

## Faults, Foibles, and Idiosyncrasies

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In the introduction to this paper is an excerpt from a local newspaper article, and although the methodology being employed does not reflect the opinion of this website, it nevertheless contains an important principle. The article reads as follows:

One of the toughest tasks a church faces is choosing a good minister. A member of a church board understanding this painful process finally lost patience. He'd just witnessed the Pastoral Relations Committee reject applicant after applicant for some minor fault – real or imagined. It was time for a bit of soul-searching on the part of the committee. So he stood up and read this letter purporting to be from another applicant.

Gentlemen: Understanding your pulpit is vacant, I should like to apply for the position. I'm over 50 years of age and have preached in one place for more than three years. In some places, I have left town after my work caused riots and disturbances. I must admit I have been in jail three or four times, but not because of any real wrongdoing. My health is not too good, though I still accomplish a great deal. I've not gotten along well with religious leaders in the towns where I have preached. In fact, some have threatened me, and even attacked me physically. I am not too good at keeping records. I have been known to forget whom I have baptized. However, if you can use me, I promise to do my best for you.

The board member turned to the committee and said, 'Well, what do you think? Shall we call him? 'The good church folks were appalled! Consider a sickly, trouble making, absent-minded ex-jailbird? Was the board member crazy? Who signed the application? Who had such colossal nerve?'

The board member eyed them all keenly before he replied; then he said, "It's signed: The Apostle Paul.

Obviously these church folks were fooled by the faults, foibles and idiosyncrasies of an individual who turned out to be the Apostle Paul! Just like the Pastoral Relations Committee mentioned above, we too can be fooled by the short comings of others, and as a result we can end up avoiding them, gossiping about them, or rejecting them altogether. As the saying goes, we don't want to, "throw the baby out with the bathwater."

As God expects His people to be helping one another, and esteeming others as better than themselves (Phil. 2:3-4), we need to recognize how we deal with the things that make us all different, unique, and interesting. We can look at these differences either negatively or positively. The choice is ours, but as we will see, it is always better to encourage the positive treatment of each others' differing traits unless they are contrary to God's will or harmful to other people.

To begin with, we need to really believe what Christ said in Matthew, and we need to put it into practice,

And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? <sup>4</sup>Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? <sup>5</sup>Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye (Mt. 7:3-5; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted).

In these two verses Christ is telling us that we need to view our faults, foibles and idiosyncrasies as being worse than our brothers'; not the other way around. Whether we want to admit it or not, our human nature views the faults, foibles and idiosyncrasies of others as being worse than our

own. This is one of the reasons we can be quick to tear others down, or reject them altogether, rather than examine ourselves first.

Part of the problem is related to our attitudes being affected by the *god* of this world (2Cor. 4:4; Gr. *theos*), because he wants each of us to believe that we are better than others. This way we are able to convince ourselves that the way we do things is better, the way we reason is better, and so on.

And you he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked according to **the course** (Greek: *aion*, *aeon*) of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:1-2; emphasis added; Ed. note in parenthesis).

So the *god* of this present world system, Satan, wants each of us to believe that we are better than others, and this will lead to a number of serious problems such as looking down on others as being inferior to us, or viewing ourselves as being more righteous than others, followed in some cases by “lording it over others” in one form or another (cf. Mt. 20:25-26; Lk. 22:25-26).

Going back now to Matthew 7:3-4, what is interesting about these verses is what Christ did **not** say. He did **not** say, “why do you look at your brother’s sin, but not consider the sin in your own life.” Christ wouldn’t compare sin to a speck because if we have broken one commandment it is the same as breaking them all, and one sin still earns us the death penalty (Rom. 6:23).

For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all (Jas. 2:10).

So what’s really being discussed is comparing ourselves amongst ourselves, using the yardstick of a speck versus a plank (cf. 2Cor. 10:12). Again, Christ would not refer to sin as being a speck. So he is referring to something other than sin; the phrase faults, foibles and idiosyncrasies seems to describe these differences between people and, also covers some of the areas that we tend to focus on as human beings.

