

Don't Kiss the Mailman

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Who has the cutest delivery people?

The Postal Service? Fed Ex? UPS?

I think most office workers in America can tell you which delivery service has the best looking courier assigned to their address at any given time.

There was a tacky saying in the old days about any child who turned out not to look like his biological parents. People would say, "Oh, he belongs to the milkman," or "Oh, he belongs to the mailman." The suggestion — supposedly humorous — was that the lady of the house had become involved with a delivery person making his rounds.

(This put-down always confused me when I was a little kid, because my dad really *was* the mailman — and we didn't have a milkman.)

Anyway — certainly, as a general rule, people don't kiss the mailman. But as a matter of fact, we could actually say that "Don't kiss the mailman" is a practical biblical principle.

As human beings, we have a natural tendency to "kiss the mailman" — to *revere the messenger*.

Have you ever seen one of those sweepstakes or lottery commercials where they show you the video of the moment when they notified the winner? The lady comes to the door, and the delivery person gives her the check. Sometimes the woman just goes berserk and grabs the guy and — well, it's quite a scene.

She doesn't know him, but he's brought her such good news, such a burst of joy, that she instinctively responds by, shall we say, attaching her affections to him. In other words, she smothers the poor schnook with kisses.

Did the delivery guy buy her the winning lottery ticket? No.

Did the delivery guy mail in her winning sweepstakes entry? No.

Did the delivery guy do anything at all to help her get the grand prize? No.

In fact, she had already won the prize before the delivery guy rang the bell.

All he did was clue her in.

I used to work in an editorial office with headquarters in another state. Twice a month, the Fed Ex courier would arrive with paychecks for the staff.

I understood from the women in our office that the Fed Ex man was "hot."

And I sensed from conversation in the office that most of us were pretty desperate for those paychecks by the day they arrived.

But never once, to my knowledge, did Heidi or Nancy or any other woman in the office

jump that guy and knock him to the floor and cover him with kisses out of gratitude for delivering those paychecks.

Even if they said “Show me the money!” and he complied, that didn’t make him Tom Cruise; he was just the guy who showed them the money. He wasn’t the manufacturer of the money, he was just the messenger.

Jesus recognizes our tendency to worship the messenger, and he knows the problems that we can run into as a result. So at his very first opportunity, he nails it. He addresses the subject in **Luke 11:27-28**, about halfway through his three-year teaching career.

He is, in fact, according to the biblical account, just about at the peak of his earthly popularity. He’s teaching day after day, the regular everyday people are gobbling him up, they’re following him around, they’re *fascinated* by his teaching. They don’t understand it all, but they love it when he zings the religious leaders. And of course, the religious leaders are squirming.

Then, while Jesus was still talking, **“a woman in the crowd called out, ‘Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.’”**

But Jesus shot back, **“Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”**

Oddly, this was a perfect opportunity for Jesus to salute his mom. He could have done a very nice thing. He could have said, “Y’know, you’re right, my mom is a gem. Mom, come on up here and say a few words to the crowd.” That would have been sweet. That would have been the ultimate Kodak moment.

But he didn’t do that.

He had a more important goal in mind.

Not to take anything away from his poor mom; she was a lovely lady — she was selected to be the earthly mother of the Messiah.

But regardless of that, when this woman in the crowd called out and made this proclamation, Jesus saw in a flash our human tendency to kiss the mailman — to idolize the messenger instead of obeying the message.

And he cut to the chase.

He said if you kiss the mailman — if you fixate on revering the one who brings you the Gospel — you’re spending your affections on the wrong object.

You’re expending your life’s energy on the wrong enterprise.

We need to devote ourselves *not* to doting on the one who brings us the truth, but on *living* the truth. *Doing* the truth. *Experiencing* the truth.

For many churchgoing Christians today, the most kissable mailman in our life is our own local church. We love this church. For some of us, this church was the vehicle God used to draw us to faith in Jesus Christ. Our church was the mailman that delivered us the good news! Of course we are grateful for our church. We give ourselves to it, we serve the church, and well we should.

But where is my heart, bottom line?

