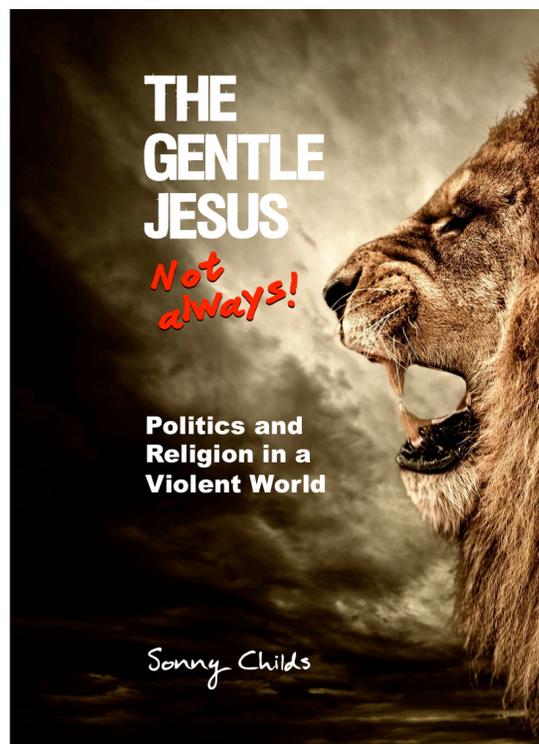


The Gentle Jesus, *Not Always!*

Politics and Religion

By Sonny Childs



Copyright 2015 Sonny Childs

Bible quotations are taken from the New International Version
unless otherwise indicated.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system,
or transmitted in any form or by any means –
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise –
without the prior written permission of the publisher.
The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Published by Sonny Childs
P.O. Box 682
Paragould, AR 72451

Contents

- [1. The Lord of Balance](#)
- [2. The Abrasive Savior - Religion](#)
- [3. The Abrasive Savior - Politics](#)
- [4. The Congenial Christ](#)
- [5. Keys To Cultural Confrontation](#)

[Supplement](#)

[Practical Suggestions](#)

The Gentle Jesus? Not Always!

1. *The Lord of Balance*

An Allegory

The man rushed out of his smoke-filled apartment building. Across the street, fellow tenants huddled together, waiting for the fire trucks.

As he joined them, he noticed a young girl out of the corner of his eye. She was sitting alone by the curb of the road. Heavy sobs shook her little body and a steady stream of tears fell from her eyes.

He was drawn to her.

As he approached, he spoke softly. He knelt beside her and placed a gentle arm around her shoulder.

"Are you okay, little one?"

She nodded but did not speak.

"Are you hurt? Is that why you are crying?"

She looked up, shook her head.

"I didn't mean to. I really didn't mean to!" she squeaked. "All I wanted to do was see how it felt."

He gave her a gentle squeeze. "What was it that you didn't mean to do?"

Her little body sagged beneath the weight of a guilty conscience.

More gentle prodding and the man discovered that the little girl had been trying to light a cigarette. One of the matches accidentally fell from her hand and caught the curtains on fire.

The news was overwhelming. He didn't know what to say. He didn't know what to do. With a heart full of sympathy, he squeezed her a little tighter. "It will be okay," he whispered. "You'll see. It will be okay."

"No!" she cried. "You don't understand! My mom came home drunk. She passed out on the couch *and she's still in there!*"

Immediately, the man leapt to his feet and rushed back into the smoke-filled building. With great urgency, he located the apartment and kicked down the door. He screamed the woman's name and threw furniture out of his way as he

searched for her. Through the deepening haze, he could see the woman's motionless body still lying on the couch. He rushed to her. He shook her shoulders violently and with great harshness he shouted into her face, "Wake up woman! Wake Up! This building is on fire!"

Moments later, the man staggered out of the building half carrying and half dragging the woman to safety.

Q: Would you say the man was unbalanced? Would you say it was unreasonable for him to respond to the little girl's situation in one way and respond another way to the situation of the mother?

The Lord of Balance

Our culture is going up in smoke. We need a Hero! Some of us seek the niceties of a mild-mannered good news reporter while others seek the justice of a man of steel. In truth, Jesus is both. In truth, He expects, NO HE DEMANDS, that anyone who wishes to follow Him takes upon himself the same balanced nature.

Q: Would Jesus approve of the way Christians are confronting the cultural chaos of our day? Would He be disappointed to know that some Christians respond with silence? Would He support the posts we are making on Facebook and other parts of social media? Would He encourage Christians to give moral balance in political affairs or would He say that political debate damages evangelistic outreach? Would He acknowledge the present doomsday preaching and tell us to cleanse some temples or would He tell us to just relax in grace and accept that God's purpose will be done regardless?

It is the purpose of this series to examine the ultimate authority, the ultimate life example of Jesus, the ultimate Hero. In this material, we will examine His words and reactions while asking the questions, "What would He do today?" and "How would He decide which reaction to choose?"

To set the stage, it is important that we first understand the balanced nature of our Lord.

