

## Star Quality vs. Soul Quality

American culture promotes and rewards the attention-getting personality. Because of this, and especially in public life, we often don't find out what a person is really like until it's too late. Outward shine, which we've been trained by our culture to value, can distract us from inward realities. Every time I hear of a pastor or ministry leader crashing due to hidden problems, I wonder how much our culture of narcissism and histrionics has infected the church.

When we have star quality in mind in selecting up-front ministry leaders, we're perhaps both seduced by our culture and straying from biblical reality. In II Corinthians Paul has a lot to say about this, as he was apparently "competing with" those who boast about outward appearance.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. II Cor. 4:7

...as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. II Cor. 4:18

We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. II Cor. 5:12

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. II Cor. 5:16

And this last passage from II Cor. 6 puts emphasis on the kind of character both required for, and molded by, real Christian ministry:

...but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise.  
II Cor. 6:4-8a

These passages describe a way of life in which the worldly external shine has been worn off, so that the inner, Christ-transformed reality can glorify God.

But if we choose only those with star quality for our up-front ministry positions, what are we modelling for the members of the church about soul quality? What's the goal of the Christian life, to have one's name or one's church be famous? We can't regard our leaders "according to the flesh" and at the same time have "the surpassing power" attributed to God.

-Peter Schmidt (March 2017)

