

When Christ meets WIIFM

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As an Indonesian-born Chinese living in the second most individualistic country in the world, I instinctively know how deep the concept of 'gain and loss' is embedded in my life (and countless others who were brought up in Indonesia -- and the rest of the world, for that matter). Our well-meaning parents typically teach us to approach every single issue with this one big idea: "How is that gonna benefit you?" If we make a silly decision or a foolish bargain, they will say "Shame on you. How could you not lose if you did that?" Such seemingly innocent remarks given repeatedly over a few critical years at young age cement in our mind a certain attitude that goes very far in our lives. We are wired to think: "What's in it for me?"

What's In It For Me. WIIFM. That's the mantra we live by.

Nearly everyday we are led to believe that if we don't think "I, Me, My, Mine, and Myself", we won't last in this dog-eat-dog world. If you don't look out for yourself, no one will. Only the paranoid survive.

Find it hard to believe? Think again.

When it comes to choose a major at university, we assume it is only logical if we think along this line: Which one will give me the most opportunities to land in a most highly-paid, socially admirable, eternally secure job?

When it comes to getting to know new acquaintances, we wonder: Which ones of these folks who will at least allow me to reap half the benefit I give if I make some efforts to befriend them? "Let see, this couple has a social status I want to be associated with, she has very powerful friends who knows other powerful people, her husband is good with knowledge on the real estate market, which is just what I need."

When it comes to select a business opportunity, we will be remiss if we don't ask: Which one will give the greatest rate of return, so I can take my family to five-star overseas holiday every year, pay off that mortgage ASAP, or retire young?

When it comes to find a soul mate, we ask: Which man or woman will satisfy me the most first visually, then perhaps emotionally, relationally, intellectually, morally, spiritually, physically, etc. (often it's not in that order).

When it comes to choose a church, we muse: Which church will help me to experience the most enjoyable worship? The most inspirational sermons? The warmest fellowship? The nicest folks? The most gourmet snack after church?

... and so on (feel free to contribute to the list).

I am more and more convinced today that this WIIFM mindset is a huge barrier that stops us from personally coming face to face with Christ to experience inside out transformation. Of course we swim well along the religious tide in our Christian circles, but we never knew that our WIIFM tendency is in a major collision with Christ's terms.

WIIFM Christians always ask: How does following Christ benefit me? If by knowing Christ, going to church, obeying the 10 Commandments, getting involved in the ministry, praying, fasting, tithing, I will be less likely to be infected with anything from flu virus to cancerous cells, and more likely to get a great job or an ideal soul mate or obedient kids or a comfortable life relatively free from stress-inducing problems, then hey... I WILL BE MORE THAN HAPPY TO DO ALL THAT!

We serve the Lord and sacrifice our time, energy, and money to make Him indebted to us that He owes us His blessings. We lead a holy life and avoid sinful behavior so the Lord felt compelled to bless us with the things we wish to get.

Christ Jesus is nothing but a means to an end. In our interaction with Him, we are the ones who hold the remote control, since we control how much we give and surrender to Him on the basis of what we can get out of Him. Either that or Christ is useless.

If we are willing to step aside from all the trapping of our religious circus, we will realize that we often relate to Christ the way pagans relate to their territorial gods. When I was still very young in the 1970s, I lived in a remote town in the deep end of East Java where the villagers dutifully worship the goddess of the sea, Nyai Roro Kidul, with strings attached. They worship the goddess while expecting something in return. Safety, Fertility, Harmony, Peace, Comfort, Health, Success. I don't see much differences between the indigenous East Javanese in 1970s and the 21st century suburban Christians in big cities like Melbourne.

WIIFM stops us from seeing Christ as He really is. We just don't get it, just as Judas never got it despite his physical proximity to Christ. As Christians, we may flock to church every Sunday, but we never taste and see the majestic glory of God, the blinding holiness of God, the deafening love of God in Christ, the sweet grace of Jesus Christ, the astonishing death of Jesus Christ, and the life-altering resurrection power of Christ.

We know all that intellectually of course, but never personally. We know that as part of our social identity, but never alone one-on-one with Christ. The only way to reverse this trend is not to try harder. But to turn to Christ and humbly cry at the foot of the cross:

*Lord, please undo my WIIFM so I can see you for who you really are.
Save me from myself, from my relentless desire to control my life.
Save me from using You to get the things I wish and want.
Save me from moving on the road that leads to eternal destruction.*

*Turn me o Lord for the pig that I am who trample the pearl You gave me
Into a new creation, a fully spiritual human being who values the Pearl
That is, Christ who came for me, the Almighty became a single cell for me,
Lived the life I should have lived, and died the death I should have died.*

*Stop me Lord from asking what You can do for me in the future
by continually pondering what you have done for me in the past.*

*I don't want to make You a means of my success.
because I now see that You alone are my success.
I don't want to add You so I live a happy life
because I now see that You are my happiness*

*I don't want to ask You to find me the man/woman I love
because I now see that You alone are my true Lover.
I don't want to use You for to get Your blessings
because I now serve You for Your intrinsic worth*

*I offer my life promptly and sincerely
For You alone are worthy O Lord.*