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# Reflections

I recently was asked to check on our “grand-pets” when our kids were going to be gone till late into the evening. They have a cat and a dog who are as different as night and day when you compare their “personalities.” The dog greets you with an effusive display of what can best be called raw emotional happiness to see you. She wiggles, groans, brings gifts (her favorite stuffed toy) and acts like you haven’t been there in a long time, even if you were there earlier in the day, and for a few minutes you are the only person in her world. When you give her a doggie treat she acts like she can hardly believe your generosity. By contrast their cat doesn’t bother with greetings. He will be just as likely to bite your hand if you try to greet him as the dog is to beg for attention. He is the only being in his universe and you are treated with disdain, or at best ignored. Now, I’m told that he does reserve his “affections” for his own family, but guests are not welcome and he makes it quite obvious that you are not family. He will receive a treat from you but it must be on his terms. The treat must be placed exactly where he wants it and then he will partake of it.

I began to see in their contrasting “personalities” a metaphor for how church people often behave when guests arrive. Some welcome them as they would a long lost friend while others visit with their own friends and ignore the guests. I am pleased to report that for our folks, the first picture best describes them. Not so in many groups in various churches though. Too often those who visit do not receive a greeting that demonstrates a welcoming attitude from the regulars.

The writer of Hebrews calls on us to be aware that we need to be a family that welcomes others when he reminds us... *Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. (Hebrews 13:2 NKJ)* We are to remember that Jesus invites us to come into His salvation and that He welcomes all who will believe on Him. He tells us through the Apostle Paul... *For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." <sup>14</sup> How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? (Romans 10:13-14 NKJ)* What if your welcoming expression of grace is the very message that will open their spiritual ears to hear and receive the Gospel of Jesus? When you extend your hand in greeting, you are their first contact with the ministries that are shared from this church.

We certainly want to give a clear signal that such ministries are Christ honoring and available to the guest we are greeting. In this day and age of compromising churches, it is important that we keep the Gospel of Jesus first and foremost in our minds as the hallmark of spiritual health of the Church and its primary mission. Many have sacrificed their message in favor of trying to meet the cravings for entertainment that characterize the world’s self-focused individuals. They might say: “If you don’t cater to my narrow set of preferences I won’t be back” and this seems to cause many to step away from the power of the Gospel in favor of that which makes these types happy. The sad reality is that they probably won’t stay anyway because of their perception that there is a better product at Church B or C than at this one.

The Pharisees were guilty of passing off men’s traditions and their own practices as having greater importance than the Law that they publicly claimed to revere and serve. Jesus addressed their error when He said to them... *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. (Matthew 23:27 NKJ)* Jesus was clearly not impressed with their brand of religious practice. All of their failures were presented by them to the people as if they were righteous, but Jesus looked at their hearts and saw their emptiness. Let’s not fall into the same traps that characterized their practices. Righteousness can only be found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and that righteousness is His imputed to us, not our own self-righteousness regardless of how we try to sell it. The Church must be about our Father’s business not our own. Even though we become greeters with the best smile in town, we can only be His true disciples when we lift up Jesus in our lives, and in our church fellowship and ministries.

Like the dog’s happy greeting which may feel special until you notice that she gives it to any who will receive it so it is ultimately about her. If you ignore her, she will soon retreat to her bed and pout. The cat, though a perfect example of a self-centered creature, is probably more honest, though wrong, because he isn’t hypocritical. Our critters are not good examples because both are self-serving. Is our desire to make people happy with us, but still lost in their sin or do we greet them warmly to then share the Gospel of Jesus with them? Let’s continue to warmly greet our guests, but let’s do so in order to share the Gospel of Jesus with them, after all its His Church to which we are inviting them. **Pastor Doug**