

“What Makes Christian Coaching Christian?”

“...The menial housework of a manservant or maidservant is often more acceptable to God than all the fastings and other works of a monk or priest...” Martin Luther, Augustinian monk and reformer, from a 1520 treatise entitled: *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*.

But wait a minute, menial work more acceptable than “churchy” work? How? Why? As a matter of fact, what makes anything we do Christian?

What makes *anything* we do Christian?

Is it in the “externals” of what you say and do such as praying, being loving and forgiving, quoting Scripture or sharing a testimony?

Or is rather the “internals” of who you are, being a person of faith in Jesus, trusting in His promises?

Then what about the other word in the question? Does the coaching itself have anything to do with making it Christian?

What does this mean?

(A classic Lutheran Catechism question)

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the beginning of anything Christian. This is the teaching that we are saved by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith, apart from the works of the law. In the words of the Bible, this can be described as being “in Christ.” (Romans 8:1; Philippians 3:8-9; 2 Corinthians 5:17). It is only from this place of faith in the Savior that anything can hope to be Christian.

So it starts with Christ and faith in Him. Then what? This “being” “in Christ” of a Christian coach will continue with what coaches assume, how they think and how they approach the task of coaching itself. Assumptions or mindsets matter.

The Christian is to have the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5). They know they are “new creations in Christ” (2 Cor 5:17). That is their identity by grace. So a “Christian” coach will approach each coaching conversation remembering that they are in Christ! Their self-esteem and value do not come from being a coach, or any outcomes from the coaching relationship or the person being coached, but from the promise of Jesus that their sins are forgiven and they belong to Him forever.

This mindset makes a world of difference for Christians in general but even more importantly when Christian coaches are coaching. There will be love and devotion to the one being coached as a reflection of how God relates to us in love. “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19 NIV). The fruit of the spirit will be evident (Gal 5:22 and 1 Cor 13). There will be a spirit of humility as the coach considers others “better than (them)selves” (Phil 2:3 NIV). There will be a losing of one’s self in service to the one being coached, “giving thanks in everything” and “doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 5:20 NIV; Col 3:17 NIV).

Whether those being coached are professing Christians or not, the Christian coach sees both themselves and their client as people for whom Christ died (John 3:16). This view of God towards them will bring the self-aware, mature Christian coach to not fall into manipulation, controlling behaviors, or otherwise having unhealthy attitudes or boundaries with their clients. If assignments are not done or if trouble mounts for the person being coached, then the coach in faith will seek not to take it personally nor grab control, take revenge or resort to manipulation.

Furthermore, both coach and client are not left helpless but with rich possibilities through Christ. To be sure, they are also sinners, but sinners saved by grace through faith in Jesus. Thus while there will be numerous challenges, many self-created, God's promises to both people are a great resource and cause for optimism. As Jesus says, "I am with you" (Matt 28:20 NIV); "Never will I leave you" (Heb 13:5 NIV).

The lesson is that just as a boat moving through the water produces a wake, so also the "being" of a Christian will bring an outcome. When going about their day, or life or life's work, an effect will occur, that is, the "doing" of a Christian, even unconsciously, even during a coaching dialogue!

It is only "in Christ" and empowered by Him that we can truly be forgiven, die to self and live for God and others. And in the coaching relationship, dying to self is critical, foundational and necessary. "It's not about you" is a phrase that fits especially well for the coaching relationship. It is from that place where the coach can truly devote themselves to Jesus and the person across from them and "do" the best kind of coaching, one that will serve the coaching client for their highest good.

This is because it is only "in Christ" that we are free—free from building our self-esteem through our helping and free from having to prove ourselves. We are even free from trying to be acceptable God, which was the point Luther was making in the opening quote. We are free through faith in Christ. This makes anything we do "Christian." We are even free in Christ to serve the other person as a Christian coach. Thus a rhythm emerges of being and doing, faith and action, receiving and serving. In this way a Christian coach can be positioned to be among the best coaches. They let go of sinful thoughts, words and deeds. They embrace and believe ever more firmly in Christ and who they are by grace, fully serving their client in love.

This is a Christian coach engaged in "spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1). Put another way, their highest worship as a Christian coach is first of all being a great coach! They keep learning, working, improving and practicing this craft of coaching. It is an act of worship!

To quote Luther again, "In the light of this view of the matter a poor maid should have the joy in her heart of being able to say: Now I am cooking, making the bed, sweeping the house. Who has commanded me to do these things? My master and mistress have. What has given them authority over me? God has. Very well, then it must be true that I am serving not them alone but also God in heaven and that God must be pleased with my service. How could I not possibly be more blessed? Why, my service is equal to cooking for God in heaven!" So also when we coach it is an act not only of service to another but an act of worship toward God!

Worship Him with all your heart in your coaching! See your coaching clients as people loved by Jesus, whether they are believers or not. Your coaching curiosity and how you engage with them will also be informed by what you in faith know about how the Holy Spirit operates.

Yet what about the "externals" of prayer and Scripture reading and so on? First it must be said that no piety in the coach will excuse coaching that is sloppy or unlearned or otherwise not very good. Yet a coach, who is in Christ, is like a sponge that is saturated with water. Once a client begins to interact with them, Christian external faith words and behaviors, love and grace, will naturally start "leaking out" all over, even unconsciously.

It is in this way that we as Christian coaches, empowered by the Spirit, will mirror what the Holy Spirit is for us: A paraclete. In the New Testament, the word "paraclete" is used in four places (John 14:16, 26, John 15:26; 16:7) in reference to the Holy Spirit and in one place (1 John 2:1) in reference to Jesus Christ. The meaning of the word is literally "one called to the side of an-

other.” The coach is likewise called to the side of a client for the purpose of helping. The coach is to be an advocate, a helper and a supporter of another.

So, what makes Christian coaching Christian? Being in Christ: forgiven, valued by Him, empowered by His Spirit, and serving another, all as a spiritual act of worship...a rhythm of being and doing. God bless you as you worship God in your coaching!



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