



On the Outside Looking “In”

Did you ever feel that you were not “with it?” I mean, did you ever feel that you didn’t belong? I’ve felt on the outside most of my life and most of that time I thought it was a major negative.

I’ve always wanted to be a part of the “in” group, and because I never was a part of that group, I thought there was something special and different about that group of people.

If I could discover what it was—learn the rules, as it were—I would be accepted and, thereby, become complete.

A “Phony” Doctorate

I have a “phony” doctorate that I don’t use very much. Well, it isn’t really phony except in the sense that I didn’t earn it. It’s honorary. It was given to me by King’s College and it is a Litt.D. (whatever that means).

I had made jokes about doctorates. I often said, when I was introduced as “Dr. Brown,” that I wasn’t even a nurse.

Sometimes, when I was teaching on humility, I said that the best way to see how mature and humble a Christian man or woman with a doctorate was, was to call that person “Mr.,” “Mrs.” or “Ms.” and watch the reaction.

Then the Board of Trustees at King’s College wrote and told me that they had voted unanimously to give me an honorary doctorate.

“However,” they said, “We have heard some of your comments about people with degrees and don’t want to embarrass you or us by making the public offer and having you refuse to accept it.” I wrote them back—immediately, I might point out—that, of course, I would accept the honorary degree. “I was just a little boy,” I said, “throwing rocks at the house because nobody would let me in.”

Most of my life I have been the “little boy” throwing the rocks. I’ve stood on the outside looking in thinking that someone would notice and invite me in. I always thought that the people would somehow be “nicer” or “more loving” and certainly “more fun.”

Does It Really Matter?

I’m getting older and perhaps even a bit wiser, and I want to share with you something I’ve learned: It doesn’t matter. It really doesn’t.

Do you remember the time the mother of James and John came to Jesus and asked him if her boys could sit, one at the right and one at the left, when he entered his kingdom?

After gently admonishing the mother of James and John (after all, she was only doing what mothers do naturally), Jesus gave his disciples a lesson on greatness.

He said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve....” (Matthew 20: 25-28).

On another occasion, Jesus wanted to prepare the disciples for the hard times they were going to have after the ascension. He didn’t tell them to “move with the movers” or to “get on the inside with the ‘in group’ so they could exercise some Godly influence.” He didn’t tell them to become accepted by the political establishment, garner some political power and make a difference in government.

He said, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first....”

I’m a kid who ran away from kindergarten, and God has allowed me to be a professor at a major seminary.



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he asked me...

Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also" (John 15:18, 20).

In other words, if you are a Christian and being a part of the "in" group is something you desire as John Calvin said, "Lots of luck!" (That's a joke for my Calvinist brethren.)

In the "In Group"

One of the things God has given me in my old age is a certain kind of access to some of the evangelical "in" groups. I'm a kid who ran away from kindergarten, and God has allowed me to be a professor at a major seminary.

He has allowed me to be on some boards peopled by many of my "heroes."

I have been allowed to speak in some pretty "heady" places (always, I might say, living in fear that they would find out the truth about me).

Let me tell you what I've discovered. There isn't an "in" group. Those folks are just like us.

They want to be accepted just like me, and they are just as afraid, lonely, guilty and insecure as I am.

In fact, some of those folks are just as messed up as we are.

There is a certain amount of security in knowing that, and so I thought I would tell you the secret.

So, not only are we not to try to be a part of the "in" group, to have great power and fame, to exert our influence—it's not even worth the effort anyway.

A Little Respect

Now, having said that, I expect a lot more respect from you than I have heretofore received.

Let's have none of this "Steve" stuff anymore. I expect to be addressed as "Doctor Brown" from now on.

Don't look at me like that, Lord. You're right.

It was a poor attempt at humor, and I won't do it again.

I will remind them for you. □

—Steve Brown