Colossians 1:16-17 (NIV)

"For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible ... all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

Jesus is the literal dynamic Who holds all things together. It is He Who keeps the sun at just the right distance from the earth. It is Jesus Who controls the tides and keeps the sea from overwhelming the shore. It is He Who combines the egg

and the sperm to create human life. It is He Who governs all created things visible and invisible. Jesus is the Lord of balance and He expects His followers to live by His example.

In Luke 12, Jesus presents an interesting description of God's balanced approach toward humanity. At the conclusion of this passage He also presents a sobering application for His followers.

Luke 12:4-9 (NIV)

"I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. 6 *Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God.* 7 *Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.*"

8 "I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. 9 But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God."

Please notice the odd combination of admonishments within the first paragraph. First, Jesus harshly warns His listeners to fear God because men only have the ability to kill the body. God has the authority to throw a person into hell (verses 4-5). Then, without even a break in thought, He transitions into words of gentle comfort reminding His listeners that God sees and cares for even the hairs on their head (verses 6-7).

Q: What does this odd combination of admonishments tell you about God?

A: He is a God of balance!

To those who see God as a harsh, hellfire and damnation type Deity, I would say this; your relationship is only one-sided. Be careful lest Satan trap you into accepting a God Who is less than balanced.

To those who see God as a gentle, warm fuzzy type Deity of grace and tolerance, I would say this; you too only know one side of Him. Be warned! Satan wants nothing more than to convince you that it is enough to worship just 50% of His nature.

And then there is that sobering application Jesus makes at the end of this passage. Read verses 8-9 again.

Directly on the heels of this striking dichotomy of God's nature, Jesus presents a very sober warning; be sure to publicly acknowledge Him before others or God will disown you!

Q: What is the connection between God's nature and the warning Jesus gives immediately following?

A: In order to be like God, our **public** acknowledgement of Jesus must emulate the nature of God. It must be balanced.

But that, of course, raises another question, "How do we know which response is appropriate in each situation?" In the final part of this study we will answer that question. But before doing that, it is important for us to further establish the complete nature of God. It is vital that we examine the complete living example provided through the God/man Jesus.

In the next section, we will begin an eye-opening examination of "The Abrasive Savior." Many will be surprised to find out that Jesus didn't always take the "nice guy" approach. With regularity, He used an "in your face" presentation of His message and did, on several occasions, bait the audience with intentional combativeness. It may also be a surprise to discover that not all of His abrasiveness was directed at religious leaders. Jesus had much to say about social issues, race relations, and even politics. He engaged in debate (Mark 12:28) and He understood the necessity of a spirited defense. His example must not be overlooked!

The Gentle Jesus? Not Always!

2. *The Abrasive Savior - Religion*

Q: What are the two topics you should not bring up in public?

A: Religion and Politics

Interestingly enough, the One Who is so often portrayed as a mild-mannered Messiah, actually spoke quite openly and boldly about both of these topics.

First, let's see His sometimes abrasive approach toward religious topics.

Some time ago, I did a casual survey of the Gospels. My aim was to note each of the times Jesus addressed religious topics in a, well... less than gentle way. Below is a rather interesting partial list of what I found. (Note: Quotations are taken from the NIV.)

Religious Abrasiveness:

Luke 12:51 - Jesus warns that He did not come to bring peace but division.

Matthew 12:34 - Jesus called the Pharisees a "brood of vipers."

Luke 7:36-50 - Jesus confronts His host, Simon, in his own home and at his own table.

Matthew 23:27 - Jesus calls the teachers of the law and Pharisees "hypocrites" and "whitewashed tombs."

Mark 8:33 - Jesus calls Peter "Satan" because he did not "have in mind the things of God."

Luke 11:37-42 - Jesus calls His audience a "perverse generation."

Luke 6:6-11 - Jesus intentionally goaded the Pharisees by doing a miracle on the Sabbath.

Mark 11:27-33 - Jesus refuses to answer a question when they refuse to answer His question.

Matthew 10:14, Mark 6:10-11, Luke 10:1-12 - Jesus commands His disciples to shake off the dust from a city that will not receive His message.

Luke 12:49-53 - Jesus says He came to bring fire down upon the earth and wished it were "already kindled."

Matthew 12:39 - Jesus refuses to do a miracle and calls those listening a "wicked and adulterous generation."

Matthew 11:24 - Jesus tells Capernaum, "it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

Matthew 21:23-32 - Jesus tells the chief priests and elders that "the tax collectors and the prostitutes" are entering the kingdom of God ahead of them.

Luke 10:25-37 - Jesus intentionally uses a priest and Levite as the bad guys of His story and a hated Samaritan as the good guy.

Matthew 21:43-46 - Jesus tells the chief priests and Pharisees that the kingdom of God will crush them.

John 8:31-44 - Jesus calls His listeners sons of the devil.

And lest we conclude that Jesus was only abrasive toward those who were abrasive toward Him, consider the following passages. Notice how He does not shy away from the truth even though it had the potential to drive away converts.

