

2009 Performance Philosophy Bob Cates, Comedy in Motion

Being a “Christian Entertainer” can be a tricky thing in many ways. In 2009 we live in a society that is drenched in entertainment in any form that you can imagine. Many Churches and Para Church Ministries are hiring entertainers for a wide variety of events, such as Upward awards banquets, stand alone outreach events/concerts, church “fairs”, camps, youth conventions, and other things. When the entertainer is hired to be “straight entertainment” then it is simple. You just be funny, entertaining, and good at what you do to the glory of God. You are using your talents that God has given you, to the best of your ability. An example of this would be, a volunteer appreciation banquet for the church family where the focus is simply good clean fun, and not outreach.

However, at 90% or more of the “ministry” events that I perform for, the focus is on evangelism or outreach in some capacity. This means that the congregation or ministry wants to share the Gospel at the event, or at least make some sort of connection with the non-Christians who come to the event.

So can a comedy show be evangelism? The dictionary definition of evangelism is *“the spreading of the Christian gospel by public preaching or personal witness.”* So evangelism is presenting the Christian gospel by preaching, proclamation or personal witness. Therefore a comedy show could be called evangelism if the speaker or performer shares the gospel. Many performers are hired as “Christian Entertainers” but do not share the gospel. The reader can probably remember seeing a clean comedian, musician, band, illusionist, or comic variety act that did a great clean show, but did not share the gospel. Or perhaps they just shared something “inspirational.” That is fine and dandy if that’s all you want or need. But my feeling is that if the focus of your event is evangelism, then you had better make sure you share the gospel at some point.

That means that you have to get the gospel right for one thing. It also means that it would be advantageous if you could share it clearly and in a way that can be easily understood by the hearers. I believe that I as an entertainer should therefore be bold in my on stage witness, as well as take every opportunity that I can to get the message across, as it may be someone’s last chance before their death.

I believe it is important to use the Law in evangelism in order to help the non believer understand what sin is, and to lead them to Christ. *Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith.* (Ga 3:23). I use the ten commandments as an example of some of the specific ways that we have broken God’s law and store up wrath for ourselves. God commands us to repent of our sins, turning away from our sins and turning to Him in faith, for the forgiveness of our sins. *“Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”* (Ac 17:29)
We can be forgiven, because the payment for our sins has already been paid in full for us, by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, when he was put to death on the cross. *He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* (2 Co 5:20)

It is not merely believing the facts of the gospel. But it is putting your full faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation from your sins. Trusting in none of your deeds, even your

righteous acts. *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.* (Eph 2:7)

So, what is the “tricky” part for a “Christian Entertainer” that I mentioned above? *It is the fact that entertainment’s goal is amusement, and the end goal of evangelistic preaching would be repentance and faith.*

I do not bill myself as a preacher who happens to be an entertainer, or a “speaker” who happens to be an entertainer. I’m an entertainer who is a Christian. This means that from beginning to end, the show is designed to entertain and amuse, even in a “ministry setting.” But as a Christian, I can then by the grace of God, preach the message of salvation. I used to scatter the gospel message throughout the show, interspersing the elements of the gospel as I went along, building the facts and presentation in between comedy routines. **However, I’ve come to a point where I feel that it is more effective for me to perform the straight comedy show, and then speak at the end of the show.** If there is time available, I will often perform for 1 hour, take a 10 minute break, (stage controlled by the MC or host), and then I return to stage out of character, as myself, and proclaim the gospel for about 15 minutes, taking the time to get it right. This way, I can keep the entertainment the entertainment, and the gospel, the gospel. Usually at the beginning of the show, I compare the evening (or my presentation) to that of a DVD. I tell the audience that on a DVD you have the main performance, and then the really cool behind the scenes stuff, like the director’s commentary. Similarly, I inform the audience that I will give the main performance and then afterward give the most important “behind the scenes” insight or the “director’s commentary” so to speak, about my faith.

This leads me to ask the question, *should something that has as its primary goal amusement, have a place in a Sunday AM worship service or fellowship gathering?* (such as a comedy juggling show?) Personally I think not. At the very least I don’t want to add to the problem of lack of good preaching/teaching/worship etc. on a Sunday morning. That is why I will not replace a Sunday morning service with a performance. I would consider speaking and sharing the gospel however. But there may not be as many non believers at a Sunday worship service, as there would be at non-Sunday evening concert, if outreach is your goal.