My heart needs to be focused on Jesus Christ.

If my church suddenly collapsed — if by some bizarre twist of fate my church no longer existed, or if my church were rocked by some kind of scandal —

(God forbid. It would probably involve *me!* Let's switch gears.)

— If something horrible happened in *your* church, you could be sad, you could be shocked, but your faith shouldn't be shattered — because you don't worship a church; you worship a Savior named Jesus Christ.

He'll still be there, long after your church is gone.

Many of us who grew up in church have gone through periods where we revere our church minister.

Many of us know what it's like to be involved in a church where the entire universe seems to pivot on the senior minister.

Everybody hangs on his every word; there's an unspoken assumption that this top guy can do no wrong.

But in that kind of environment, if the pastor *does* do wrong, the disillusionment is *horrible*.

How many churches have imploded because the minister was held in such unrealistically high esteem that when he stumbled, when he failed, the people had no spiritual backbone to sustain them?

They kissed the mailman — instead of focusing their affection on Jesus, and living for him.

Many Christ-followers today have to be careful about kissing the mailman of their denomination.

Many churches pride themselves on being “independent-minded” — distinct from their denominational model in certain important ways. Yet you can almost always detect some feeling of reverence for that denominational hierarchy. We use their curricula and publications. We adhere to their doctrine. We straighten up when their bigwigs come to town.

Not all of this thinking is wrong or bad. Most denominations have years of trial and error under their belts. Local churches have a wonderful opportunity to learn from their experiences.

But there is the danger of saying, Well, “Headquarters” does it this way, so we've got to do it this way too. Or “Headquarters” doesn't do it this way, so we sure can't.

Even independent, non-denominational churches are often based on some sort of “model” — I've been involved as a pastor in a number of churches that fall into this category — and yet in a lot of these cases, we observe that the model becomes the priority.

I would always urge our church management teams to find their own way of *adapting*, not *adopting*, the model on which the church was based.

I always want my church to be responsive to the specific needs of the local community. We want our leadership team to let the Spirit of God guide the growth and development of the local ministry, so that we minister uniquely to the distinct needs of the people that God has led into our church family.

And yet even with all these cautions, we have to be on our guard, because we *want* the kind of impact in people's lives that has been accomplished through the ministry that has gone before us!

The work that God has done through our predecessors — we want that kind of life-changing ministry for people here in our own community.

That's an honorable goal, yes.

But we have to be careful not to worship the ministry model instead of worshipping Jesus.

We have to be careful not to rely on the guidance of the "patriarchs" of this ministry model — this denomination — this fellowship — this whatever-you-call-it — instead of relying on the guidance of God's own Spirit.

Some of us come from backgrounds where we actually worshipped a religion, or a religious system, or a set of religious rituals.

Some of us have turned away from those systems of thinking, or those religious organizations, but we still find ourselves having to process out of our past.

There's a part of us that's still tuned that way.

That religious system is still, in a way, deeply rooted in us.

We need to ask Jesus to clean us out completely.

What does the Bible call anything that takes the place of Jesus in our lives? An idol. Are all those pages and pages of Scripture that say "Don't worship idols!" just talking about statues made out of stone?

No, they're about whatever gets in my field of vision, whatever blocks out my view of Jesus.

I may have a friend in the faith, a Christian friend who has helped me enormously, whom I can rely on for wisdom, for support, for insight into difficult issues I may be facing.

That kind of relationship is a wonderful gift from God. It is to be treasured.

But the day will come when that friend disappoints me, when that friend doesn't meet my expectations, when that friend accidentally betrays me.

What happens to my faith?

Is my faith anchored in what that Christian friend says and does?

Or is my faith anchored in what Jesus Christ says and does?

Maybe your "mailman" is the person who led you to faith in Christ.

Thank God for that person!

God used that person to give birth to your faith.

But don't anchor your faith in that person.

Some Christians revere a television preacher, or a radio teacher, or a Christian writer, or a Christian educator.

Some Christians flock all over the country to attend seminars by this speaker or that

speaker.