John 4:7-26 - Immediately after the Samaritan woman indicates interest in Jesus' promise, the Lord brings up the messy situation of her five previous husbands as well as her live-in boyfriend.

Matthew 8:18-22 - An interested student of Jesus wanted to become a full-fledged follower. "First let me go and bury my father," he requested. Jesus responds rather bluntly, "let the dead bury their own dead."

Mark 10:17-22 - A very good man falls on his knees before Jesus and asks for spiritual advice. "Jesus looked at him and loved him." Then, Jesus brings up the one thing that He knew could potentially drive him away. "Go and sell everything... Then come follow me." The story concludes with this unfortunate line, "He went away sad, because he had great wealth."

But perhaps the most revealing peak into Jesus' willful abrasiveness is the time He publicly confronted the religious leaders in Matthew 23. Notice just one example from this rather lengthy tirade of sharp religious condemnation.

Jesus is mid-way through His famous list of "Woe to you" statements when He stops to address the subject of evangelism.

Matthew 23:15 (NIV)

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves."

Few things were more important to Jesus than the subject of evangelism. Yet when given the opportunity to embrace the evangelistic efforts of his fellow Jews, what does He do? He levels against them the harshest of indictments, "...you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves."

The "Gentle Jesus"? NOT ALWAYS! And especially NOT ALWAYS when it came to the most important part of the human experience, the appropriate response to God's sovereignty.

Conclusion

What applications can we draw from this eye-opening list of unexpected abrasiveness?

1. Jesus attacked religious conflict head on and with great harshness when necessary.
2. Jesus never compromised the truth in order to win favor with His audience.
3. Jesus did not soften His presentation just because He was in public.
4. Jesus did not bow to the pressures of religious "power players."
5. Jesus created opportunities to prompt religious debate.
6. Jesus placed His calling ahead of His comfort.
7. Jesus called it like He saw it.

In the next section we will discover that not all of Christ's abrasiveness was directed at religious leaders. Jesus also had a lot to say about social issues, race relations, and even politics.

The Gentle Jesus? Not Always!

3. *The Abrasive Savior - Politics*

Have you ever heard a preacher preface his remarks with this statement, "Now, I know you should never mix politics and religion..."? Why do church leaders feel the need to do that? What is it that makes us assume that blending these two topics is inappropriate and that politics have no place in the pulpit? Why do we engage in schizophrenic spiritualism, dividing our Lord's Day convictions from our Election Day choices? What has led us to this divided psyche?

Without question, the primary reason Christians operate with a split personality is because they have wrongfully concluded that Jesus never engaged in political debate. They justify their on-again off-again values by assuming that Jesus believed in the separation of church and state.

They are wrong. They simply do not understand the political landscape of Jesus' day.

One of the greatest joys of my college experience was being able to study two of my favorite subjects simultaneously. Little did I know when I received a minor in History that it would become such a wonderful complement to my major in Bible. It was that very combination that opened my eyes to an important historic principle - the politics of Jesus.

Jesus lived in a culture that was governed by one of the most diverse political systems in all of human history. In technical terms, Jesus lived within a theocratic tetrarchy of imperialistic oversight. In less technical terms, the culture of Jesus' day had three overlapping spheres of political power, somewhat like our local, state, and federal governments.

1. Theocracy

The inner sphere of political influence was the most honored and, in many respects, the most powerful. Webster defines a theocracy as "a government by a person or persons claiming to rule with divine authority." (Webster's New World Dictionary) In other words, the most influential political power in Jesus' life was actually a group of rulers who had religious/secular authority. The High Priests, Teachers of the Law, Pharisees, Sadducees, the Sanhedrin, and other Jewish officials not only wielded great influence over religious matters, they were also given wide latitude to govern matters of secular politics. Much like the period of the Judges, they addressed both the spiritual and the physical sides of government.

Because of this theocratic arrangement, it is fair to say that anytime Jesus spoke about regulations governing the physical realm, He was, to some degree, making a political statement. Let's consider just one of the more obvious times He did so.

Matthew 23:1-3 (NIV)

"Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.'"

"Moses' seat" is a reference to another period in Jewish history when theocracy was also the political structure of the day. Go back and read the life of Moses. Read about the responsibilities he had both religiously and secularly. In this passage, Jesus is about to launch into a stinging indictment of those who have placed themselves in the same seat as Moses. The entire passage is about the religious/secular politics of His day. Read it again and, this time, keep His comments within the context of a theocracy. Yes, Jesus took political positions and He addressed them openly.

2. Tetrarchy

The next sphere of political influence was called a tetrarchy. When Herod the Great died, his kingdom was divided into four sections and given to three of his sons and a sister. The Herod who ruled Galilee and Perea during Jesus' ministry was referred to as a "Tetrarch" meaning "ruler of a quarter." He was responsible for the death of Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist, and would Himself make sport of Jesus during the trials before His crucifixion.

Herod was a wicked and shrewd ruler. As a result, he was the target of rebuke by John the Baptist and at least two politically charged statements by Jesus.

