saying we need to do anything dramatic. A baby step would do to start. Waking up trying to be a little more kind, more generous, more interruptible, more forgiving, more humble, more civil, more tolerant. Do these things and prayer and worship will come alongside to support us.

I truly want people to spend time working on their relationship with God. I just want them to do it by taking the time to care about the person standing right in front of them.

NOTE: THE TEACHER IS NOT ME -

Re: A Teacher's Testimony - posted by TMK (), on: 2018/5/14 9:42