
BY-ENDS OF FAIR-SPEECH

BY-ENDS—what a strange name. But then, John Bunyan is the chief inventor of unusual titles, not the least of which are the residents of By-ends' hometown, Fair-speech. Residing there we also find Lord Turn-about, Lord Time-server, Mr. Smooth-man, Mr. Facing-both-ways and others.

Christian meets By-ends right outside Vanity Fair on the way to the Celestial City. The latter cleverly avoids giving his name, yet he wastes no time sharing his pedigree, his religion and his family tree. It is significant to the discussion that Christian recognizes this new companion as By-ends of the town of Fair-speech; however, this is quickly brushed aside as a nickname given to him by those who are intolerant of his way of life. By-ends wants religious people to recognize him, not by this name, but by something more honorable and less controversial.

What does the name "By-ends" mean, and why does Bunyan choose such an odd name? By-ends seeks to employ religion for his own gain. He makes a profession of faith in the midst of the church but only so that he may advance his agenda. He has ulterior motives other than the glory of Christ and the advancement of His kingdom. He dresses self-advancement and self-glory in religious robes.

The first part of By-ends' motto in life is "we never strive against wind and tide." It is the opinion of public sentiment that drives him. It is the approval of the group by which he gains his recognition and standing. The

"strict religionist" is too narrow and unreasonable for him. It is the endorsement of the majority and not divine revelation, which sets the direction of his life.

Secondly, "we are always most zealous when religion goes in his silver slippers; we love much to walk with him in the street, if the sun shines and the people applaud him." When religion is popular and acceptable and prestigious, it suits By-ends just fine. In the gospel account, Jesus rode into Jerusalem to the cheers of the multitudes (Luke 19). The crowds were ecstatic with the appearance of their king riding in prophetic splendor. Here is religion in "silver slippers." Shortly, however, we find the throng scattered, right down to the last disciple. Jesus is alone because "wind and tide" had turned, and it was no longer popular to follow Christ (Mark 14:27).

We must also see that By-ends not only opposed any identification of himself, he also resisted any definition of the faith: "You must not impose, nor lord it over my faith; leave me to my liberty" In essence, he is saying, "Let me believe what I want to believe; my opinion has every bit of value as yours." It is the quintessential ecumenical spirit—the spirit of our age calling for tolerance and diversity of opinion as the basis of fellowship and unity. Any other position is now considered far right, religious and extreme.

Jesus counters this kind of thinking by saying, "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27).
