

Openness, Honesty and Realism



There are many people in America who enter the doors of many churches on a Sunday morning only to have their hearts locked up behind smiling masks. The tradition is to have them sit front-to-back to be only spectators as they listen to the one-man sermon. There were times when I went to church hoping the “pastor” would have a *word from the Lord* to encourage me for whatever struggle I was going through. Maybe some point of his message will edify me and give me strength to face the following week. I’ll have to admit, there were many times I went home empty-handed and still heart-broken. I wonder how many other people go home with a burden still on their heart, the same burden they came with. How many struggle with their marriages, with their children they see wondering off in things that will destroy them in the end, those who struggle with their faith or unhealthy fears, and the list goes on.

If pastors would only wake up! Walk in many of the churches today and the one thing they are blind to is that they hold back the people from openness, honesty, and realism. There seems to be no regard that there are people dying inside as they sit in their pews to listen to his sermon, a sermon that will not touch a majority of them. Why? Because sermons can’t touch their hearts where they are hurting. The best most pastors can give is his intellectual knowledge that he learned while in the Seminary, but very little taken from personal life’s experience. He might not have experienced the murder or loss of a child, he might not have ever experienced a financial crisis and losing a home and being homeless, or marriage problems as others experience. There are so many things that he might not be able to give any personal comfort by showing others what the Lord Jesus has done for him. (2 Cor. 1:4) This is why we need the body, everybody!

Most pastors do not know how to breed honesty. They must project an image of invincibility and impregnability. They have been trained in their Seminaries directly and indirectly to keep a distance from the flock so we do not see their humanness, lest they lose respect because he has been put on this pedestal as the role of conqueror and victor. Do you think this is not true? How many of you REALLY know your pastor and how well does your pastor KNOW you? He does not know everyone and their struggles and victories. He possibly couldn’t. But he is not the only one to be blamed. Because of our traditions and mind-set, the flock has placed expectations upon them which drives some of them to hide their humanness. There are many pastors who struggle in their own marriages and have their own problems, but he has been taught as well to hide all behind his smiling mask.

Church today is not a forum or atmosphere for openness and honesty. Many are detached and hurting from the rest of the body of Christ. Some become disillusioned, some leave their marriages, leave ministries, etc., and then there are those who just sit in their pew Sunday after Sunday, month after month, year after year alone and continue to hide their secret pain. How can they be open when everyone else is smiling and can only conclude that everyone else is emotionally, socially, and spiritual all together? So we must put on the same mask even though

we may have just had a major fight with our spouse before walking through the church doors – even though we just lost a loved one through death – even though a few days earlier a child tried to commit suicide – even though anger has become your companion because someone has hurt you badly – even though you are in a financial crisis and about to lose your home – even though all seems hopeless to you – even though there are issues of your past that haunt you and don't know how to deal with it – some are just plain struggling, and this list can go on.

We have been taught to hide our weaknesses, including pastors. We are forced to hide until we break. A majority of pastors can't open to the flock. They find their ways of coping by meeting with other pastors from all over for some type of support group when all the pastors have to do is be honest with his peers who struggle just as well.

I used to be in a home fellowship where openness and honesty was welcomed. People were real with each other. When a weakness or struggle was revealed, there was no condemning or anyone abandoning each other, but we prayed for one another and encouraged one another to keep going. One did not have to go through details, but all they had to do was say they were struggling or hurting. Some of it was obvious as we would see the tears flow. We rallied around those hurting with love, support, prayers and encouragement, and at times I was on the receiving end. We developed heart-to-heart friendships. It was my true family. I long for such openness among believers today, but instead there are too many wearing their smiling mask, afraid to be valuable, but would rather be involved in intellectual theological wars to prove who is right. We have become spectators in a pew rather than edifying one another.

There are many who will quote Heb. 10:25 to mean not to forsake "going to church" on a certain day, but fail to miss the other part of the verse.

*"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, **but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.**"*

This does not go on behind closed doors. Instead we go through the formalities of the "church service" where "one anothering" does not take place. With minor differences, almost 350 million Christians around the world observe this liturgy on a typical Sunday, week after week:

- The Greeting
- Prayer or Scripture Reading
- The Song Service
- The Announcements
- The Offering
- The Sermon
- One or more of the following: altar call, more singing, the Lord's Supper, or another prayer
- Closing Announcements
- The Benediction

Where do we see the following on a typical Sunday morning or even throughout the week?

- be devoted to one another (Rom. 12:10)
- honor one another (Rom. 12:10)
- live in harmony with one another (Rom. 12:16; 1 Peter 3:8)
- love one another (Rom. 13:8; 1 Thess. 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11)
- edify one another (Rom. 14:19; 1 Thess. 5:11b)
- accept one another (Rom. 15:7)
- instruct one another (Rom. 15:14)
- greet one another (Rom. 16:16)
- agree with one another (1 Cor. 1:10)
- discipline fallen members (1 Cor. 5:3–5; 6:1–6)
- organize the church's affairs (1 Cor. 11:33–34; 14:39–40; 16:2–3)
- care for one another (1 Cor. 12:25)
- prophesy one by one (1 Cor. 14:31)
- abound in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58)
- serve one another (Gal. 5:13)
- bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2)
- bear with one another (Eph. 4:2)
- be kind and compassionate to one another (Eph. 4:32)
- speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19)
- submit to one another (Eph. 5:21)
- forgive one another (Col. 3:13)
- teach one another (Col. 3:16)
- admonish one another (Col. 3:16)
- encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11)
- warn the unruly (1 Thess. 5:14)
- comfort the feeble (1 Thess. 5:14)
- support the weak (1 Thess. 5:14)
- exhort one another (Heb. 3:13; 10:25)
- incite one another to love and good works (Heb. 10:24)
- pray for one another (James 5:16)
- confess sins to one another (James 5:16)
- offer hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9)
- be humble toward one another (1 Peter 5:5)
- fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7)

In conversing with a friend, she mentioned how AA seems to fit more of the Biblical format for relationships, and I agree. In those meetings there is openness and honesty. Everyone is given time to speak from their heart and share what has helped them and members rally around those who are still struggling.

Likewise, we should function as a support group as God intended. God did not intend for us to sit passively week after week to listen to repetitious songs sung by the choir and to hear

repetitious sermons by one person. So many people sit passively as their minds are filled with information that is forgotten within a day or week. Do you remember the sermon from three weeks ago, or even from last week?

No one is getting involved in each other's lives in many of the Institutional churches today. It isn't until we are able to interact with one another by getting beneath-the-surface, by tearing off our plastic smiles and start being open, honest, and real, we will find ourselves in atmosphere where we are better able to reach out in evangelism to non-believers. Non-believers don't want "programs," as we have fallen for, they want people to talk with who are not afraid to be genuine and transparent. They long for the "one anothering" just as we long for it, but will not find it in most of the institutional church setting.

With God, it's all about relationships, not programs. As in the book of Acts, they will know we are Christians by our love for one another. These Christians met every day. They met in public places to worship God; they met in their homes as friends. They provided meals; they were kind and generous with their material possessions. They were happy and showed God's love in their daily lives. It was this attraction that people wanted to come and be with them. Evangelism was taking place because of their love for one another and more souls were added to the church.

Remember, it's relationship verses programs.

