

Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?

Ask someone who Jesus is and you might get a variety of answers. Sadly, the identity of Christ in our modern day largely depends on the opinion of the individual. While many can recite orthodox statements heard from the pulpit concerning the person of Jesus, the role and personality projected on Him varies greatly. We often find bits and pieces about Him we like, discard those we dislike, and manufacture our very own “jesus”. This Jesus tends to be safe and convenient, and will easily adapt to help our life at the moment.

But often our perception of Christ is handicapped, not by our understanding of His deity, but rather a misguided view of His **character and actions**. This is the issue that seems to provoke much confusion. And in an age rife with counterfeits, the REAL Jesus is far less obvious than we may realize.

So how can we counteract this malady? Perhaps the answer to this is rather simple. To conquer the culturally relevant “jesus” of our day we must study Christ's life through the Word of God without relying on men's opinions. Only this will help us obtain a true portrait of His character. As such, we might begin to appreciate His revolutionary lifestyle and better prepare ourselves to follow His example.

So let's begin by examining the core attributes of Christ's character, specifically the areas of His life that are most emphasized in the Gospels:

COMPASSIONATE & LOVING

Christ's compassion and love compelled Him to help the crowds that followed Him. While aware that those who came to Him were vulnerable and helpless, “like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36), He never once exploited them for gain. Instead, He healed their diseases (Matthew 14:14; 20:34), taught them the way of salvation, and when they were hungry, produced enough food to feed more than 5,000 (Matthew 15:32).

While the theme of Christ's love is expressed throughout the Gospels, the story of Lazarus offers a profound look into His emotions and feelings. Notice:

*...now Jesus **loved** Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus... Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if*

*thou hadst been here, my brother had not died... Jesus **wept**... Then said the Jews, Behold how he **loved** him!* (Jn. 11:5; 32; 35; 36).

Even though Jesus knew that He would soon recover Lazarus from death, he was moved with great emotion when beholding Martha and Mary's grief. And just like us, Jesus shed tears and wept openly. **Clearly, Christ Jesus was not awkward about expressing His love at the emotional level too.**

SERIOUS & FOCUSED

Christ lived with a singular purpose. His mission was to save mankind. As a result, He was a serious, motivated, and focused man. **He was never passive or complacent.** He refused to be sidetracked, knowing the magnitude of His work and the little time left Him (Lk. 2:49; 4:43; 13:33).

SERVANT & SELFLESS

The attitude of Jesus was that of a servant. He did not come to **be served**, but to **serve others** (Mark 10:45; Jn. 13:14).

OBEDIENT

Christ's entire life can be summed up in one word—obedience. Christ was sinlessly perfect because of His **complete obedience** to the Father's will. Jesus obeyed the Father by leaving heaven to live in this world as a man. He knew that dying on the cross was the only way to secure our salvation and so He submitted Himself to His Father's plan despite the intense suffering it would require. The night of His betrayal, Jesus prayed the following: *O my father, if it be possible, take this cup of suffering from Me: nevertheless **not what I will, but as thou wilt*** (Matthew 26:39). This simple prayer is perhaps the best illustration of Christ's submissive nature.

Note: Christ submitted Himself to all of His earthly authorities such as His parents and government leaders just as perfectly as with His Father (Luk. 2:51; Mat. 17:27). As such, Christ is our supreme instructor of obedience.

MERCIFUL & FORGIVING

While hanging on the cross in deep agony, Jesus cried out: *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing* (Luke 23:34). This plea was made on behalf of those who were directly responsible for His murder. Such an act of forgiveness is rare, but Christ was the first to display it.

Yet even today Jesus sits at the right hand of God to make intercession for us:
*Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, **seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them*** (Heb. 7:25).

Our Savior offers mercy and forgiveness to any who would simply confess their faults before Him: *if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness* (1 Jn. 1:9).

TRUTHFUL

Christ never violated His own Word and always spoke the truth **even if it offended the Pharisees** and eventually cost Him His life. As a result, He alone is able to lead us on the supreme path of truth: *I am the way, the **truth**, and the life...* (Jn 14:6).

PRAYERFUL

Christ's life and ministry are full of examples illustrating His profound devotion to prayer. Clearly, prayer was of supreme importance to our Savior:

*And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart **to pray**: and when the evening was come, he was there alone* (Mat 14:23).

*Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, **while I go and pray yonder*** (Mat 26:36).

*And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain **to pray**, and continued all night in prayer to God* (Luk 6:12).

AUTHORITATIVE

When Jesus was angered by the moneychangers and those who were buying and selling in the temple, His manner immediately changed and He rebuked their hypocrisy with an authoritative demeanor: *It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer; but you have made it a robbers den!* (Mat. 21:13). In fact, during this one occasion Jesus even used a whip to drive out those who were violating the law by turning the temple into a “house of merchandise” (Jn. 2:13-16). Obviously, the “gentle Jesus, meek and mild” that we often hear about was out of character in this example....or was He? It is clear that Jesus was not a weak leader and **when necessary, knew how to exercise rebuke and discipline.**

PATIENT

Jesus exercised great patience with those who were helpless and small in their own

eyes. But He was intolerant toward any with a self-righteous and “holier than thou” attitude, which characterized the Pharisees of His day. Any who seek Christ with a humble heart will be rewarded with the same unfailing patience: *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some understand slowness but is **patient toward you**, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9).

So these are just a few of the traits that defined Christ’s character and caused many to be drawn to Him. As Believers, we should aspire wholeheartedly to emulate His example. The things that drew people to Jesus should be the very things that draw people to us today. God's desire is that we are conformed to the character of His Son (Romans 8:29). But this will only come about as we yield to the real Jesus, as LORD of the universe, and not the “Jesus” of our imagination.

WHAT DID JESUS DO?

Christians often pose the question, “what would Jesus do?” But perhaps we should turn this question around and ask, “what *did* Jesus *do*?” You see, the Bible offers enough information about Christ's life that we can know exactly what Jesus would do because of what He *did* do. So what are the things Jesus did which our modern culture has conveniently ignored?

For a start, most of Christ’s activity was spent in teaching His disciples the perfect way of salvation. He preached against sin and **did not make Himself popular** with the political or religious establishment of His day. Those who found themselves condemned by His message were the usual hypocrites and impostors who then devised ways to kill Him. Yet while Jesus rebuked the evil actions of the Pharisees, He comforted the sinners and gave them the means necessary to be set free from their sinful habits. As a result, we can analyze Christ’s attitude and actions based on His interaction with either the Pharisees or the sinners. His relationship with these two groups reveals the most about His life and teachings.

CHRIST'S MANNER OF COMMUNICATION

What was Jesus like in His communication with others? Was He soft-spoken and reserved, mild, formal? Was He extra careful not to “step on any toes” or offend anyone? Actually, not at all! On the contrary, **Jesus was not a timid man**. In fact, Christ was a bold communicator and spoke in a manner that was **frank and direct**. He refused to “beat around the bush” and never minced His words. He expressed His views openly, even if at times it seemed inappropriate or out of place. As a result, many were offended

by His manner of speech. And His dialogue with the Pharisees was a good indication of it. Just notice these verses:

And as he spake, a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him: and he went in, and sat down to meat. And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not

*first washed before dinner. And the Lord said unto him, **Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also? But woe unto you, Pharisees! Then answered one of the lawyers, and said unto him, Master, thus saying thou reproachest us also. And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers!*** (Lk. 11:37-46).

Sadly, the modern church is more concerned about offending people than about turning them away from eternal destruction. We are cautioned against sounding too condemning or judgmental lest someone is made to feel offended. And when we wish to warn a struggling friend heading in the wrong direction or otherwise, we are careful to keep our thoughts to ourselves because we fear offending that individual or "hurting their feelings". **But while it's wrong to fault find or nitpick someone's actions in the wrong spirit and a self righteous attitude, the Bible encourages us to gently reprove those who are backsliding in their faith: Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful** (Pro 27:6).

Yet there are times that correction should be stronger and more direct and take on the form of verbal rebuke. Verbal rebuke is especially necessary with those who are aware of their sin but refuse to repent of it. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees when necessary, as demonstrated previously, and the New Testament Church is required to do the same. Notice the following Scriptures:

*Them that sin **rebuke before all, that others also may fear*** (1 Tim. 5:20).

*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; **reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*** (2 Tim. 4:2).

*This witness is true. Wherefore **rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith*** (Tit. 1:13).

