

THE BOOK TOXIC FAITH ON NON-TOXIC FAITH

Toxic Faith by Stephen Arterburn & Jack Felton (Oliver-Nelson, 1991)

FROM Toxic Faith (a summary by B. Jackson)

This is Part D entitled Characteristics of Healthy Faith

1. Focusing on a personal relationship with God in Christ, not religion

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

1. Protestants see God as their personal saviour. That means that spirituality is merely between the believer and his or her God. This is individualism. Brainwashing is less likely.

2. Looking to God to meet the needs for security and significance

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

2. Looking to God for help and comfort will only add the problem of guilt to a person who is so depressed that they are unable to look. It is better for us to live without belief in God even if it means we will be less happy than for us to propagate a belief that torments many of those who suffer the most.

3. Growing in faith as evidenced by walking into pain

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

3. An atheist can accept pain better than a Christian can. If I think there is no God to help me, I have no choice but to accept the pain. Indeed it is good to take risks in order to toughen myself up. If I think there is a God, I may reason that I have no choice but to accept the pain for he is letting it happen for a reason and he will not change his plan. The atheist accepts pain because it is inevitable. The believer accepts it though God can stop it but won't. That is acceptance with a big but. It is not authentic acceptance.

4. Respect for the personhood of others

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

4. Christians cheapen respect for people by pretending that your sins are to be thought of as separate from you. That really demands that the evil person be viewed the same as the saint. It is hypocritical for Christians send evil people to jail and judge them.

5. Serving others for their sake

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

5. Serving others for their sake is unhealthy. The healthy person should balance what is good for herself with what is good for others.

6. Being vulnerable

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

6. People like us to feel vulnerable when appropriate and when the intention is to create rapport with those who are in any kind of trouble. But the Bible claims that its message can give us a sense of invulnerability no matter what happens for God is all-powerful and our stronghold. The vulnerability requirement contradicts Toxic Faith's assertion that we must always feel safe in God.

7. A trusting atmosphere

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

Christians can only get along when they forget their beliefs. How is telling people that it is bad to intend to harm for it hurts people and hurts God supposed to help people trust? The atheist settles for leaving God out. Making evil out to be worse than what it is, is slander

8. Celebrating uniqueness by recognizing people's spiritual gifts

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

8. Every religion recognises alleged gifts from God and celebrates the differences but between parameters. For example, Catholics recognise speaking in tongues as being from God and deny the gifts of a person who claims that God gave him the power to consecrate the Eucharist without the intermediary of a bishop. People having different alleged gifts does not mean that manipulating and brainwashing is less likely.

9. Relationships being the heart of everything

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

9. Relationships cannot be everything to a Christian. The only exception is a relationship with God.

10. People being taught to think

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

10. Religions never teach the people how to think. Do they teach them the basic laws of logic? Those laws are really different forms of the rule that a is not b in the same way as it is a and at the same time. Anything varying from that is self-refuting. A contradiction is self-refutation. It is against your own dignity to let somebody be a self-refuter. They are trying to be inauthentic towards you. Say something politely.

Faith claims to be helped along by reason but beyond it. That means that you are taking a chance. What if what you think is beyond reason but is to be believed? It could be something against reason that is being mistaken for being beyond reason.

11. Balanced thinking rather than extremes in black and white

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

11. The notion that God comes first automatically endorses extremist thinking. It is putting belief in an entity above all things.

12. Non-defensive

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

How a faith that says you might go to Hell forever at death and that Satan is the god of this world and a Jesus who said that the whole world was in the hand of the Devil, the supreme fan of evil, can ask people to be non-defensive is a mystery.

13. Non-judgmental

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

Christianity says that sin has ruined God's creation, and forced Jesus to become man to die on the cross to atone for it and will take people to Hell to suffer forever. Obviously we should welcome being judged. It might save us from damnation. And to say that our sins put Jesus on the cross is judgemental. Nobody believes that people should be judged when there is no proof that they have done what they are accused of.

14. Reality-based

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

The Old Testament of the Bible and the Book of Mormon claim to record history. The faiths based on them try to corrupt history. No valid historian takes them seriously. We know that the Book of Mormon history is fictitious but if enough Mormons became historians it would ruin history forever.

Religion threatens our knowledge of the past.

15. Able to embrace our emotions

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

If sin is as bad as Christianity says, then we should fear any feeling that invites us to sin.

16. Able to embrace our humanity as evidenced in the ability to allow for mistakes

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

How can a religion that says human nature is sinful - ie we sin because we are sinners and it is not the case that we are sinners because we sin - seriously make point 16?

17. The ability to laugh

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

I'd not be as keen on laughing if I really believed that people could suffer in Hell for all eternity.

If God comes first that is no laughing matter. God cannot have a sense of humour for you need to be able to be surprised to have it. And God knows all so he cannot be surprised. Is putting such a being first going to make you more humorous? No.

4.

A. I think that each of the toxic roles is actually a counterfeit for genuine gifts and roles in the kingdom of God:

a. A person receives a vision from God to start a certain type of ministry, be it church or Sunday school. They articulate that vision and impart it to a group of people who partner with them to fulfil it, not to gain identity but as an outflow of the gifts of the Spirit exercised in faith. The difference between the persecutor and the true godly leader is motive and degree of control. The true leader obeys by faith and is secure enough to not be controlling. He/she does not lay down in front of the people and do what they say because of being afraid of them (cf. 1 Sam. 15.24), nor do they lord it over those they lead. The leader definitely leads but as a servant and an example to the flock

b. True leaders gladly submit themselves to a group of people with whom they can know and be known. They trust their council and value relationship with them above pursuit of the vision. They wait for them so they can walk together

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

Despite talk about the leader having to be really a servant the fact is that a true leader is not a servant. He is an authority and a superior. A leader playing at being a servant is not a servant.

