

Four Spiritual Flaws

John 6:1-15

In 1952 Campus Crusade for Christ founder Bill Bright wanted to attract young, floundering, post-high school people to a life of faith, fulfillment, and commitment, and offered them four spiritual laws. The "laws" Bright proposed were far from rude and reactionary. Instead they were redeeming and revealing. And they've touched many people seeking direction and meaning in their adult lives.

Bill Bright's "Four Spiritual Laws" are these:

1. God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life.
2. Man is sinful and separated from God. Therefore, {man} cannot know and experience God's love and plan for {his} life.
3. Jesus Christ is God's only provision for [man's] sin. Through Him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life.
4. We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives.

These guidelines continue to be the mainstay of the evangelical outreach of the Campus Crusade for Christ to this day.

But that doesn't mean we don't still get it wrong, everyday, everywhere, whether we're teen-aged, college-aged, middle-aged, or elder-aged. Whatever our generation, we are all completely capable of living according to "spiritual flaws" instead of "spiritual laws."

From our lesson this morning, you might even say that the typical human reaction to the insertion of the divine into human life is the exercise of "spiritual flaws" instead of an embracing of "spiritual laws."

Only two miracles are recorded by all four gospel writers: the miracle of Jesus' resurrection, and this week's extravagant, big audience, "ta-dah" miracle - the "feeding of the five thousand."

Gospel writers and biblical scholars agree to disagree about whether this was five thousand "men," and a bunch of women and children, or five thousand people which included five thousand women and children. Either way, they understand that it was a large crowd, and everyone was hungry.

The crowd had come seeking miraculous healings and instead experienced the miracle of full stomachs, satisfying their need for the sustenance of food and water. And once their physical hunger had been satisfied, Jesus could address the spiritual hunger within them.

Let's look at the "four spiritual flaws" that many of us apply to our lives every day.

Spiritual Flaw #1: The notion that **the spiritual and the material are separate**, or that the material is inconsequential to the spiritual.

It's easy to make fun of songs about the "sweet bye and bye," and the "pie in the sky bye and bye." It's easy, that is, until you're so poor that the "pie in the sky" is about all you have to eat.

Physical life is not a be-all and end-all. But neither is it inconsequential. Jesus become "incarnate." Jesus took on material form. Jesus assumed a human body. Jesus felt hunger, thirst, exhaustion, injury, aging. Every church youth group should be reminded that Jesus went through adolescence and puberty, and survived!

One of the "spiritual flaws" exhibited in today's text is the belief that faith is all about the spiritual, and that all we have to do is wait for things to be better in the sweet "bye-and-bye-in-the-sky." Wrong.

The feeding of the five thousand flies in the face of such "wait-until-you-get-to-heaven" ideologies. Faced with a crowd that had tracked him down because of his miracle-working abilities, Jesus is first and foremost concerned with getting them something to eat.

Not impressing them with his feats of power. Not show-casing show-stopping miraculous healings. Not convincing anyone in the crowd of anything. Jesus was just as concerned for their rumbling bellies as he was for their shrunken souls. And his actions fed both.

Instead of "pie in the sky bye and bye" Jesus offered fish and bread in the here and now, simple and sustaining food for today.

Spiritual Flaw #2: the belief that **"I can do it on my own!"** As long as the crowd remained standing, they retained control over their own destiny. They could go off on their own and get some food. They could go home. To remain standing is to say "I can feed myself. I can do it on my own."

Jesus says to all of us "I-can-do-it-on-my-own" types, "Sit Down." Or in other words, Trust me. Put your future in my hands.

Jesus asks Philip how the crowd can be fed. Overwhelmed he responds with mathematical figures that guarantee failure. The miniscule portion that Andrew offered as a possible "idea" is a recipe for failure.

Both responses proved that they could not "do it on their own." Five thousand strangers. A barren wilderness. Everyone is hungry. Feed them. Only by relying on a power outside themselves could a positive answer be offered, a positive outcome assured.

Nothing is possible in this world until the people of God listen to Jesus and obey His command. In sitting down, they released their future to a power outside their control. They submitted themselves to a power greater than themselves. They reclined in order to dine.

And with nothing except the equivalent of half a "happy meal" for five thousand people, it takes a huge leap of faith to park your posterior on the green grass and wait for what God has to offer.

Spiritual Flaw #3: **The "straight and narrow" is the easy path.** Where did we get the notion that the "straight and narrow" path is straightforward, straight-faced and the shortest distance between two points?

In today's text Jesus' "path" takes those who follow him across the Sea of Galilee, into the wilderness, up a mountain, all in order to voluntarily face an evening without food or shelter. It's a course that is not very straight nor narrow nor short. Living out the call of God's will, following Jesus' path for life, is definitely NOT straight and narrow.

Discipleship is a winding path that always is surprising and rarely "safe." We claim to be followers of Christ, but can we follow Christ on all the curves and around all the bends even during those times when we can't see what's ahead of us? Jesus didn't call us to follow him down easy paths, but promised instead that he'd lead us every step of the way wherever the journey takes us.

Spiritual Flaw #4: **"It is what it is."** Which is a favorite cliché of our day: "It is what it is." But it's flawed. Life is NOT what it is; life is what you make it.

This past year we've been horrified at the enormity of evil born in the human heart. Who can understand the evil that lurks in the human heart?

After every volcanic eruption of evil there's this question: why is there evil and suffering in the world? Why doesn't God just blot all of the bad things out?

But the Christian answer to the problem of evil is unlike any other answer of any other religion. Because Christians don't answer the question with a philosophy or with a panacea or with a position paper. Christians answer the question of "Why evil?" with a person.

A person nailed to a cross, bearing for us and sharing with us the worst that evil can throw at us. The unspoken words from the cross from that person, the very Son of God, are these: Evil may seem mighty, but God is Almighty. You are not alone. Amen.