Mark 8:15 (NIV)

"'Be careful,' Jesus warned them. 'Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.'"

Notice that, in this political statement, Jesus gives an unabashed warning about the influence of both the theocracy (Pharisees) and the tetrarchy (Herod). Much like you and I might warn our fellow citizens not to trust the promises made by some of today's politicians, Jesus warned His friends to be careful about the level of trust they placed in their political leaders.

Luke 13:31-33 (NIV)

"At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, 'Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.' He replied, 'Go tell that fox, "I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal." In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem.'"

This passage gives us several striking insights into the way Jesus reacted toward

the politics of the tetrarchy.

First, notice the disparaging remark He makes about this political leader. Jesus does not honor him with his proper title or even his name. Instead, He boldly dismisses the political ruler of the region as simply "that fox."

In Exodus 22:28 the Old Law commanded, "Do not ... curse the ruler of your people." (NIV) Was Jesus guilty of violating this law or was His statement true and thus justified? Is there an application for a Christian's political expression today?

Secondly, notice how Jesus waves off the political pressure to stop His work, "I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal." (Luke 13:32, NIV) This could rightly be concluded as an act of civil disobedience. Clearly, Jesus was doing something that was politically incorrect. Why else would the political leader of that region want to execute Him? To read about another Christ-inspired act of civil disobedience, study Acts 4:18-20. Yes, Jesus both engaged in and inspired others to engage in civil disobedience whenever government conflicted with the mission of God.

Thirdly, notice that even though Jesus does not run from the political pressure, He does not allow it to distract Him either. With a laser sharp focus on the mission He declares, "In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day...." (Luke 13:33, NIV)

Lastly, please notice the brutal sarcasm Jesus uses to describe the theocratic assassinations which occurred in His Own nation's history, "...for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem." (Luke 13:33, NIV) In this statement, Jesus not only affirms His disdain for political hypocrisy, He acknowledges that sometimes a person's religious responsibility conflicts with the politics of the day. On that occasion, Jesus would tell us to press on! He would also remind us, "...whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God." (Luke 12:8-9, NIV)

In these two passages, Jesus provides a very compelling example of just how Christians might, at times, need to respond to their own political leaders.

3. Imperialism

During Jesus' life, the largest sphere of political influence came from the imperialistic rulers of Rome. Here, too, Christ expressed Himself openly.

Before referencing some direct quotes, it is interesting to note that Jesus made no effort to hide His regular association with the Roman oppressors known as tax

collectors. On one occasion, He even stopped the entire entourage in order to validate Zacchaeus, a most hated minion of Rome. Furthermore, Jesus personally selected polar opposites, a tax collector and a Jewish zealot, to be part of His inner group of disciples. (Matthew 10:2-4) Few things are more politically charged than taxes and political activism. Christ used men from both backgrounds to reach His intended purpose.

But perhaps the most obvious reactions of Jesus toward imperial Rome came during the two following passages:

Matthew 22:15-22 (NIV)

"Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?'

But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, 'You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.' They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, 'Whose image is this? And whose inscription?'

'Caesar's,' they replied.

Then he said to them, 'So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.'

When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away."

First, it is important to notice the two groups that were sent to test Jesus. The Pharisees hated Roman rule and the Herodians did their best to promote it. They were truly at opposite ends of the political spectrum. It seemed like the perfect trap. Jesus had been drawn into a political controversy that had no solution. What would He do?

"So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." (Matthew 22:21, NIV)

Brilliant, a simply brilliant response to an impossible question!

Unfortunately, many have viewed this response too superficially. They conclude that Jesus' answer was intended to place distance between Himself and politics. They further conclude that, by His response, Jesus was actually validating a "separation of church and state." But think deeper.

Consider the logical conclusion to Jesus' statement, "give back to Caesar what is

Caesar's." What could Caesar possibly own that does not already belong to God? What is there to "give back"? With this statement, Jesus does not validate the "separation of church and state," just the opposite. He acknowledges the theocracy in which He lived. God is over all, and with regards to politics (taxes), whenever it is morally possible, Christian's must honor those who God has placed over our physical context. (Romans 13:1-7) Jesus' statement was deeply political and, to many, it was also very abrasive.

Conclusion: Yes, Jesus participated in political debate. Although His position was not popular, He did engage the political system. He also taught His followers the proper response to a political issue that might be inconvenient, but does not involve a conflict with God's law.

Matthew 5:38-42 (NIV)

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."

This section of Scripture is taken from what is known as the Sermon on the Mount, one of the Lord's most practical presentations on life. Throughout that lengthy oration, Jesus addressed everything from religious tradition to secular law and even the proper response to political oppression. While there are many things within the Sermon on the Mount that we could point to as having a relationship to politics, one of the most obvious is that one little sentence, "If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles." (Matthew 5:41, NIV)

As you may know, many of the imperial soldiers of Rome were fond of humiliating the oppressed. It was Roman law that a soldier could demand a subject to stop what they were doing and carry his baggage a certain distance. As you can imagine, this infuriated the Jews and many of them refused to go one step beyond what the law required. It was within that abusive political climate that Jesus makes a rather abrasive decree. "Don't just go one mile, go the extra mile."