Before going any further, we need to examine what is meant by faults, foibles and idiosyncrasies beginning with the dictionary definition of *fault*,

A mistake or error. A character weakness - especially a minor one.

An example of this word in action we could say something like, “*Joe Blogs* has a fault because he often locks his keys in the car.” It’s easy to see a fault like this in another person, but do we use their fault as an opportunity to examine our own behavior? Maybe we have never locked our keys in the car, but maybe we often turn up late for work. Both are faults that need to be worked on rather than viewing one as being better or worse than another.

So when we see the faults of others it can often be deceptive because we also have faults that need to be worked on. But when we view others as being worse than ourselves, we no longer view our shortcomings as being all that bad. There can also be a tendency to ignore our shortcomings altogether. Instead, we should continually examine our own attitudes and conduct, and then follow through to make the necessary changes in our lives. After all, we can control our own conduct, but we can’t control the conduct of others.

*Foibles* by dictionary definition is,

A minor weakness or failing of character.

It comes from the weaker section of a sword blade from the middle to the tip. As an example of this word in action, we could say something like, “*Jane Doe* can’t travel by ship because she always gets sea sick!” Again, we need to realize that we are not God and therefore we all have our own unique weaknesses. So if someone has a weakness that annoys us, use it to examine our own unique foibles rather than becoming critical of someone else’s.

Another example of a weakness could be allergies. Some people can’t eat nuts because they have a reaction that can be serious in some cases. In a situation like this, it might be annoying to an individual who just put a lot of effort into baking a cake only to find out that their guest can’t eat it because walnuts were used in the batter. On the other hand, you could use this occasion to remember those weaknesses you have, and thereby become more compassionate toward people with food allergies.

Consequently, by recognizing and admitting that we all have foibles, it is easier to grow in love, patience and compassion toward other people’s perceived shortcomings

Idiosyncrasy by dictionary definition is,

A behavioral characteristic peculiar to an individual.

In most cases idiosyncrasies are habits that are formed. Often, we are not conscious of them until someone points them out. For instance, *Joe Blogs* always plays with his glasses when he is speaking in a public setting. Now we can make fun of this idiosyncrasy, or use it to examine what idiosyncrasies we have. If you don’t think you have any noticeable idiosyncrasies, ask your spouse, a close friend, or a relative, and chances are they will enlighten you.

Although an idiosyncrasy can be an obvious physical habit, it can also be a distinct behavioral characteristic as the dictionary definition states. We will see a Biblical example of this later.

If someone has an obvious idiosyncrasy, there’s nothing wrong with mentioning it to them in a kind manner, and perhaps think about an idiosyncrasy you used to have and share how you overcame it when you are addressing the individual in question. This is the helpful and kind way of assisting someone else.

Idiosyncrasies can be endearing, or annoying depending on our attitude and perspective. For instance, in a happy marriage your spouse’s idiosyncrasies are probably cute, but in an unhappy marriage your spouse’s idiosyncrasies are probably annoying, irritating, and may soon become grounds for divorce.

Having described the terms faults, foibles and idiosyncrasies, let’s look at some of these in the Bible.

We’ll start with *faults* because the Bible is full of these, and they’re not always sinful although they could lead to sin.

The earlier example of a person always locking their keys in their car is a fault - not a sin. However, if they keep doing this, one day they may lock themselves out of their car in an emergency situation and then end up stealing someone else’s car because it just happened to be idling a short distance away while the owner went into a store.

Bearing this in mind, let's look briefly at a fault that Jacob had,

Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. <sup>30</sup>And Esau said to Jacob, 'Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary.' Therefore his name was called Edom (i.e. Red). <sup>31</sup>But Jacob said, 'Sell me your birthright as of this day.' <sup>32</sup>And Esau said, 'Look, I am about to die; so what profit shall this birthright be to me?' <sup>33</sup>Then Jacob said, 'Swear to me as of this day.' So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob (Gen. 25:29-33; Ed. note in parenthesis)

Jacob had the fault of exploiting any situation even if it meant exploiting a family member; in this case his own brother. In today's world, many business people would argue that this was not a fault but a virtue. The Bible, however, shows that this is a fault because it led to Jacob eventually dishonoring his own father and lying to him (Gen. 27:18-24). So this was a character fault that led to sin.

