

From the Desk of Tom Nelson:

The Gimper

The chaplain of Dallas seminary in the years I attended was Dr. Richard Seume. He was a tall, stately, ex-pastor with the theatrical voice and booming singing voice perfect for leading us in hymns. And he coined the term, "Gimper." A Gimper was a Christian who was not content with mediocrity or status quo. He was one who went above and beyond. The impassioned man. The excellent committed man. The man of the minority.

From one end of the Bible to the other, and even throughout the history of the church, there have always been "Gimpers." Men and women of the road less taken. Those who break from the pack. Men of distinction. Pacesetters. Those who wanted more. Adventurers.

The Old Testament economy demanded a sin offering for violating moral law, but also gave a place for burnt, grain and peace offerings for those of devotion, thankfulness and the love of God. The Gimpers. Leviticus 27 gave a system of valuation should one wish to pay money to dedicate his life or child or house or animals. These dedications were not required, but were above and beyond. For the Gimpers. In the same way, a Nazirite vow was for anyone who sought a time of special devotion. A woman could devote herself to service in the Temple. Both Debra in her song of praise and Nehemiah blessed God "for those who volunteered" in sacrificial service. Both in Moses's day and in the days the prophets, "those who feared God" rallied to the temple to pray in times of national distress. The New Testament in 1st Timothy 5 speaks of "the list" of widows who were designated for special recognition. Gimpers all.

The history of the church is much the story of the Gimper. In the first three centuries of the faith, it was the martyrs who had gone above and beyond. So venerated were these "Confessors" that the cultic ideas of relics (mementos of their lives or even their bodies) and even prayers to them to intercede in heaven became part of the Medieval church. After the legalization of the faith under Constantine, being a Christian became acceptable and even advantageous to social advancement. Martyrdom was no longer a possibility. The Gimpers became the hermits who withdrew from the fast compromising church to live alone in the Egyptian countryside in contemplation, study and prayer. In time, these solitary men organized into "monasteries" and thus became the new standard of self sacrifice. The Gimpers had become monks. In time, however, monasteries became centers of commercial activity and even luxury — and then laziness, pride, and even lust. In a Medieval reform came Francis of Assisi and his order of "Franciscans" with their vow of poverty and service — a discipleship which was true to the standard of Christ.

After the Protestant Reformation and the splintering of Lutherans, Anglicans, the Reformed church and Arminianism, the faith often became argumentative confessionalism. It became a continual debate between groups on what was right. The Gimpers were the Pietists who realized Christianity was more than doctrinal correctness and organized Lutherans into small groups of Bible study, prayer, and accountability — i.e. discipleship. From Pietism would arise the modern missions movement.

As England lolled about in the dead tradition of its Anglicanism, the stiff breeze of Wesleyanism began to blow. John Wesley, the ultimate Gimper, organized his "method" into "method-ism" with its home study groups, personal quiet times, zeal for holiness, giving to missions and, above all, its revolutionary idea (at least for its time) of the necessity of the rebirth. These reforms would come to America in what would become "Evangelicalism." A clear distinction had arisen between simply church membership and the reality of a vital personal relationship with God. Gimpers!

The 20th century saw theological liberalism — the denial of the miraculous aspects of the faith — infiltrate every denomination in the US. And with this, the loss of the Evangelical perspective spread throughout American churches. There arose the Gimpers. First, Fundamentalists who fought for, and if need be, separated from liberal denominations to form the Fundamentalist movement. But as Fundamentalists withdrew from society in fear of contamination, there arose the parachurch phenomenon of the 20th century. Campus Crusade, Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, The Navigators, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Young Life, Youth for Christ, Child Evangelism Fellowship and others who upheld inerrancy, the rebirth and discipleship. They aggressively penetrated the growing secular campuses of the mid 1900's.

My point? Don't settle for mediocrity in your Christian life. Don't just show up and attend and listen to God's truth. Separate yourself from the great gray mass and the twilight of indifference. Study, apply, seek after God, share your faith, be a prayer warrior, seek to be a reproducer, fruitful — a disciplemaker. Be willing to dream and suffer and take the hits of those who walk alone. Commit!

Break from the pack. Be distinguished.

Be a Gimper!

I'm still not sure what it means, but I sure know how to spot one.