

Pretty Like Me

by Oscar Patterson

When my son was four years old, I undertook the task of training him to dress himself properly. After several weeks of our struggling with lacing and tying his shoes, I noticed that though he did well with his right shoe he never seemed able to do the left one correctly. I pointed this out to him and showed him my neatly-tied shoes as an example. He quickly retorted, "But Daddy, I can't tie my shoes pretty like you. I have to tie my shoes pretty like me!"

Though I hadn't considered his little shoes to be "tied pretty" with several knots in them, his firm and sincere explanation taught me a lesson. Each person is a unique being, made in the image of God. Jesus said, "*You are gods*" (John 10:34). God is infinite. Because we are in His image, we are individualized expressions of God, infinite in variety.

Our uniqueness goes far beyond personal customs such as how we tie our shoes! Each of us who is in the body of Christ shares a measure of God's glory in a specialized way. We have been given talents and "*gifts differing according to the grace that is given us*" (Rom. 12:6). These talents and gifts are meant to be expressed in a manner peculiar to the person possessing them. Our uniqueness is purposely designed so that we might manifest the infinite being of God. To act in a manner that is contrary to our unique selves is to deny God the glory of such expression. It is to violate the divine purpose of our lives.

If there is one thing that makes all men equal, it is that each is unique in his own being. No one can behold another and say, "See here, I am unique, but you are not," or "I am more unique than you." How we handicap and hinder our lives when we labor to live by concocted standards and intellectual contrivances promoted by pseudo leaders who, have less than genuine spiritual love and concern for others.

The sad fact is that many are unaware of their heritage as sons of the living God, and as a consequence they allow themselves to be drawn away from manifesting the glory of the kingdom of God within. They subscribe to some man-made concept of what a son of God should be like, instead of being the unique expression of God that He created them to be. The gravity of man's unwillingness to accept his uniqueness and live spontaneously as an expressor of God is brought out by Paul:

" . . . that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:19,20).

The very being of God is expressed in us, His supreme creation! We are in His image and are meant to manifest His invisible attributes. But the human race chose to focus on the things that are made rather than on the One who is manifesting Himself in all that is made (Rom. 1:21-25), and hence ceased to express His glory. We commit the same awesome sin when we refuse to be our real selves—when we avoid our uniqueness!

A great many believers have difficulty with self-acceptance, choosing to become stereotyped copies of others instead of being their own unique selves. To know how we can accept ourselves without condemnation is of the greatest importance. And in Christ we *can* accept ourselves! Once we know that we have the fullness of Christ in us, we quit fussing about our standing with God and begin to act out of the boldness of faith. We are set free to simply be what He chooses to be in us. This brings about a tremendous release of creativity, whereby He expresses Himself in a variety of ways in our common daily lives.

Not only should we learn to accept (even be a little proud of) the oddities and peculiarities founded in our uniqueness, we should learn to behold the glory of God in the uniqueness of others. Oh, what a glorious joy and freedom there is in realizing that the highest calling in creation is for me to live “pretty like me,” while you live “pretty like you”!

Perhaps some of the things in our lives don’t look as if God could be in them. Jesus had to address this very issue for the disciples of His day. They were unable to understand God’s infinite and unique ways of expressing His glory in His creation. Concerning a blind man they asked: “*Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?*” Jesus answered: “*It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the works of God be displayed in him*” (John 9:2,3). The unique circumstances of the life of the blind man would allow the works of God to be manifest in him! What to humans appears a terrible tragedy, God means to be and plans to use as a channel for His glory.

A few weeks ago a dear fellow Christian came to me and said, “Brother Patterson, I have been looking for you for several days so that I could get your help and advice on a problem. I have a very important decision to make and I just can’t make up my mind what to do. I want you to give me an idea, any idea which you think might be helpful.” After he had stated his problem, I confessed that I was just as uncertain about what he should do as he was.

However, I explained that since he is a unique, individual expression of God, he has the serious responsibility of exercising his own judgment and making a decision peculiar to himself. His failure to do so, I told him, would amount to denouncing the guidance of the Spirit of Christ within him and would deprive God of the glory of expressing Himself through him. He needed to trust Christ to live as him. He left me, returning the following afternoon to announce that he had made a decision (which in retrospect seemed to turn out to be the right one) and was greatly relieved.

How regrettable that because of spiritual ignorance and fear so many wonderful, beautiful sons and daughters of God are robbed of the glory God intends for them. So many people still insist that life is a matter of obedience to lifeless “canned rules,” and that it’s almost immoral to be different—to be unique!

I remember my own frustration as a former member of a Pentecostal group. At each meeting, during the singing and praying, everyone would speak in tongues. I was nearly scared to death because I had been told that if I didn’t speak in tongues “something was terribly wrong with me.” I couldn’t do anything right in those services! Even when they were all clapping hands together in one big clap, I was clapping a beat behind.

Only I and Christ within me knew how frustrated and miserably alone I felt during those times. All the while those around me insisted that I had to speak in tongues and get “fired-up” in the Spirit. I was unaware that I am a unique person manifesting God in accordance with His gifts to me, and that it’s perfectly all right for me to tie my shoes “pretty like me” while others tie theirs “pretty like them.”

I sincerely believe that the majority of people in prisons and mental institutions are there because they have in some way been hindered from living spontaneously, from expressing their Creator according to their unique selves. They have been derived into believing that they must answer to the accusation that either they or their parents sinned and caused them to be cursed with uniqueness!

If you have been blessed with the spiritual enlightenment to see that you are meant to be the unique person you are, don’t be afraid to go hard against the grain of popular nonsense-belief. Jesus commands us to live spontaneously as Him. In doing so we are necessarily possessed of a constant attitude of Christ-love which no man can gainsay, and which is

beyond condemnation. Be your unique self in Christ, and let the works of God be made manifest in you.