To help Jacob see that his fault had become a sin, God allowed Laban to exploit Jacob for seven years and then trick him into marrying the wrong daughter (Gen. 29:25). To add insult to injury, Jacob then had to serve Laban another seven years for the wife he had originally requested (Gen. 28:27).

Another fault could be procrastination. This is not a sin, but could lead to sin. For instance, if someone came to realize that they need to stop their normal work activities on the weekly Sabbath, but decided to wait for an indefinite period of time before asking their boss for the day off work, they are now guilty of breaking the law; hence, they have sinned (Jas. 4:17).

As mentioned earlier, we all have faults and rather than criticizing one another, we need to look closely at our own because they could lead us to sin. This does not mean that we should ignore the faults of others; especially if we can see those faults leading to sin. Instead, we should try and help someone avoid going in that direction.

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted (Gal. 6:1).

We are told in the verse above to be gentle when we try to help others with their faults because we also need help with ours. Human nature exploits the faults of others so that we look better or profit in some way; but this is not a godly trait. God's nature wants to help and serve others. We need to examine which method we use the most in our relationship with our fellow man.

Let's now move to *foibles*.

Moses had a weakness when it came to public speaking and expressing himself well (Ex. 4:10). This does not mean that he was stupid because Acts 7:22 tells us plainly that he wasn't.

What is important to us, is the fact that God expected Moses to do His Work despite his speech difficulties or weaknesses, and we need to encourage one another to persevere despite our weaknesses; which we all have.

The Body of Christ is not known for its physical strength, good health, riches or large numbers of people (2Cor. 12:7-9). You could say that it is more like a collective foible. So the last thing an individual should be doing is criticizing the foibles, or weaknesses of other people. Instead,

each person needs to keep encouraging others not to give up. Ideally, everyone should have the attitude of Barnabas who was known as “the son of encouragement” (Ac. 4:36).

Finally, we'll look at idiosyncrasies.

Before going to a scriptural example, it is important to remember that an idiosyncrasy is not inherently good or evil. It is a characteristic unique to, or associated with, an individual such as the example of *Joe Blogs* playing with his glasses when speaking in a public setting. Therefore Joe Blogs is now associated with this behavior because it is unique to him. However, there is every likelihood that someone else, in this big wide world, may have this same characteristic, or habit. However, not everyone you meet does. So you could say that an idiosyncrasy is the opposite of commonplace.

Joe Blog's wife might find his idiosyncrasy cute or humorous, while someone else might find it irritating.

The problem with an idiosyncrasy is that it can be “the straw that breaks the camel's back”. In other words, if someone already doesn't like us because of other faults, and foibles that we have, then the last straw can be an idiosyncrasy that they find completely irritating. As a consequence, they lash out at us, or reject us altogether. Again, this is often the process that takes place when people separate as spouses, friends, or business associates.

The Apostle Peter had an idiosyncrasy that made him quite distinct from the other eleven that followed Christ, and we see it exhibited in a number of different situations. If you were to try and describe this idiosyncrasy in one word, it would probably be “impetuous.” At first glance, you might think that being impetuous is a fault, but by definition it is a characteristic not a fault. If not handled properly, however, this characteristic could lead to problems, as we will see.

By dictionary definition, impetuous means,

Characterized or prompted by sudden energy, emotion, or the like; having great impetus.

In John 13:8-9, Peter was associated with high energy and a quick response in various situations. This could be irritating to a lot of people but because Christ loved Peter, he simply used this idiosyncrasy as an opportunity to teach a valuable lesson.

