

Favorite Brands

I've lived long enough to be at a point that I have a "favorite" brand of a whole slough of things from foods to toiletries to fishing tackle (don't get ahead of me, this isn't an article about fishing gear). I've also lived well enough to be at a point that I not only "prefer" my favorite brands of all these things, but I buy them almost exclusively. But these favorite brands weren't chosen haphazardly or without experimentation. The process of elimination and experience helped me choose them. Admittedly, a few of these "favorites" are purely subjective. I really prefer one particular brand of mayonnaise, but in a blind taste test (organized by my wife!), I liked another one other just as well and couldn't really tell the difference. Other, more expensive "favorites" came to be so by trying less-expensive options and "paying the price" for going cheap- sometimes, you DO "get what you pay for" in the long run. So, what does any of this have to do with spiritual matters? A couple of things, actually:

- Unfortunately, some people choose their favorite "brand" of religion like I chose mayonnaise... not the "blind taste test" part, but the "purely subjective" part. They pick a "favorite" based solely on personal preference. Which one tastes/feels/looks best to them. While this method is fine for mayonnaise, it's lousy for religion. The reason is simply this: Religion is supposed to be about HIM (God- the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) and His preferences not "me" and mine. Otherwise, we wind up *"enemies of the cross of Christ... whose god is their own appetite"* destined for "destruction" because we *"set their (our) minds on earthly things,"* Phil.3:18-19.
- Also, our responsibility regarding religion is not one of "choice" but "discovery." Here's what I mean. Rather than catering to our own personal preferences, our real obligation is supposed to be finding "truth" and those who teach and practice it with which to affiliate. In the end, the line between "saved" and "lost" is determined by one thing: whether or not we *"receive the love of truth so as to be saved,"* 2Thess.2:10. If we desire the "truth" of God over our own personal preferences, if we are relentless in our pursuit of it and unwavering in our commitment to obeying it, eternal salvation is promised. But if we are instead willing to simply find what pleases or "feels right to me," we'll get exactly what we "pay for"... *"self-made religion"* that has *"no value against fleshly indulgence"* (cf. Col.2:23) or eternal value.
- Beware, therefore, of anyone or group that attempts to "brand" itself in some way to appeal to masses. Truth is truth. Jesus didn't attempt to "package" or "brand" it for "mass appeal" or to "cater" to personal or group preferences. He told "the masses" that *"If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple,"* and added, *"Whoever does not carry his own cross (not as a religious symbol, but an instrument of personal destruction!) and come after Me cannot be My disciple,"* Luke 14:26-27. In our day of personal preferences and favorite brands or His, that won't "appeal" or "sell" to the masses... but it will secure eternal salvation.

"Yes," you CAN "choose the church/religion of YOUR choice"... but why WOULD you? What you believe, practice, and preach matters, cf. Matt.7:21ff. Why not *"learn what is pleasing to the Lord"* (Eph.5:10) rather than just placating yourself with your own particular "favorite" brand of religion? (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org)