While the spiritual applications to this teaching are plenteous, it is the political ramifications that we are interested in here.

1. Jesus acknowledged the political authority of Rome. While much of Roman rule was seeped in paganism, Jesus still acknowledged the empire's authority and encouraged submission whenever possible.
2. Jesus honored the political authority of Rome. He didn't just encourage obedience; He taught second-mile servitude to those who have political

power.

3. Jesus exploited the political authority of Rome. With this teaching, the Lord encouraged cooperation with political minions. What is the difference between this passage and the examples of civil disobedience found in Luke 13, Acts 4? This piece of political maneuvering didn't interfere with the mission; it actually had the potential to advance the cause of God. Is it possible that it was this very teaching that opened the doors of goodwill and led to the conversions of several Roman officials, not the least of which could have been Cornelius?

Conclusion: Jesus encouraged political cooperation in order to reach a higher purpose. Not unlike today, His approach to politics was greatly looked down upon by the pious religious hierarchy. They viewed Him as being guilty by association. They saw it as compromise. Jesus saw it as opportunity.

Summary

Obviously, the point of this material is to show the unexpected abrasive nature of Jesus within politics. So what have we learned?

Jesus lived in a culture that was governed by one of the most diverse political systems in all of human history, yet He boldly engaged them all.

Because of this theocratic arrangement in which He lived, it is fair to say that anytime Jesus spoke about regulations governing the physical realm, He was, to some degree, making a political statement.

While Jesus encouraged submission to those who had taken over "Moses' seat" (Matthew 23:1-3, NIV), He was not shy about exposing their political hypocrisy and oppression.

Jesus boldly and publicly called out the political leaders of His day and even used disparaging references to their character.

Jesus engaged in and inspired acts of civil disobedience.

Jesus openly associated with the hated political minions of Rome in order to accomplish the greater good.

Jesus participated in political debate and even prompted it in order to address areas of deeper spiritual significance.

Applications

We live in a culture that is governed by democracy and we must bodily engage it

to the advantage of Christ.

When we address political matters, the underlying motivation must always be the greater good, the spiritual condition of man.

We should submit to governing authorities, yet not be shy about exposing political hypocrisy and oppression.

When necessary, Christian leaders should feel empowered to call out political leaders who operate with a flawed character.

There are times when Christians can and should engage in acts of civil disobedience.

If being involved in politics means advantages will come to the cause of Christ, then by all means, Christians must be involved.

We must not cower away from political debate. When issues of morality are at stake, Christian leaders must be bold.

Conclusion

I realize you are not likely to agree with every conclusion that I've drawn in this section. But surely you would agree that the preponderance of evidence points to at least one thing - much like today, Jesus lived in a politically charged culture and He did not refuse to engage it boldly and publicly. May we be courageous enough to do the same.

The Gentle Jesus? Not Always!

4. The Congenial Christ

On the other hand...

After the last two sections in which we emphasized the abrasive nature of the Lord, I feel it necessary to revisit the fact that the confrontational side He often demonstrated is not the entirety of His nature. Because we live in a world that has sissified the Savior and promoted doctrines of grace without responsibility, the theme of a mild-mannered Messiah probably does not require as much emphasis. It is, however, important that we see the Lord for Who He really is and, for that reason, let me remind you of a very descriptive passage that offers a striking dichotomy of the Divine nature.

Luke 12:4-7 (NIV)

"I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. 6 *Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God.* 7 *Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.*"

Notice again the odd combination of admonishments within the first paragraph. First, Jesus harshly warns His listeners to fear God, because men only have the ability to kill the body but God has the authority to throw a person into hell (verses 4-5). Then, without even a break in thought, He transitions into words of gentle comfort reminding His listeners that God sees and cares for even the hairs on their head (verses 6-7).

Conclusion: The Divine nature, the very characteristics from which we were created (Genesis 1:27), is nothing less than a balanced nature. As such, in order to see Jesus for Who He truly is and, as a result become like Him, we must also be balanced. Those who view God as a harsh, hellfire and damnation type Deity have only a one-sided relationship with Him. Those who see Him as a gentle, warm fuzzy type Deity of grace and tolerance only know one side of Him as well. Be warned! Satan wants nothing more than to convince you that it is enough to worship just 50% of His nature.

The Congenial Christ

“con·gen·ial (kan 'jēnēal)

Adjective: (of a person) pleasant because of a personality, qualities, or interests that are similar to one's own.” (Webster's New World Dictionary)

It doesn't take much searching of the Scriptures to find glowing examples of this part of Jesus' nature. Below are a few of my favorites:

Jesus chose to touch a leper in order to heal him when, in fact, he could have done so by just speaking the word. (Matthew 8:1-3)

Jesus took a child into His arms. (Mark 9:36-37)

Jesus stopped a funeral procession, touched the bier, and raised a dead man back to life because He felt compassion for the mother, a widow. (Luke 7:11-17)

Jesus saved the life of a woman caught in adultery. (John 8:1-11)

Jesus commended the woman who washed His feet with her hair even though she disgusted others at the table. (Matthew 26:6-13)

Jesus looked down from the cross and, while bearing the sins of the entire human timeline, He remembered to care for His mother. (John 19:26-27)

Wow! What a Savior!