Finally, if I have a performance philosophy, I must have a church philosophy that somehow fits into it. Over the last 18 months the Lord has been growing me greatly in the area of evangelism, and it has nothing much to do with the *Comedy in Motion* show. On one side of the coin, it has to do with **how** I share the gospel. I’ve been enlightened to use the Law (the 10 Commandments) in witnessing to the lost. (See comments above.) The Law is needed for grace to make sense to an unbeliever. (See www.wayofthemaster.com for more information.) I’ve been stretched to use this “method” in one on one conversations, open air preaching, and tract giving.

The other side of the coin is **where** I share the gospel, for lack of a better word. I’ve noticed that we Christians really keep the good news to ourselves. Or we want the non-believers to come to us (at church) to hear the Gospel. Indeed, that is what I do for part of my living! (Outreach shows where we invite the lost). But Jesus said, “**Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.** (Mk 16:15) It has been said that there is about as much chance of the unregenerate unbeliever wandering into your church as there is a criminal turning himself into a police station. It does happen, but not that often. The unredeemed hate God!

So I have been very challenged this past 18 months to put more energy into going to the unbelievers, and taking the gospel message to them, rather than trying to persuade them to come to the church, where people who love God want to go. This has been a personal challenge and stretch for me, requiring a step of faith, and I have so far to go!

So regarding church - it is a place for believers to gather and worship, learn, be edified and encourage one another. Do we welcome non-believers to come to the church? Most definitely! But it is not to be designed for the unbeliever. Inviting the lost to attend church is not evangelism. Inviting them to Christ, IS. We are to go to them. (And I realize that now a days, we will actually find many of them IN the church.) The above church philosophy ideas have already be well summarized by others I will now quote:

Let me begin by stating upfront that Jesus Christ never commissioned His followers to go out into the world and "church" lost people. Nowhere in scripture will you find the Lord or any of His Apostles attempting to lure and entice the lost into the first century church. That was NEVER our Lord's intention. The church was created WITH and FOR the REDEEMED ONLY -- not for the faithless, rebellious and unrepentant. It only became the primary place for the lost to hear the Gospel preached because church members throughout the 20th century couldn't maintain enough faith and courage to talk about Jesus Christ outside the church sanctuary. So, for decades now, instead of Christians inviting the lost to Christ with an open Bible, a convicting Spirit and a working knowledge of scripture, we've been inviting them to church instead to hear our pastor do what we ourselves should have been doing all along. Imagine what would become of our military if recruiters bribed civilian passersby into putting on a uniform, taking a loaded gun and boarding the next plane to the middle east to fight terrorists. Bribing the lost into spiritual service armed with little more than human wisdom, strength and talent to battle Satan and his demons on the streets of America is just as ridiculous and destructive. To say it defeats the purpose of the church would be a gross understatement. Ultimately, church attendance, membership, personal sacrifice and service should be the RESULT of one's salvation, not a means to obtaining it. If it becomes the latter, it eventually corrupts, confuses and degrades the church as a whole and undermines its divine purpose. Paul Proctor <http://www.newswithviews.com/PaulProctor/proctor3.htm>

... many would say that a seeker sensitive church still wants to minister to the believers that are coming to the church, but that at the same time it wants to be sensitive to the unbelievers that are coming in the context of evangelism and ministering to the unbelievers. And then, by their definition, Grace Community Church would be a seeker **insensitive** church. ...because our idea of what takes place on the Lord's Day is that the ingathering of believers on the Lord's Day is for, **first and foremost, the exaltation of the Lord and then secondly it's for the edification of the believer.** Clay Miller <http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/SC03-1029.htm>

Having stated my performance and church philosophy, let me just say, that if you do not agree with me, I would still be very open to coming to whatever event you have, and performing and/or sharing the gospel wherever I can. I understand that each church body is different in how they choose to spend ministry dollars and puts planning and effort into their own events. As a professional performer, entertaining is how I make my living and I would be happy with "just performing." I have performed at many outreach events put on by churches, in which I was specifically asked not share the gospel. Each church will have it's own reasons for this, and their own vision for the event (some use the show as a "first contact" type of event, or perhaps someone else at the event or conference is already sharing the gospel).

I am passionate about sharing the gospel whenever and wherever I can, since none of us knows the date of our death. But if I'm asked not to share the gospel, then I will follow the church's wishes, and not. Instead I just perform a great show, to the best of my God given abilities, just as as I would when hired by a corporate client, or cruise ship for straight entertainment.

Thanks for taking the time to read this. I would love any feedback that you may have. I trust that God will bless you as you personally think about evangelism, and seek to reach the lost, as we are all called to do.

Bob Cates