Sometimes however, even an idiosyncrasy can lead to problems.

Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus (Jn. 18:10).

To put this into a modern setting, we need to examine our idiosyncrasies to make sure that they do not cause someone to get hurt in a spiritual sense. We need to handle the idiosyncrasies of others as Christ did. He was patient and would work with every idiosyncrasy in a manner that would benefit the individual.

This brings us to the obvious question, and that is, “If God works with all of our faults, foibles and idiosyncrasies, why do we often find it so difficult to do the same with one another?” The simple and painful answer is that we haven't yet learned how to love one another to the point where we can work together with care and patience over the long haul. Instead, we can find it

easier to simply give up on one another, wash our hands, and walk away. Human nature is quite clear on this position (Gen. 4:9).

Although dealing with the faults, foibles, and idiosyncrasies of others can be very demanding, we need to remember that God deals with ours in a very patient, kind, and loving manner. One of the reasons people are called by God at this time is to learn the skills necessary to deal with a myriad of different people and their faults, foibles, and idiosyncrasies during the millennial rule of Jesus Christ on this earth (Rev. 5:10). Having said all this, we can not expect to become masters at handling each other's differences perfectly because even some of God's most loyal and effective servants sometimes failed at this task, and the Bible even records it for our benefit,

Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see* how they are doing." <sup>37</sup>Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. <sup>38</sup>But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. <sup>39</sup>Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; <sup>40</sup>but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. <sup>41</sup>And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches (Ac. 15:36-41; cf. Gal. 2:11ff).

There are a number of valuable lessons we can learn from this incident, but the most important lesson is the fact that neither Paul nor Barnabas allowed this difference over John Mark to get in the way of continuing to do God's Work. They put their differences aside, and kept moving forward. Obviously Paul had a different opinion of John Mark and must have viewed John Mark's departing in Pamphylia as a fault making him unreliable in Paul's mind. On the other hand, Barnabas looked at this fault differently and was willing to give John Mark another chance. Who's to say what the right decision was in this situation? The point is that the faults of others need not prevent us from continuing to move forward in our relationship with God, and also in continuing to do God's Work.

How we handle the faults, foibles and idiosyncrasies of others, no matter how difficult it may be, is very important to God. He takes note of how we do in this area of our life, and we know this is true otherwise there would have been no mention of the dispute between Paul and Barnabas in the Bible or the incident mentioned in Galatians 2:11ff. How we deal with the unique differences of others will show our Father how we are likely to deal with those who enter the millennial rule of Jesus Christ. Some people will make this job very challenging, but we must learn to deal with many different personalities in order to be better equipped to deal with the difficult cases, including all those who come up in the second resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6). The following scriptural commands show us how to be successful in this process,

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself (Phil. 2:3).

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith (Rom. 12:3).

Although we are all different and unique individuals with differing backgrounds, experiences, and personalities, we need to work toward being of one mind or approach when it comes to living God's way of life. One of the reasons individuals are placed into the Body of Christ is to learn to work together and help one another toward a common goal. As, scripture says, Christ is not divided (1Cor. 1:13; 2Cor. 11:4).

And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the son of God, to a perfect man (i.e. person), to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; <sup>14</sup>that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive (Eph. 4:11-14).

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:5).

The Only True God created each human being to be unique but he also gave His Holy Spirit to those who have been called according to His purpose, and have repented of their sins, so that they can all work together as one body and be conformed to be like Jesus Christ now,

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His son, that he (i.e. Christ) might be the firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:29; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Therefore, those who are called to this responsibility now must strive to be at peace with all men (cf. 2Cor. 13:11; 2Pt. 3:14), especially those in the household of God (Gal. 6:10; 1Pt. 4:17) by being kind and patient about the faults, foibles, and idiosyncrasies of others and by, examining ourselves to make sure we are of the same mind and purpose as exhibited by Jesus Christ who was patient with everyone he worked with (1Cor. 11:28; 2Cor. 13:5).

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor.11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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