

It Is Written

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Popularity Without Principle

By Jere Frost

"Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets." (Luke 6:26, KJV) 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."

Don't Put a Question Mark Where God Put a Period

By Steve Klein

God placed man in the Garden of Eden with the following rule: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16,17). When the serpent came to tempt Eve, he said, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of every tree of the garden?'" Notice what is at the end of that sentence. Satan put a question mark where God had put a period. Because of Satan's influence, first Eve and then Adam wound up violating God's rule, treating it as a question in their minds instead of a command.

Men often make the same error today -- we put question marks where God put periods. Here are some examples:

- In His word, God said, "in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day" (Exodus 20:11). Men ask, "Do we really know how long it took to make the earth?" "Could God have used evolution over millions of years to create life as we know it?"
- God said, "Wine is a mocker, Strong drink is a brawler, And whoever is led astray by it is not wise" (Proverbs

20:1). And, "Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it swirls around smoothly" (Proverbs 23:31). Men ask, "What's wrong with taking a drink now and then?"

- God said, "Baptism doth also now save us" (1 Peter 3:21, KJV). Men ask, "Do I have to be baptized to be saved?"
- God said for us to "consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24,25). Men ask, "Do I have to go to church?"
- God said, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16). Men ask, "Can we play instruments of music in worship?"

The mistake of putting a question mark where God put a period is as old as the Garden of Eden. Let's resolve that we are not going to make that mistake. If God has said it, let's believe and obey it, no questions asked!

HE NEVER HAD SUCH GOOD FRIENDS

By Greg Gwin

A man – a brother in Christ – has slipped away and fallen seriously into sin. Though he was once growing and active in the Lord's service, now he is distant, unconcerned, and clearly pursuing a different agenda.

His brethren see his condition. They are aware of the spiritual danger he is in. All signs point to the fact that he is heading down a path to eternal ruin.

Out of love for his soul, and with knowledge of their own duty in such matters (Galatians 6:1-2) his brothers and sisters in Christ reach out to this erring one. They are crushed to think that one who once worked hand-in-hand with them in the Lord's service could now be so alienated from them and God. They humbly try to encourage him, reminding him of things he already knows – but has chosen to ignore. They plead with him to "repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22).

And, what is the response from this brother in desperate need of rescue? Too often the response is one of bitter animosity and resentment. Instead of looking inwardly and humbly admitting his sins, he lashes out at those who are trying to help him. He has harsh words of criticism and disdain for them. His effort is to deflect attention away from his own sins, and place focus on what he perceives as the failings of others.

What this man fails to realize is that he never had such good friends as these fellow Christians who are committed to help him and restore him to a right relationship with God. It would have been easier – much easier – to look the other way and ignore the situation all together. Let him go – clear his name off the 'church roll' – and proceed as though nothing significant had happen. But, love will not allow this. He is a brother – a friend – and they cannot, will not, let him go without a fight for his soul. Truly, he never had such friends as these.