



CHRISTIAN CREATIVITY by Steve Reynolds

The sound of live music caresses my ears as I enter the sparsely lit auditorium. Multi-colored lights pepper my sight. Seemingly hundreds of candles flicker to the rhythm of drums and electric guitars. Huge multimedia screens tower over the room projecting close-ups of the action on stage. An artist can be seen quietly working his magic, creating images from a void and transferring them to the waiting canvas as a throng of faithful fans file in. Fans of whom you might ask? Fans of some rock band? No, actually these are fans of Jesus.

What I've just described to you is a typical service at my church. Although the Bible is preached and the gospel of Jesus Christ is declared at my church, there are some who would find worship services at my church offensive. This is the kind of thing that definitely would have bothered me before I started recovering from legalism! People enjoying worship! Curses! Don't they know we're supposed to suffer for Jesus?!

Legalism and Creativity

No doubt about it, legalism squelches creativity. Legalism says, "We have one way of doing things, this is the way we have always done it and don't tread on our venerated traditions!" What does Jesus have to say about such traditions that have no basis in biblical truth? He said of all extra biblical rules and traditions, "They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men" (Matthew 15:9).

Creativity is a godly trait. We know that David was a man after God's own heart. He was the great warrior king of Israel whose conquests are legendary. What you may not readily recognize about David is that he was also a poet and musician who wrote songs about his relationship with God that have endured as the book of Psalms for over 2,500 years!

God himself is the ultimate creative genius. All we need do is look around to see his wonderful, delightful creative nature in a majestic sunset, a falling star or a newborn baby. They are all his creations!

When we are being creative, we are tapping into a part of what it means to be made in his image. Monkeys (although they are one of my very favorites in all of creation) do not paint works of art. Monkeys don't write love songs. Humans do! So, with this in mind, we Christians, who have Jesus living his life within us, ought to be some of the most creative people in the world, but we're not. What is wrong with us? Many times our music is stale and shallow (not like David's songs that express real human emotions and struggles). Some Christians so distrust the arts they have virtually abandoned creative self-expression.

The Disease

It pains me to announce that once again the dreadful disease of legalism has claimed yet another victim within the church. That victim is our creativity. When legalism reigns, the freedom to be creative always suffers.

Legalistic religion says that we must live up to someone else's idea of what a Christian should be, and we are not free to decide on non-essentials for ourselves. Legalistic religion tries to make all of our choices for us, robbing us of the ability to express our creativity. Legalism tries to tell us what music to listen to, what people to hang around, what movies to see, what food we can eat, what clothes we can wear...the list goes on and on, ad infinitum!

The apostle Paul, himself a legalist in recovery, had something to say about this kind of religion:

"You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the evil powers of this world. So why do you keep on following rules of the world, such as, 'Don't handle, don't eat, don't touch.' Such rules are mere human teaching about things that are gone as soon as we. These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, humility, and severe bodily discipline. But they have no effect when it comes to conquering a person's evil thoughts and desires" (Colossians 2:20-23 NLT).

We prideful humans find legalism attractive in some warped way, don't we? If we feel that we are pretty good at our legalistic rules, it can make us

feel better about ourselves when we compare ourselves to others. Of course, true Christianity does give us boundaries, but there are many less "ought-nots" to being a Christian than legalism would have us believe!

Legalism encourages inside-the-box thinking, because it is always intensely preoccupied with what others think. It discourages risk taking and individuality. In legalistic circles people who dare to color outside of the lines are often ostracized and singled out as troublemakers.

The Cure

So, if legalism inhibits creativity, then what can we do in our spiritual lives to encourage our creativity? What is the cure for the legalistic creative doldrums? The answer is that Jesus sets us free from the disease of legalism and all of its dreadful symptoms! So we can be creative without fear.

When we begin to yield to Jesus Christ who lives within us we begin to see some wonderful changes in our ability to be creative.

There is a sense of empowerment that comes with knowing that Jesus loves us unconditionally and lives within us. That empowerment encourages risk taking; it does not fear failure but welcomes it as a chance to learn. We begin to move away from *I could never do that* thinking into *Why couldn't I do that?* thinking. We begin to believe in Jesus who lives in us because we know that "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

God is a creative God. He is the source of all creativity. As Christians let's start encouraging the artists among us again. And while you're at it, why not encourage the artist within you? Maybe you enjoyed drawing, painting or writing poetry when you were a child. Maybe you've always wanted to learn to play an instrument. What pulled you away from your dreams? I can assure you it wasn't God. Maybe it was religion. □

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