*These things speak, and exhort, **and rebuke with all authority**. Let no man despise thee (Tit. 2:15).*

So why is biblical rebuke missing from most Churches today? Is it because we have misunderstood Christ's instruction about judging others (Mat 7:1-3)? Is this the reason why we have nearly eliminated all forms of corrective discipline? Frankly, I believe so. I believe that a gross misunderstanding of Mathew 7:3 is at the heart of this problem. But did Jesus truly condemn all forms of judgment or have we failed to grasp the meaning of His teaching on this matter? Here is a scripture to help answer this question:

Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment
(Jn. 7:24).

Clearly, Jesus was not opposed to people using prudent judgment. Instead, He was opposed to people casting judgment unfairly based on external appearances or personal bias. So as long as we judge the actions of others fairly and without partiality, we can be sure that we are exercising "righteous judgement".

WHAT JESUS WAS NOT

Christ's character was flawless and everything He did was good and wholesome. But what are some characteristics that would be antithetical to His perfect nature? It's good for us to consider this question so that we may avoid falling victim to poor character. The following are a few characteristics which were never present in the life of Jesus:

Proud and Boastful

Jesus was a humble man. He **never bragged** about His fame or success in order to amaze people: *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; **for I am meek and lowly in heart**: and ye shall find rest unto your souls* (Mat 11:29). The opposite is true in Christendom today. Too many of us like to parade our achievements around so others may notice us and we can earn their respect and admiration. Perhaps this is the root cause underlying the failure of many ministries and outreach programs. Maybe this is why they are being exposed for their shamminess.

Fearful

Preachers today are afraid to confront sin in the Church. They realize their popularity

rankings would drop in a hurry if they rebuked sin or preached against it. They are too fearful to compel people to live a repentant and holy lifestyle. So instead, they condone and approve of the actions of the world. They glaze over sin issues as though they were trivial and insignificant. Such incompetent behavior is no different than applying a band-aid over a festering wound, or what the Bible describes as a superficial healing:

*They **have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace** (Jer 6:14).*

But what about Jesus? Was He fearful of men? Not at all! He was not afraid to confront people's evil actions or condemn them openly. If Christ is truly our example, then why do we cringe before men? Why do we avoid speaking out against sin?

Casual, Entertaining, and Clownish

Christ's ministry was never casual. He never clowned around or played "Mr. Funny Guy" with His disciples. And He never engaged in anything that was trivial or frivolous. On the contrary, Jesus lived with a singular purpose and was under the constant pain of death. Therefore His style of ministry was intense and filled with purpose. He wasn't seeking to entertain people; He was seeking to save them.

Today, Christians attend church to see entertaining performances. Preachers are expected to assume the role of stand up comedian every Sunday and to illicit laughter from their congregants. The pulpit is no longer used to convict people; it's used to entertain them. This is the sad state of modern "christianity", the very movement that purports to follow Christ's example; yet there is nothing Christ-like about it.

As God's people, it's important to balance our spirituality carefully and to use amusement sparingly, *outside* of our Christian gatherings. The following scriptures remind us of this:

Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ (Phip 1:27).

*Neither filthiness, **nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks** (Eph 5:4).*

*Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and **be sober** (1Th 5:6).*

*But let us, who are of the day, **be sober**, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation (1Th 5:8).*

*That the aged men **be sober, grave, temperate**, sound in faith, in charity, in patience (Tit 2:2).*

*That they may teach the young women **to be sober...** (Tit 2:4).*

*Young men likewise exhort to **be sober minded** (Tit 2:6).*

*Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, **be sober**... (1Pe 1:13).*

***Be sober, be vigilant**; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: (1Pe 5:8).*

***Redeeming the time**, because the days are evil (Eph 5:16).*

***Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time** (Col 4:5).*

*Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that **for all these things God will bring thee into judgment** (Ecc 11:9).*

Compromising

If there is one word that fits least with the character of Christ, it's probably the word compromise. Jesus came to "rock the boat" and "stir the waters". He was intolerant of hypocrisy and soothsaying, and He was unwilling to compromise with anything evil. In fact, He was the perfect rebel. He came to spark the fires of revolution, and how anxious He was to see this peaceful uprising sweep the world: *I am come to send fire on the earth; and how I wish that it be already kindled!* (Luk 12:49).

