

On The Failure of Creeds

"But there are so many creeds, all claiming to be right, that I should not know which to take. They were all made by learned men, and if they can not agree on the kind of a creed, how am I to decide which is right?" says one. It is a matter of great moment and of much relief that, aside from all these conflicting, clashing, and erring creeds, there is one book that all parties concede is right. They all agree that the Bible is right - that it came from God. They all further agree that it contains the law of God - that the law of the Lord is perfect. The only wonder is, that man ever attempted to make any other creed or law for the Church. Such an undertaking could not have commenced without two wicked assumptions:

1. That the law of God, as set forth in the Bible, is not sufficient - is a failure.
2. That the insufficiency or failure can be remedied by weak, erring, and uninspired men.

No man of intelligence will affirm, in plain terms, that the Bible is not sufficient for the government of the saints; or that man - uninspired man - can make a creed that will serve a better purpose than the Bible. Still such affirmations are implied in every attempt made by uninspired men to make a creed. If you admit, as all are bound to do, that the law of God is in the Bible; that nothing may be added to it, nothing taken from it, and that no part of it may be changed, there is not an excuse in the world for making another law. The law of God in the Bible is the law, the divine law, the supreme law, in the kingdom of God; and it is a treasonable movement to attempt to get up another constitution, law, name, body, or officers, apart from the constitution, law, name, body, and officers as found in the Bible.

But the matter now in hand is to find a safe course to pursue. Can this be done? All admit the Bible is right. All admit that the law of God in the Bible is right. All admit that those who follow the Bible honestly and faithfully, in faith and practice, will be saved. All admit that wherever any creed differs from the Bible is wrong. Then it is infallibly safe to take the Bible and follow it. When men undertake to prove that a human creed is a good one, they argue that it is like the Bible. If a creed like the Bible is a good one, why will not the Bible itself do? If the Bible will not serve the purpose - is insufficient and a failure - a creed like it would be equally insufficient. When men make a creed to do what the Bible would not do, they should certainly make it different from the Bible, or it would serve no better purpose than the Bible itself.

- by Benjamin Franklin

This is an excerpt from "The Infallibly Safe Course," New Testament Christianity, edited by Z.T. Sweeney [note: Benjamin Franklin was a nineteenth century gospel preacher, not to be confused with our eighteenth century "founding father."]

Popularity without Principle

"Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets." (Luke 6:26, KJ) "You are in trouble when everyone says good things about you. That is what your own people said about those prophets who told lies." (Luke 6:26, NIV)

People do not characteristically want unpleasant truths. They prefer comforting lies. The false prophet understands this, and like his political counterpart he seeks out that message he believes most people will approve. Politicians do it by polls. They actually pay people to take samples of what positions and platitudes people most want to hear, and then they go out and say those very things. It is shallow in substance but profound in effect. Preachers do the same thing, except that they do not need polls. Truth unsettles us. We may be comfortable and satisfied, and then truth rebukes us and "unsettles" us. A man of conscience will repent and change his life. But sin-loving, self-willed men will oppose that truth. However, they want to appear to love truth, so they seek out preachers who will preach what they like. As Paul said: "...after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." (2 Tim. 4:3b)

It is a "self-feeding" process. There are plenty of preachers and politicians who want to say what people want to hear, and there are plenty of people who will reward the preachers and politicians who do it. So the reality of it is that they are actually looking for each other! It is

therefore no compliment to a preacher or politician to be particularly popular, and certainly such should never be the goal. Consider Jeremiah's comment about his generation: "The prophets prophesy falsely and my people love to have it so .." (Jeremiah 5:31)

The empowerment and credibility of the false prophet (and politician) is in the fact of his popularity. "Look at his following!" they say. "That many people cannot be wrong!" "He must surely be doing something, or a lot of things, right!" So it goes! It is once again a "self-feeding" situation where preacher, politician and people make each other feel good, all kinds of sin, corruption and abuses notwithstanding.

But do not altogether blame the preacher or the politician. It could not happen if the people did not "love to have it so." Or if it was not for the fact, as Jesus said, that "men love darkness rather than light." (John 3:19)

Whatever else is true, popularity is more of a sign of desertion of duty than a rendering of right. Remember, Jesus said, "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you."

- by Jere Frost

Givers and Takers

Every congregation of God's people is made up of two basic, but quite different, types of people.

There are some that can be properly described as the "givers." These are the good-hearted souls who are always doing helpful deeds of service for others. If there is someone sick who needs to be visited, if folks are grieving over the death of a loved one, if a spiritually weak person needs encouragement, if a lost soul needs to be taught the gospel - you can count on these "givers" to step up and meet the responsibility. You will not hear these members complaining that "someone needs to do something." Instead, you will find them busily doing whatever needs to be done. They teach Bible classes, they transport folks to services, they run errands for the shut-ins, they take food to the sick and grieving, they send cards of encouragement, they do chores for those who can't do for themselves - in a word, they GIVE. They give of their time, their money, their energy - they give of THEMSELVES in humble service to others.

Sadly, the other group of people in any particular church would have to be labeled the "takers." These are the ones who seem to expect others to do everything, especially as it relates to them and their specific situations. If they are sick, they expect to be visited, if they are down, they expect to be encouraged, if they are grieving, they expect to be comforted. Never mind that they have not done these things for others. In reality, their outlook is "ME, ME, ME!" And, if the help and service they desire is not forthcoming, you can expect these people to quickly become offended and hurt. We've even known of some such folks who "quit the church" because their perceived needs were not addressed to their satisfaction.

What the "takers" don't understand is that the "givers" are the ones who are really receiving the better part. By their giving, they are in return blessed with the comfort, peace, and satisfaction that comes from humbly serving others. Jesus said it is the true way to greatness in His kingdom (Mk. 10:42,43). By their open-hearted giving, these folks are directly imitating their Savior (Jn. 13:14,15). Thank God for the "givers." May their tribe increase!

- by Greg Gwin