

Religious Emulation:

Religious Mannerisms and Behaviors :

It is easy to appear good and righteous if you learn the patterns of religious behaviors. All religions have forms of worship; All have clerical authority which guide methods and attitudes in their worship; Any practitioner can appear devout regardless of what is the object of their worship.

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds."

There is a place for conformity and imitation and there is a place where conformity is a hindrance to knowing God. We are charged with *turning away from the ways of this world*; to seek and to conform to God's ways. "Are we to follow God or man?" the earliest Christians asked.

If we were to try to keep up with any of the latest style trends, we would have to keep our eyes on the trend setters and emulate those fashions and fads. Teenagers are very much attuned to the issues of "being in" and staying "in." There is a media today which is ablaze with trend setting images and impulses. It tries to persuade us to conform to the things which are "hip" or "cool." Fashionableness whether in the "look", in language affectations, or in material accessories (the toys that are presumed to make life fulfilling) has the power to turn our minds away from things which are true or eternal. Conformity is the thing that on one hand, everybody seems to condemn, while at the same time, striving to measure up in those areas which delineate success. This conformity is foundational in Christian tradition.

Religion thrives on conformity. Religion thrives on emulation. Religion is a system where a "copy-cat" can go strait to the top. Practically everything about church life can be seen, demonstrated or modeled, and replicated. We can learn how to affect piety. We can emulate sincerity, we can emulate compassion, deep affection or even Godly sorrow. We soon are able to talk or emulate our own religious hero or role model.

It is not uncommon for generations of preachers to sound like they were cut out of the same fabric or the same mold. Why do men or women talk a certain way among themselves but when they get inside a church they use a different voice, or mannerisms, or inflections which seem somehow more "spiritual?" How is it preachers sound like preachers? Where do they learn this "preacher voicing" and emphasis?

Is it necessary for King James English to be spoken in order to sound Godly? Why do we use "King James English" to affect spirituality? This is a cheap affectation which in no way has any more power to influence God than for you and I to simply talk as ourselves. Why don't we just act like ourselves? God knows who we are, he knows our weakness and sees we are dust. How dumb do we think God Almighty really is? Do we think that we can persuade him that we are something we are not: That we can "fake it" with him.

In a recent television broadcast featuring music and religion I enjoyed seeing the contrast of many kinds of musical traditions including "high church" and "low church" and all sorts in between.

Music has a way of preserving things which are good and Godly even when the glory has for the most part faded. Among the musicians featured were a young black evangelist whose name I can not credit (God knows him) but whose Spiritual gifting was immense. It was this man's calling and gifting to minister the Gospel and the power of God through Rap Music in

the mean streets of a major city. The fact that God was using him was unmistakable, his strength and anointing and transparency to God was strongly evident. The difference between this man's street music and the highly intellectual liturgical music of a high church musicologist did not hinge upon natural ability but supernatural anointing. I will say simply that I am not a fan of rap music, but may I say that I would rather listen to Rap Music enabled and anointed by God, than another who may be an expert in method but does not know God in the power of his Spirit.

What a shame that churches have to be a place where everyone is putting on an act? In the pulpit there can be all manners of affectations which may or may not be sincere. If a pastor is charismatic (naturally gifted) many will begin to talk like him, gesture like him, or pray like him. It is too easy for us to emulate a man.

The world looks at these peculiar behaviors associated with church life and soon begins to make characters of them. There have been too many films made in which preachers or evangelists were portrayed as zany con-artists, usually out to deceive and to "flim-flam" the gullible folks at a "revival meeting" into giving their last dollar. Just about anyone especially those outside of the fellowship of God can do perfect imitations of a drawling evangelist pretending to heal a person by laying on hands. The parody of the religious charlatan is portrayed' articulating each spoken syllable with a consonant affixed to "ah." The fact that there are so many models of these kinds of affectations is the tragedy.

When Should People Copy Others? Christ and the Apostolic Models

Not all role models are bad. Not all role models are bad. God made each of us "originals." There is no need to copy anyone else unless what they know about the Kingdom of God 'works' and also conforms to the model of Scripture. Emulation of a human role model is understandable in the fact that we view our own abilities as inadequate thus we feel a need to copy another. Success in human terms probably motivates us to be like others who we call successful. In church circles any person who imagines themselves as great, powerful, or successful in a very real sense is self deceived.

A key distinction is the kind of "role model" we chose to emulate and the correct kind of behaviors which we see modeled. The Bible has some very important things to say about copying others. It even suggests, believe it or not, that we do copy others, but we are never to compare ourselves with others. There is a distinction.

The Bible states, "Be ye followers (imitators) of God as dear children." (Ephesians 5:1) "Be followers (imitators) of me even as I follow Christ." (1 Corinthians 11.1.) What makes it possible to imitate the apostle? It is because he is imitating Christ.

The apostolic approach to ministry is one in which a man is never preeminent. Human abilities are to be discarded. Personal name, rank and reputations are absolutely of no consequence. The apostolic messenger must never get in the way of his message with any affectation of ego or worldliness. Human character and the human flesh is the natural enemy of the Gospel. I have heard a spiritual man say wisely, "I have one great enemy to my ministry, myself."

Human pride, (being somebody important) is an enemy of the Gospel. Being yielded is of primary importance. A person must lose his desire for self exaltation before God can do much with him. However this is something that only God can do and does, as he prepares and disciples us. It is part of the task we call "learning Christ."

Paul the apostle, announced to the people of Corinth that he did not come to present stories, or teachings, with rhetorical drama, affectations, or oratory. He said rather, that he came to "demonstrate" the Spirit of God and demonstrate the "power" of the Gospel. (1 Corinthians 2:4). This manner of presentation is what I call the transparent messenger.

God does not want the world to see a man when a Christian is displayed before them. He wants the glory of God to be revealed through a messenger who is as transparent as possible. When believers come together it is not to exalt any person but to reveal His glory. Those who are struggling to find a Spiritual life often have limited choices about who might be an appropriate role model. Someone may choose to model themselves after a person whose attributes or credentials reflect personality affectations or performance gifts, such persons may be totally without spiritual insights and knowledge of God. Paul states again in 2 Corinthians 10:12, *that we should not make ourselves like any who tend to compare themselves to others, he says, to make such comparisons is "not wise"* (paraphrased.)

Our need for spiritual teachers and mentors is principally met by God, through the Spirit of Truth. Through prayer and study of Scripture. Through the Spirit, God can and does teach us individually. But we also grow through having wise and proven Spiritual (not religious) mentors. Most of us desire to experience the goodness of God, the Power of God, or the transforming mind-restoring Wisdom of God.

Failing to find a Spiritual mentor we may proceed to ask God to instruct or direct us. If any has faith and believes God will respond to us, we may ask him to meet us where we are. He can then direct us where you can find our "Annanais" (Acts 9:10-17.) At this moment you may not have the faith that God can and will, reach down and touch you, in answer to your request. But I have perfect faith that He will do just that.

NEXT CHAPTER

E Book 1:

[The Gospel Without Religion](#)

E Book 2:

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E Book 3:

[Mysteries in the Bible](#)

[Index to all Charles Pinkney Christian Titles](#)