But in order to fully establish the congenial nature of Jesus we need to look beyond His life and also notice the impact His example had upon His followers.

One very important follower comes to mind.

Paul was the last to be chosen. Because of this, Paul called himself an apostle who was "born out of due time." (1 Corinthians 15:8, KJV) Yet it is that unique relationship with the Lord which does, in some ways, give Paul the best possible insight into the congenial side of Christ's character. Not only did Paul receive a concentrated dose of training by Jesus at the beginning of his ministry (see Galatians 1:15-17), he also came to the Lord with a very one-sided abrasive character. (See Galatians 1:13-14.) He required a very large dose of congeniality training in order to make him effective. Only through the Divine intervention of the Lord of balance could Saul have ever become Paul.

Much later in Paul's ministry, the apostle finds himself once more in prison for the cause of Christ. It is from that restricted context of humility that Paul writes some of his most congenial texts ever to be inspired. Consider just two.

Philippians 1:12-18 (NIV)

"Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of

goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."

It cannot be overemphasized that the source of this mature attitude came directly from the years of spiritual tweaking he received by the congenial Christ. From this text we see that Paul not only celebrated his imprisonment, and thus influenced the "whole palace guard", his congenial attitude also inspired others to "become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear."

Furthermore, Paul, the combative debater and stubborn defender of truth actually laid pride aside and celebrated the preaching of Christ even when his enemies engaged in it with "selfish ambition" in order to "stir up trouble" for him. "The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."

Interesting Note: This passage is part of a letter that Paul wrote to a church that had been established because of another congenial moment in his history. Remember the prayers and songs of Paul and Silas at midnight? (Acts 16) Remember how the jailer was so impressed by these men that he fell at their feet and asked what he needed to do to have the same faith? That was the beginning of the church at Philippi. That is the church to which he is writing the passage above.

Colossians 4:5-6 (NIV)

"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

Another letter written from prison gives even more insight into the congenial teachings Paul received from Christ. Notice, from this short excerpt, five important commands of congeniality.

1. "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders...." - Congeniality requires consideration of others and their context.
2. "...make the most of every opportunity." - By definition, congeniality leads to common ground and relational effectiveness.
3. "Let your conversation be always full of grace...." - Grace means unmerited favor. A Christian's congeniality must include an element of favor bestowed on others that is neither earned nor deserved.

4. "...seasoned with salt..." - It's interesting to note the similarities between these words of Paul and the instructions of Christ during the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5:13) Here Paul does not just emphasize the preserving nature of salt, he also points to the congenial seasoning nature of our conversation.

5. "...so that you may know how to answer everyone." - Congeniality leads to a proper understanding of how to give an answer.

And that makes a perfect segue for the conclusion of this series.

In the next section we will ask the all-important questions, "What was it that governed Christ's congeniality?" "What factors led Him to respond with confrontational abrasion?" and "What prompted Him to choose congeniality?"

The Gentle Jesus? Not Always!

5. Keys To Cultural Confrontation

As we conclude this timely study of the Lord's nature, it is vital that we give a practical summary by looking at three criteria Jesus used to govern His own responses to a culture in chaos.

1. The Motives

Before responding to any situation, Jesus examined the motives, both His own and those He was engaging.

His Personal Motives

It is interesting to note that the Lord was always careful to deflect the glory toward His Father in Heaven. In so doing, His motives became obviously selfless and His example became the benchmark for all. Consider one example:

John 2:13-17 (NIV)

"When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, 'Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!' His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'"

In this passage, we find one of the most striking contradictions to the mild-mannered Messiah that is so often preached today. In order to fully understand and emulate the example of Christ, we must fully embrace all sides of His nature.

Please notice the clearly stated motive behind Jesus' violent outburst, "Stop turning my Father's house into a market!"

Q: If Jesus was God in the flesh, wasn't the temple His house as well? Why did He violently defend the temple's sanctity on behalf of His Father rather than just claim it for Himself?

A: His assignment demanded more than a pursuit of personal acknowledgement. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. That process demanded a perfect example for those who would respond to His salvation. His selfless motives had to be obvious in order for His followers to react similarly.

Application: From this example of cultural confrontation, we see that it is possible to react loudly and even violently yet still maintain pure motives. The proof test is found within the heart. Before every action, Christians must ask one very

important question: Is this best for the cause of Christ or am I waging a personal vendetta to defend my own conclusions, my own heritage, and my own pride? Many a Jewish leader fell victim to the sincerely held motives that were not in the best interest of God. It was this very thing that prompted Christ's crucifixion and the subsequent torture, imprisonment, and killing of early Christians. Before cleansing any temple or crucifying anyone's character, every Christian must be sure to examine his own motives.