You gain a wonderful new insight into your walk with Christ from the teaching of a certain individual — but suddenly it's more about that individual and less about Christ himself.

Jesus says to the woman in Luke 11:27, "Get a grip."
Or as the teenagers are saying, at least this week, "Rent a clue."
Keep your balance. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus.

In **Acts 14:11** we see this tendency again. Paul and Barnabas were ministering in Lystra, and their ministry was so powerful, and people's lives were being changed so dramatically by the power of God's love, that the people shouted, **"The gods have come down to us in human form!"**

They started offering sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas, which was the religious ritual the people used to show their devotion to their gods.

But in **Acts 14:15**, Paul and Barnabas said, Hey, wait. **"We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn ... to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them."**

These guys were human beings, just like you and me.

The day came when Barnabas laid down and died.

The day came when, in spite of thousands of Christians all over the known world praying fervently that he would be spared, Paul knelt down in front of a chopping block, to be executed by the Roman government.

People in high-profile ministry can be effective, they can be used by God — but they can just as easily be set aside by God.

People in high-profile ministry are just people.

In fact, as followers of Christ, we're *all* supposed to be in ministry — so the only difference between people in high-profile ministry and the rest of us is the height of our profile.

And that is a very flimsy quality.

The writer of the book of Hebrews saw people falling into this kind of error, and he wrote, in **Hebrews 12:2**: **"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith."**

Those two descriptive words are significant.

Jesus is the **author** of our faith — in other words, it started with him.

It didn't start with that brilliant, wonderful, loving person who first brought us the good news about Jesus; it started with Jesus.

He was there way before that wonderful messenger of the faith brought him to us.

But Jesus is also the **perfecter** of our faith — our faith doesn't go anywhere, it doesn't grow, without him.

If we lose sight of Jesus, our faith stagnates.

It's significant that when Jesus responded to the woman in the crowd, in Luke 11, he

pointed her back to the Word of God.

Episcopalians have a good handle on this:

They recognize Jesus as the Word of God — the Gospel of John, for example, starts out by saying, “**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**”

He’s talking about Jesus. The Episcopal Church refers to Jesus, quite accurately, as “***the Living Word of God.***”

Then what do they call the Scriptures?

They call the Scriptures “***the Word of God Written.***”

The only distinction between Jesus himself, who was perfect, totally without sin or flaw, and the Bible, which is perfect, totally without error, is that Jesus came in the form of a human being, and the Bible came in the form of a book.

Otherwise, there is no distinction.

Everything Jesus said and did during his earthly ministry was completely consistent with the Scriptures, and everything in the Scriptures is completely consistent with the life and ministry of Jesus.

So when Jesus responded to that mailman-kissing woman in the crowd that day, he said, “Hey, your happiness, your truest joy, will come from living out the Word of God.”

He was saying, in effect —

Learn to be like me. That’s the work I want to do in you.

Get into the Word of God and discover Jesus.

Let his Spirit change your thinking so you come to *think* like Jesus.

Let his Spirit change your vision so you come to see people and situations the way Jesus sees them.

Let his Spirit guide your words so you come to say what Jesus would say in a situation.

Get into God’s Word for yourself. Don’t rely on a preacher or a teacher. They have an important work to accomplish, but they’re not your Redeemer. Jesus is.

Don’t just trust a Christian author or speaker. They may have an important ministry in your life, but they’re not your healer. Jesus is.

Don’t just check your brain at the door and take anybody’s word for it when it comes to your walk with Christ. Walk with Christ!

Set aside some time each day for prayer. Learn for yourself to hear from Jesus personally, and to speak your heart to Jesus personally.

Set aside some time each day to read a portion of the Bible. Ask the Spirit of Christ, living within you, to illuminate it to your heart, to help you understand what he wants you to receive for yourself from that passage at this point in your spiritual life.

People are imperfect. Organizations are imperfect. Churches are imperfect. Systems of thought are imperfect. Religions are imperfect. They’re not worthy to be your God.

For what you’re up against in your life, you need a *perfect* God.

There's only one available.
His name is Jesus.