1. The persecutor is the counterfeit for the real gift of leadership which God gives to a man or woman by the Holy Spirit

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

God himself sanctioned persecution in the Bible. The apostle Paul and Jesus both wanted people hated and ostracised for breaching Christian morality.

2. The co-conspirator is the counterfeit for true eldership and government

a. Leaders need an accountability and decision-making structure around them. They (leader and eldership) function together as coequals with different functions based on giftedness. Those who serve the leader who is serving them do so as those who already have an identity in God and are merely walking out their response to God's grace according to the measure of their faith. They are "elding" for the right reason

b. They are not "yes men" but neither are they of an interdependent spirit. They recognize the leadership gifting on the point person and trust in what God has put on him/her. They also trust that the leader understands how the elders complement that leadership and know that he/she will listen and heed their council. While the leader leads by giving direction and going first, they govern the church together

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

Not a single word is given in the Bible for helping accountability and decision making among the leadership. It preaches what leadership should be but gives no guidance in helping it be what it says it should be.

3. The enablers are the counterfeit for the true servant workforce in the church

a. Jesus told us to pray for labourers in the harvest, for the harvest was plentiful but the workers were few. Nehemiah saw to it that it was the people's job to build the wall around Jerusalem, not his. He saw to it that they had whatever they needed, training, supplies, etc.

b. The true workforce of the church is serving according to their spiritual gifts by faith and not for a sense of belonging and worth. They are not passive co-dependents who would enable the sickness of leadership because they need the sick system for their pain medication. They know they are not gifted in government so they trust that gifting on the eldership. But they also know that if they had a question, even a hard one, that the leaders would be open to their concern and make proper adjustments when necessary. They serve God, not the leader or vision, with joy in their hearts

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

An enabler in this case is a person who enables a religion to do evil. Merely being part of its structure or seeming to be contributing to its evil. The less need you have to be in the religion the more you are to blame for the problems. You are keeping up a system which creates the conditions for bad things to happen.

That is why Roman Catholics who think the Vatican is seriously evil are only hypocrites. And that is what they will be until they defect and depart.

4. The victims are the counterfeit for the godfearer fringe

a. These are those that attend the larger meetings and are trying to decide if they want to give themselves to the local church. Many are Christians who have had bad experiences in the church and are hesitant; some are frightened "pew sitters" who need to be loved into the family and joyful service, others are non Christians who are checking out the faith.

b. Whichever category, they are the fishing pond out of which disciples are made. Jesus chose 12 then 70 out of the crowd that followed him. What makes the difference whether these people become disciples or victims? Everything depends on the actions and motives of the group they are walking among. Is it healthy, glorifying Jesus and honouring personhood or is it toxic, glorifying the leader and denying personhood? Motive is everything.

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

This is interestingly humanistic. There is no mention of Christianity's irresponsible doctrine, "God is all-powerful. Thus you must trust in him to change hearts. Even the worst of sinners can change overnight. God is always waiting to transform them and all they need to do is ask."

5. Outcasts are the courageous detractors in the toxic system who are trying to bring health to something sick

Just as God will try to heal something that is sick, Satan will try to destroy something that is healthy. In the healthy system will be found both rebels and wolves

a. Rebels are Christians who for whatever reasons have enough wounding to create problems for members in the flock because of their sin. They are good people who are just not conscious of what they are doing and why. They may be caught in a sin and need to be restored gently (Gal. 6.1). They may be acting out congregational pain that they have not been able to understand. Whatever the case, the flock is called to a process of lovingly winning these rebels through ardent pursuit outlined in Matthew 18. This passage begins by talking about true shepherds who make lost sheep their priority. It then says we are to go to our brother who is in sin and try to win him. We are to offer numerous opportunities for repentance, each with a higher relational price. If losing relationship is worth something to the rebel (this is what separates rebels from wolves), then he/she will eventually repent and have a genuine heart change. The key to this process is love. The parable of the unmerciful servant which follows in the text highlights how the atmosphere needs to be permeated with forgiveness

b. There is a difference between the rebel and the wolf. Rebels are good people with wounds who need to be loved back to

health. Wolves are divisive people with hardened hearts who the enemy has planted with a strategy to destroy the fellowship. Titus says, "Warn a divisive person once, then twice, then have nothing to do with him" (3.10). Paul told the Corinthians to expel a wicked man from their midst (1 Cor. 5.13).

Discerning rebels from wolves and treating them accordingly is one of the jobs of eldership (even wolves are to be treated lovingly and with respect as human beings!). The difference is in the heart and the heart must be discerned.

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

This suggests that rebels are believers who have something against their Church for reasons they might not fully understand. It is said that sometimes it is necessary to end the relationship with the rebel to get them back on track. But read Matthew 18. Jesus said that the rebel was to be treated as a tax collector or a publican! In other words, treated with contempt not love.

Christianity when it follows Jesus properly is a toxic religion. Jesus said in Matthew 18 that the person is the problem - no love sinner and hate sin there!

The Bible text quoted does not distinguish between a rebel and a wolf. The wolf has to be a rebel. The rebel is a wolf for his intention is to cause division and trouble and to draw others into it. The text is manipulated because Jackson does not want to urge the Churches to expel all who stubbornly rebel. It's bad for the collection plate.

FINALLY

Faith being non-toxic is not enough. It needs to be helpful. Nobody can verify when or if it is helpful. They can only talk about what healthy faith looks like.