The Motives of Others

Secondly, Christ left us an example that shouts, "Christians must engage in judging the motives of others!"

In a world that hides behind the line, "Don't judge me!" it can easily be assumed that it is not our place to judge someone else's motives. But that conclusion comes from the heart of Satan, not the teachings of Christ! Perhaps the most misapplied verse in the entire Bible is this, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." (Matthew 7:1, KJV) Satan has skillfully lifted these words out of context and used them to mold a generation of spineless Christians who are without evangelistic fervor because they are without an evangelistic yardstick.

Read the context! Clearly, Jesus was **not** condemning the process of judging others. What He was doing was condemning judgments that are made with impure motives. Judging others is not only necessary for daily living, it is a commanded element of a Christian's function - evangelism.

Consider one example from Jesus' ministry:

Luke 19:1-10 (NIV)

"Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.' So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.'

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.'

Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'

From this account, we learn several obvious things that pointed toward the motives of the heart.

1. Zacchaeus was a tax collector, a chief tax collector and, as a result, he was very wealthy. At first glance, one might assume that these things would be considered evidence against pure motives. But think deeper. Why would a wealthy minion of Rome be interested in Jesus? Why would a hated sinner seek out a messenger of salvation? Read further.

2. Zacchaeus ran ahead. Clearly he had more than just a casual interest in the Lord. Is it possible that Jesus spotted Zacchaeus out of the corner of His eye and watched his feeble attempts to see over the crowd? Is it possible that Jesus took notice of his efforts and from that moment began to assess Zacchaeus' motives? Could it be that Jesus lost sight of the little man momentarily only to find him later in a place that would validate the assessment He had made about Zacchaeus' motives?

3. This wealthy government official not only ran ahead, he actually climbed a tree. Surely it would have required a certain level of humility for a man of his status to make such an undignified effort as to react like a school boy and perch himself on the limb of a tree. His motives were obvious.

Application: Many of those who are counted unworthy by the religious world actually need only a moment of patient acknowledgement in order for salvation to come to their house as well. Christians must take more time to walk in the shoes of others before making harsh reactions to the path they are on. Assignment of a scarlet letter can easily snuff out a person's growing interest in the light. Watch for evidence of their motives. Those who are clearly living in open rebellion to the Creator's will should expect nothing less than open condemnation of their rebellion. But those who are straining their necks, climbing trees, and making a genuine effort to find the truth deserve more than harsh reactions. The Lord would expect us to give them more than hasty assumptions and statements of condemnation that are painted with a broad brush. Cultural confrontation demands careful consideration of the motives.

Matthew 7:20 (NIV)

"...by their fruit you will recognize them."

2. The Mission

In addition to an assessment of motives, Jesus also used a laser sharp focus on the mission to gauge His response to a culture in chaos. Notice this example:

Luke 9:51-56 (NIV)

"As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, 'Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?' But Jesus turned and rebuked them. Then he and his disciples went to another village."

Some of the best parenting advice I've ever received came from my sister-in-law when she said, "Choose your battles wisely." Someone else has also suggested that we ask, "Is this a hill worth dying on?" Both of these statements have greatly helped me keep my perspective in times of parental stress. I believe the same advice is applicable to our study.

Had Jesus used only the first key (Motives) when dealing with this Samaritan village, He most likely would have permitted James and John to bring down a fiery destruction upon that town. But Jesus, the master military tactician, understood that the mission was more important than a single battle. He rebuked His disciples for losing sight of the bigger goal. They moved on.

Application: We too must be careful not to major in the minors. We must not become distracted by the need to micromanage minor skirmishes at the expense of time and energy needed to make a real difference in the outcome of the war. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. (Luke 19:10) That is the big picture. That is the battle plan. It **is** the war. Every cultural confrontation must be governed by what is best for the overall mission.

2 Corinthians 10:3 (NIV)

"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does."

3. The Moment

Lastly, Jesus was sure to capitalize upon the moment. He understood the need to strike when the iron is hot and He took full advantage of the circumstances offered. Consider a sad, but important, example of this key to confrontation:

Mark 10:17-22 (NIV)

"As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. 'Good teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'

'Why do you call me good?' Jesus answered. 'No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: "You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother."'"

'Teacher,' he declared, 'all these I have kept since I was a boy.'

Jesus looked at him and loved him. 'One thing you lack,' he said. 'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'

At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth."

I suppose conventional wisdom would suggest that, on this day, Jesus lost a great opportunity to gain a follower. But conventional wisdom is almost always governed by the priorities of this world. It rarely takes into account that which is of greatest importance - the soul.

Please notice two phrases from this text as well as their contextual proximity to each other.

First, "Jesus looked at him and loved him." Clearly, the Lord saw potential, He saw opportunity for this man to go to the next level.

But secondly, it is important that we also notice the Lord's very next words, the admonishment prompted by this love - "One thing you lack...."

