

Cliché Faith

by Josh Kleinlein

This past couple of weeks was the height of the sports season. Six sports had a major championship, baseball is in midseason, and football camps reconvene. Naturally, the news has been filled with numerous highlights and continuous interviews. Post game press conferences always seem to turn up something deemed “news worthy.” In reality, though, it is rare that professional athletes say anything either original or of any substance.

Most athletes’ answer to every question involves “my teammates,” “that’s how we were coached,” or “this one is for the fans.” These trite phrases are known as clichés. Sports clichés exist for one of two reasons. Either the athlete truly has no better comment, or the average sports fan is not deemed educated enough for an athlete’s X’s and O’s answer. In both cases, at least one party is satisfied with an immaterial response.

Though not readily acknowledged, much of the religious world fits into the same category. No matter what the doctrinal question, the answer is always “faith,” “grace,” or “love,” without any consideration of why or how. To the average listener, these replies are not only acceptable, but they are even regurgitated.

The problem with clichés is not that they are always wrong, but that they are never complete. In fact, when one says, “*By the skin of my teeth*” they are quoting from the Bible (Job 19:20). This should prove that clichés express some truth. However, this quote, out of context, doesn’t explain Job overcoming the loss of his teeth, family, and home through his unwavering faith.

Again, say someone asks, “How should I praise God in song?” You would be correct in saying, “Through faith and love!” Though the questioner may be content with the answer, you didn’t address “*singing with the spirit and understanding*” or instrumental music (1 Corinthians 14:15 and Eph 5:19). No one is benefited by such a discussion.

While we can’t control *how specific* of an answer is desired, we are commanded to convey as much truth as possible when asked (1 Pet 3:15). We are to be preparing diligently for such situations. Paul explains that only one properly trained in God’s word can avoid “*irreverent babblings that lead people into more ungodliness*” (2 Timothy 2:15-16). Paul is addressing the issue of uneducated, empty teaching or clichés.

We must be careful not to give “easy” answers to spiritual questions out of convenience. When Steven was falsely accused, the high priest asked, “*Are these things so?*” (Acts 7:1). Had Stephen answered, “You can trust them as far as you can throw them,” he might have lived on this earth a little longer. Yet, it could have eventually cost Stephen his soul. When the council at Jerusalem met to determine the Gentiles’ relationship to the law, one thought might have been, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” This would only have perpetuated, “*A yoke which none had been able to bear*” (Act 15:10).

For reasons of simplicity, it is tempting to teach and accept clichés. Nothing, though, could be more dangerous than watering down our salvation. Where would it end? Eventually, Jesus’ death would be just, “Bad things happen to good people.” May it never be!

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