

Am I A “Passive-ist?”

Bill Loveless

When Paige and I went to Haiti a few years ago to conduct a missionary conference, we found a very hurting group of missionaries. There was struggle within, with each other, with the nationals, and with the churches who supported them. They were living in the desert of performance, goal setting, and “church-pleasing” (meaning, “I had better produce, or the church will quit supporting me.”) I remember making this comment halfway through the conference, “The Christian life is not about working for God, rather it is about God working in us and through us”. Well, you would have thought from their expressions that I had just said something supremely heretical! You could feel the tension and resistance quickly build. After the initial shock of that statement wore off, the room exploded. I had no idea as to the extent to which I had opened “Pandora’s box.” It was clear to me that every one of their “success” markers was focused on the work that they were doing (independently of God and “for” God, I might add).

Realizing that the Lord had just touched a very sensitive and a highly charged nerve, I prayed that the Lord would give them understanding in this before they decided to tar and feather me! I had just desecrated their most worshiped idol of PERFORMANCE!

From that moment on until the end of the conference, we focused on the difference between working “for” God and God working in and through them. Like so many other believers, their focus was on the “act” versus the “attitude”. I explained that God is not so much concerned with the acts of evangelism, discipleship, church planting, etc. as He is with the attitude with which they are done. His overriding concern is that these acts are done with an attitude of restful dependence upon Him, not independence. I explained that an “act” done in independence is a dead work, whereas an act done in dependence is an eternal work that glorifies God. As we explored the differences between act versus attitude, I began to see lights slowly come on. God was piercing the darkness of the lie that they had been believing with the light of His truth. You could see them begin to breathe spiritually and to begin dropping off the heavy weights and burdens of performance. What a glorious thing that was to behold!

I share this story because many of you, if not all of you, know that the number one obstacle that we face as we share the truth of Christ living in and through us is that we are branded “passive-ists.” We are called such because religion has so grossly distorted the Christian life that “fleshly activism” for God is the order of the day. Unfortunately, this fleshly activism for God is epidemic among church staffs. It is also fostered and promoted zealously by well-meaning lay leaders who believe and unknowingly perpetuate the lie that performance independent of God will please God. As heart disease and cancer are leading causes of physical death in this country, “performance with an independent attitude” is the number one killer of Christ’s life flowing in and through a believer. It robs the believer of operating out of God’s life, rest, and power; it steals God’s glory; it puffs man up; and, it results in the believer either working harder for God or giving up entirely.

One comment I often hear (always said with a bit of cynicism or sarcasm) is, “Well, Bill, does this mean that I just become a ‘spiritual couch potato’ and do nothing?”. Have you heard that one before? The Lord has given me a wonderful response to that remark by asking them a question. “How passive was Jesus?”. We know that Jesus was often actively ministering and always doing so with an attitude of rest and total dependence upon the Father (John 5:30).

I share this with you because herein lies the heart of what people struggle with as I share the Christ-dependent life with them. People want to write me off as a “passive-ist” without hearing me say that God is not against performance or ministry. He is only against any performance or ministry done independently of Him. However, if a “passive-ist” is one who waits on the Lord, walks in dependence upon Him, and allows Him to arrange His ministry, then I stand guilty as charged!

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