

First Church Of Fickleville, Anywhere!

Most of you GIMI friends know that I have been in the ministry for over 50 years. During these years, my wife, JoAnne and I have had the privilege of leading 10 Baptist churches throughout the United States. We have had some wonderful experiences with some of these churches growing rapidly with many people coming to Christ. In a few of the other churches, we had good growth, but nothing amazing. However, having pastored all of these churches, we have been first hand observers of the dedicated people and the visionary attitudes that have contributed to church growth and development. On the other hand, we have watched people with almost no dedication to Christ and to the local church who have contributed nothing but discouragement to the church leaders and to fellow church members in the flock. But honestly folks, JoAnne and I have never seen such fickle people in the churches as we are seeing today in this generation of churches. We are seeing it in many churches where we visit, and to be truthful, we have seen it here in our own new growing church. So, because no one with cancer can be treated properly until they are professionally diagnosed by well-trained doctors, I believe that as an older seasoned pastor with years of experience that I need to make a diagnosis of the First Church of Fickleville, and see if I might be able to help people get well from their willful disease of fickleness.

What Is Fickleness?

According to Webster's Dictionary, the word fickle means the following: likely to change often, changeable, fluctuating, inconsistent, uncertain, unpredictable, unsettled, unstable, unsteady, variable, volatile, aimless, erratic, hit-or-miss, irregular, vacillating, wavering, undependable, unreliable, untrustworthy, and on and on we might go. And yes, even as I typed the words, the names of church people kept coming to my minds. These are the terrible characteristics of so many professing believers today, and these people never accomplish anything of eternal value because they are basically living for the moment. Attending church and following Christ are just two of the many options and alternatives that they choose from each week. If they have nothing else to do, or if they have no other place to go, they might show up at church or some church activity. They make promises with their mouths and rarely fulfill them. They get all worked up about special things they might do like working in

Vacation Bible School, helping to serve a meal to the elderly, or just anything where they might get a little special attention. And then, when this special event is over and it is time for "regular worship and church again", you might not see them for weeks. Why, these people get all emotionally worked up in a church worship service and even lift their hands and shout hallelujah, but then, they go home and you don't see them for weeks. And God forbid that the pastor or some other church leader contact them, because if they do, the church member from Fickleville will get very angry because they don't want to be held accountable for their negligence. They are usually self-centered people with no time for anyone else.

These people keep their children and grandchildren out of church on Sundays and other worship times, if they have any other thing to do. And, if you call on them to do some particular job in the church, they will usually only do it if they can get some glory. And beyond this, these fickleites are usually high maintenance and demand special attention if they ever get around to doing anything. They are not team players because team players are more interested in the winning of the team rather than displaying their own abilities before the crowd. And beloved friends, these fickle folks are destroying the fruitfulness and growth of our local churches. So, it is my prayer that every person who reads this newsletter might stop and take a personal inventory of his or her life and see if there are any signs of fickleness. If there is, please, please take this dreaded disease to the Great Physician and ask Him to heal it immediately. Why? Because the Kingdom of God and the success of the Great Commission and world missions are depending upon dependable and genuine people who will carry out the mission God has given them to do.

Now, before I move on, let me give you two vivid illustrations from the Bible of fickleness. One of these may be found in the Gospels. Do you remember when Jesus rode the donkey into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, and the crowd threw down palm leaves and shouted, "Hosanna to the highest"? And then, just a short time later, these same people stood outside the court of Pilate and shouted "crucify Him". I don't know how Jesus felt as He was attacked and abused by fickle people because He was free from sin. But, I do know how it feels to have church members promise me one day or one Sunday that they are going to be faithful and support me as their pastor, and within two or three days, they get mad and leave the church. I have had the same thing happen with people who have promised to support our GIMI mission program, especially some

younger people and young preachers, then a few days later, these same people are gone and can't be found. And then, I find out that it is always my fault, but this information comes from friends of those who left because those who leave are so fickle that they don't have the courage to even tell you face to face why they are leaving. I even had this to happen recently here at our new church. And truthfully, this is why I feel led to deal with this because every pastor I know deals with this regularly in this generation of professing believers.

The last illustration that I want to give you is found in Acts 14, where Paul and Barnabas were in the city of Lystra on the first missionary journey. Paul had just healed a man at the gate of the city who had been crippled from his birth. The man jumped up and began to leap and run in the city filled with excitement. The people in that pagan city were so caught up with excitement that they thought Paul and Barnabas were the Greek gods of Jupiter (Zeus) and Mercurius (Hermes). They sent for the priest of these pagan gods, and they were about to make a sacrificial offering unto Paul and Barnabas. But Paul and Barnabas would not have it, and they ran into the crowd and tore their clothing showing the people of Lystra that they were just humans like themselves. These mixed up Jews and wicked Gentiles got so mad at Paul because he was the spokesman, that they took him outside the city gate and stoned him brutally and left him for dead. Folks, please notice this! One minute they wanted to worship God's servants as gods, and the next minute they wanted to kill them. Would you say that they were enormously fickle? I surely would, and yet, this fickleness was surely not just localized to Lystra in that day and time. Why? Because our churches are full of these fickle folks fooling around feverishly with the work of Jesus today! May God stamp out this fickleitis and give us in the Kingdom of God some more Pauls who will stick by the stuff, even when it is not even safe to do so. We need to learn that serving Jesus faithfully and taking His Gospel to the lost world is not about us, but about Him and them. When we go to church to see what others can do for us, rather than to see what we can do for Jesus and others, we won't last very long. Why? Because we are self-centered human beings who are always seeking attention, but when we are faced with accountability to be faithful and hold to our promises, so very often we get mad and go looking for another place to display our fickleness! May God stop this terrible disease in this generation before it spreads even more!

