

Faith or Franchise

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We went to New York City as Missionaries for Christ to preach the Gospel in 1976. Although I grew up in that city of teeming millions, in the early 1950's, no one ever told me about Salvation and the necessity of the "new birth."

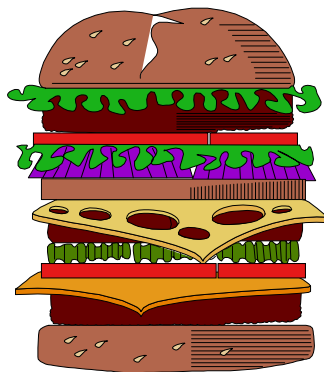
We had no missionary board backing us, we had no money, and no one was there to greet or welcome us. What we did have was God's Word and God's promise that "faithful is he that calleth you, who will also do it." God did it. God was faithful and we were privileged to watch Him work in the lives of people.

Years later we engaged in home missions work in the mid-west and then ministered in Micronesia as well as visiting missionaries in Russia and preaching in the Philippines, and in Brazil. We in no way think we are experts, but we have enough experience to make certain observations. God has called us to a faith not a franchise.

I was amazed to hear missionaries report to supporting churches that they were the only "witness" in a particular city when I knew for a fact that I and other missionaries were preaching and working and ministering right there along side that work. I have been embarrassed to hear directors of mission boards speak of unmanned mission fields that have no one bringing the gospel to the natives yet in darkness. I had visited those mission fields and met many dedicated and faithful workers laboring in the work. I have heard presidents of Christian schools speak of the spiritual poverty of a particular town or city that was crying out for laborers, because they

had none, when I knew the contrary to be true. I thought, "What is going on here?" "What is happening?"

What these schools, boards, and denominational heads meant was "we do not have our own group established in this particular area." They were not talking "faith," they were talking "franchise." Yes, there might be ten Baptist missionaries ministering in a particular place, but none from "their" mission board. There might be twenty missionaries preaching and teaching house to house, but not from "our



group, denomination, or Bible College." They were thinking of the church as a franchise rather than a faith.

Many feel they must re-invent the wheel and plant Wesleyan, or Calvinistic, or Lutheran, or Primitive, Free Will, or Four Square, etc. I don't think that is what Jesus meant when he prayed in the garden about us being "one."

Heaven is more important than hamburgers, most will admit. Yet many will go off and start another group for those who do, or do not like pickles. Now here is where I

make some angry (if I have not done so already). Some think pickles are very important. They claim that a hamburger is not a hamburger unless it has pickles. Nothing I can say will change their mind.

Jesus had to deal with the same spirit during his ministry. His Father's house had been turned into a place of merchandise (a business) and leaders became obsessed with mint and anise and cummin, which are spices (pickles?) while having "omitted the weightier matters of the law... judgment, mercy, and faith..." Matt. 23:23.

Paul had to address the tendency to "nit-pick" about pickles (I am wearing out this metaphor, I know) when he wrote to the Romans. He said, "for meat destroy not the work of God" Rom. 14:20. The Gospel is not about hamburgers (meat), with or without pickles, onions, or catsup. It is about Christ. Sometimes He gets lost in the lettuce. Paul said, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

How do we discern a faith ministry from a franchise? When we fellowship around Christ we fellowship with others around Christ. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" 1Jn. 1:3. When we are involved in a franchise, just leaving off the pickle becomes a big problem. (Remember, in a franchise, pickles are important). If we would only love Christ more, we would find He is enough.