

Wil Owens

Correcting Cookie-cutter Christianity; Matthew 9:14-17

GPBC

6.2.19

Introduction – If you're baking cookies from scratch, you cut out the cookies from your dough before you bake them. If you take one cookie cutter to cut out all your cookies, they will all look the same and have the same shape.

Cookie-cutter Christianity is the idea that all Christians should look and act and think the very same way on every single issue. Now let's be clear, there are non-negotiables to our faith. There are doctrines in the Christian faith for which there is absolutely no wiggle room. Examples of these would be the inspiration of Scripture, the Triune nature of God, the deity and humanity of Christ, justification by faith alone, and salvation by grace alone. These are the fundamentals of our faith. They are the core doctrines upon which Christianity stands. If you remove or change them you are left with something other than Christianity.

But then there are negotiables in our faith as well. Examples would be the doctrine of baptism. Presbyterians believe all children should be baptized. Baptists believe only believers should be baptized. You can believe one or the other about baptism and still be a true believer and go to heaven. You can't believe whatever you want to about Christ and still have assurance of heaven.

Then there is the application of Scripture. Some things are mandated or practiced in the NT. Those things we should follow. Some things are not mandated or practiced in the NT. On those things we should follow our own conscience before the Lord. Some things are condemned in the NT. We should not adopt those ideas or practices as followers of Christ. Some things are not condemned in the NT. For those things we should follow our own conscience before the Lord.

Cookie-cutter Christianity fails to consider that disciples of Jesus, while we have the same faith, will apply the faith differently at times. New believers are in a different place in their faith than mature believers. Believers in a different context and culture will express their faith differently. Believers are in different places and varying stages of their faith at any given time, so we will not look, act, or think exactly alike at any given time. If we expect all believers to think the same way we think about every single point of doctrine and practice, we have fallen into

cookie-cutter Christianity. Sometimes we're different because our brother needs to mature in that area, and sometimes we are different because we need to mature in that area. In today's text Jesus is facing and correcting cookie-cutter Christianity.

- I. A Reasonable Question from an Unrealistic Point of View (v14)
  - a. Now John's disciples are true believers. They are not antagonistic or in opposition to Jesus. They have a valid concern. John has taught them to fast. They understand the Scriptures teach believers to fast.
  - b. Jesus fasted in Matthew 4. Jesus taught that believers will fast in Matthew 6. It's a reasonable question. If we are supposed to fast, why don't your disciples fast?
  - c. That's reasonable, but it's coming from an unrealistic point of view. It's coming from the point of view that all believers everywhere and at any time should be practicing fasting in the same way.
  - d. Now fasting is a part of practicing our faith, but it's not central to the faith. Fasting doesn't get you to heaven, and not fasting doesn't keep you from heaven. Faith in Christ and faith in Christ alone is the difference between genuine salvation and false assurance.
  - e. Now if you do have faith in Christ, you will practice your faith, you will exercise your faith, you will display your faith. However, the counter balance is this: there are different seasons and circumstances and times in the lives of different believers. III. Believers are like snowflakes.
  
- II. Defending the Difference Among Disciples (v15)
  - a. Jesus is saying that it is ok that His disciples are not practicing fasting during this season. There is coming a time when they will fast. In fact, Jesus will teach them to fast in Matthew 17.
  - b. But there is a reason why they are not fasting now. They are in a season of joy because they are with the Messiah. They are also very young in the faith.
  - c. Fasting will come. As they grow in the Lord and understand what it takes to deepen their roots of faith, they will fast – Matthew 17. When Jesus ascends into heaven, the disciples will begin to spread the gospel and encounter stern, harsh opposition, and they will fast.

- d. Fasting represents a longing for God to do what we cannot do, what we know is out of our reach. There are times in our lives when we are so desperate for God to move that our desperation for divine intervention supersedes our comforts, when our spiritual needs outweigh our physical needs.
  - e. Jesus is not disagreeing that His disciples should fast. He is disagreeing with the supposition that something is wrong with them if they are not fasting now and exactly like John's disciples fast.
  - f. He is correcting cookie-cutter Christianity that says you need to do what I do exactly like I do or you're not right with God.
- III. Taking Difference into Account when Dealing with Differences (vv16-17)
- a. Now some commentators explain that what Jesus means by new cloth and old garment and new wine and old wineskins is the difference between the OT and the NT or the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.
    - i. I don't believe that is what Jesus is teaching here again because Jesus practices fasting and He will later teach His disciples to fast, and even here He indicates there is coming a time when they will fast.
  - b. I believe what Jesus is teaching here is that different disciples are in different places in their lives and in their walk with the Lord, and we must take these differences into account when dealing with one another.
  - c. We can't expect all disciples to look, act, and think the same way on every point of doctrine and practice. In other words, we can't look at a new believer and expect him to be in the same place on every issue as a believer who has been walking with the Lord for 20 years.
  - d. If we do that, it causes far more harm than good. The tear in the garment is worse and the wineskin will burst. But if we come alongside one another and patiently disciple, encourage, and allow for differences on secondary and tertiary points of doctrine and practice, the garment remains intact and the wine is preserved.
  - e. Here is the key: correctly applying the faith is just as important as knowing the faith. You can beat someone over the head with the Bible, or you can lift someone up with the Bible.

- f. We have to be on guard against cookie-cutter Christianity because often what lies underneath it is our own self-righteous pride and it will divide rather than unite, it will discourage rather than encourage.
- IV. 7 Helpful Reminders to guard us against cookie-cutter Christianity
- a. Adopt Augustine: St Augustine of Hippo was the great North African theologian of the 5<sup>th</sup> C. He is credited with this summary of relating to one another as believers when it comes to faith and practice. In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.
  - b. Train ourselves in Theological Triage: ER nurses have to triage patients. They have to categorize patients according to the level of emergency. If two patients enter the ER at the same time and one has flu-like symptoms and one is experiencing sharp chest pains, the chest pain patient gets priority. Theological triage means that we need to be able to categorize doctrines and practice. The doctrine of Christ takes precedence over the doctrine of last things. That we agree Jesus is the Son of God is essential, that we agree on premillennialism or amillennialism is non-essential. That we agree on being pure in our sexuality is essential, that we agree on tattoos in non-essential. If we see everything as essential, the garment of the church will tear.
  - c. Delight in Diversity: Discipleship happens in stages and therefore different disciples will be in different places in their walk with God.
  - d. Cancel Comparison: Everyone is not required to be exactly where you are or to have the exact same conviction on every single issue. What we all are required to do is to follow and love the Lord and be growing in our faith. Sometimes you simply have to agree to disagree for unity's sake.
  - e. Practice Patience
  - f. Prefer the preferences of others
  - g. Keep the minors in the minor category and the major in the major category. Don't let a major become a minor. Some things are essential. However, don't let a minor become a major. Some things are non-essential.

Conclusion – Read Romans 14.