A Lover of Fame and Money

Jesus was never a lover of fame and money. As a consequence, He inherited nothing but ridicule and scorn and earned center place on Calvary's hill. In contrast, modern day preachers are often celebrities in their own right. They are well admired for possessing

enough eloquence to downplay the Gospel message, making it non-abrasive and palatable. With their vain promises and counterfeit gospel they attract the masses. But they have little regard for their flocks and are far more concerned about their hefty pensions. The Scriptures warn us about such men:

*For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; **and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple...**Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, **for filthy lucre's sake...**walking after their own lusts; and **their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage** (Rom 16:18, Tit 1:11, Jude 1:16).*

*And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces... For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God... **Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake... Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake** (Mar 12:38; Joh 12:43; Mat 5:11; Luk 6:22).*

Power Hungry

Jesus was never power hungry. He never used intimidation or manipulation to control His followers. **Nor did He try to assert Himself as their dictator.** All too often, spiritual leaders will try to coerce their followers into obedience by employing certain psychological techniques such as “guilt trips”. These kind of leaders merely wish to control their members and to defend their position of authority. Leaders who thrive on power and control usually exemplify the following traits:

1. They operate within a hierarchy in order to prohibit the same level of freedom from lower ranking members.
2. They appear threatened when others step in to lend some measure of spiritual support, feeling it is in conflict with their “interests”.
3. They isolate their members from outside influence and form cloistered groups with an exclusive theology aimed at protecting their selfish ambitions.

4. They twist God's Word and use it to inspire fear in any that refuse to submit to their authority.

If you recognize any of these traits in the leadership of your Church then you are probably victim to an abusive form of Church authority. It is good for you to get out from under such authority and to seek a Church where the principles of equality and servanthood are put into practice. Jesus warned us not to practice hierarchical or political rule over others. Instead, we are to serve our fellow Brethren. The following New Testament scriptures adequately address this issue:

But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant (Mat 20:25-27).

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock...Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility (1 Pe 5:2-5).

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not (3 Jn 1:9).

And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage (Gal 2:4).

Preaching the “Broadway Gospel”

Many “christians” prefer to be told that they can “live it up” and follow Christ their own way and still make it to heaven. This popular message even has a label and is known as the doctrine of eternal security or “once saved always saved”. The doctrine of eternal security is potently attractive. As a result, it is taking the church by storm and fueling the fast growing mega Church movement in America and the West. Don’t be fooled, even some conservative Churches are gradually succumbing to its influence. There is a spiritual stronghold at work called “easy believism” and it’s slowly overtaking the Church and any “who love not the truth” (Rom 1:28; 2 Thes 2:12).

But Jesus never preached a “broadway gospel”. In fact, He explicitly warned against it: *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, **and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat*** (Mat 7:13).

You see, the real Gospel involves suffering. It involves self-denial and bearing our cross daily:

*Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, **let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me*** (Mat 16:24).

*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world **ye shall have tribulation**: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world* (Jn 16:33).

*Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that **we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*** (Act 14:22).

*Yea, and **all** that will live godly in Christ Jesus **shall suffer persecution*** (2Ti 3:12).

PERSONAL CLOSING MESSAGE

Dear friends, I realize that this message may come across as deeply offensive or insulting. I also realize that some of us have unwittingly believed in our own version of Jesus Christ for many years, albeit an unbiblical one. Perhaps this was due to our limited understanding of God’s Word and our inherent reliance on the integrity of our spiritual leaders and their responsibility to teach us the truth. Or maybe it was due to our simple disinterest in the Scriptures and a lack in desire to compare the popular gospel of our day with the Bible. Either way, I recognize that none of us are perfect, and that our understanding of God's Word is limited. So I don’t wish to condemn anyone.

I also want to say that while criticizing the above actions, I don’t claim to be immune to them. Like everyone else, I’m just as capable of becoming corrupt, proud, selfish, self-righteous, deceiving, etc. And I could just as easily advance my agenda at the expense of bringing God’s holy name to ill repute. Nevertheless, I have a duty to teach others the truth, whether they are offended by it or not.

So it’s my hope that as we contemplate the scriptures and truths presented in this

teaching, we might remain vigilant against the seducing spirits of our day. I hope that now that we have studied the real Jesus of the Bible and examined His character and actions, we may be able to discard the false replica manufactured by many well-meaning, but deeply deceived church leaders. I also hope we can openly decry the false methods employed by evangelicals across our nation and faithfully uphold the righteous lifestyle of the REAL JESUS.

In Christ alone,
John A.