Conclusion: In spite of all the potential this man had, Jesus knew He needed one thing more. It was his moment. It was his opportunity to step up to the plate, see the ball, and swing for the bleachers. Jesus knew the poignancy of the occasion. He understood the climactic opportunity for conviction. Because He loved him, Jesus confronted him. Because He loved him, Jesus capitalized on this moment.

Application: Ours is not the power to dictate a response, ours is only the power to embrace the moment. When confronting a culture in crisis or just a single member of it, Jesus requires that His followers take full advantage of the stage that has been set. Christians should never dilute the truth in a selfish attempt to manufacture a better moment. Diplomacy and grace are commanded virtues for a Christian (Colossians 4:6), but they must not be allowed to interrupt a moment of conviction. If Jesus pressed His disciples to the point of conviction, even though He knew there was the potential that they would go away sad, we must be willing to do the same.

Matthew 28:19 (NIV)

"Therefore go and make disciples...."

Conclusion

The Lord of balance is calling His people into the realm of public expression. To be like Him, we must understand that He could be abrasive or He could be congenial. His response depended upon His assessment of the circumstance. As

salt and light, we must be prepared to confront a culture in crisis with the same calculated approach as our Lord. Consider the **motives**, both yours and theirs. Keep a laser sharp focus on the **mission**. Take full advantage of the **moment**. If we will do this, the world will have no choice but to respond to HIS nature.

Gentle Jesus? Not always! Know Him. Be like Him. Make it real!

Supplement

Preparing for Islam

Introduction

Like dark clouds on the horizon, persecution is mounting against Christianity around the world. No other group poses more of a physical threat than Islam.

The following material is taken from the book "Preparing for Islam" by Sonny Childs. When combined with the information found within the book "The Gentle Jesus? Not Always!" Christians can better prepare to respond appropriately to this coming storm.

Preparing for Islam *Radical Few or Faithful Minority?*

After completing my reading of the Islamic holy book in 2008, I concluded that most Christians, and even Muslims, have little understanding of what the Qur'an actually says about violence. The world needs to understand why this backward religion has had so much trouble emerging from the Dark Ages.

Ever since Islam rudely forced itself onto the world stage September 11, 2001, world leaders have used political correctness to sidestep the reality of this movement's core values. To pacify the oil-rich nations of Islam, the phrase "radical Muslims" is often used to differentiate between the terroristic acts of "a few" and the majority of Muslims living worldwide.

However, when world leaders do this, they ignore two very fundamental questions:

1. Does the majority really represent what Islam is intended to become?
2. What will happen when the majority decides to return to the teachings of their holy book?

Q: What will we do if the second largest world religion rallies its members to return to faithful obedience of the teachings and practices laid out in the Qur'an? I believe it is only a matter of time. Are you spiritually strong enough to persevere under the persecution already being felt by thousands of Christians worldwide? Have you prepared your family? Are your real treasures in Heaven or are you anchored firmly to this world? Will you be faithful?

1. What Does Their Holy Book Say?

Below you will find several alarming passages from the Qur'an. We will let their holy book speak for itself. Please take time to read each passage and ask yourself what would happen if these values were to become dominant within our nation.

Qur'an 4:34

"Men have authority over women because God has made one superior to the other.... As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them, forsake them in beds apart, and beat them. Then if they obey you, take no further action against them. Surely God is high, supreme."

Qur'an 9:5

"When the sacred months are over slay the idolaters, wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them."

Qur'an 9:73

"Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal rigorously with them."

Qur'an 9:121

"Believers, make war on the infidels who dwell around you. Deal firmly with them. Know that God is with the righteous."

Qur'an 5:33

"Those that make war against God and His apostle and spread disorder in the land shall be slain or crucified or have their hands and feet cut off on alternate sides, or be banished from the land."

2. Would you say it is fair to assume that a good Muslim obeys the Qur'an?

If good Muslims obey their holy book, then it is reasonable to conclude that the politically correct propaganda about them is unreasonable. Islam is not a peace-loving world religion that has been hijacked by a few radicals. Islam is a violent world religion that has not yet brought all of its followers into full submission to the violent teachings of the Qur'an. Islam is a time bomb waiting to explode and America's leaders seem not to have enough commonsense to walk away from it.

As Christians, we are called to look beyond this realm and are commanded to live civil lives as pilgrims who do not belong here. (I Thessalonians 4:11, NIV) As Muslims, they are called to look forward to a carnal afterlife and commanded to live as conquerors that very much belong here.

3. But What About the Jews in the Old Testament?

When passages from the Qur'an, such as the ones above, are brought to light, Muslims are quick to point out that God's people under the Old Testament acted

very similarly. Though their statement may be true, their defense has two very significant problems:

1. During the Old Testament period of history, God was preserving a remnant of humanity in order to bring His Son into the world. To do this, He worked within the violent infantile sandbox rules of that time.
2. Today however, Christians are “now” (Acts 17:30, NIV) called to live above the cruel “survival of the fittest” standards of this human realm. The arrival of the God/man, Jesus, changed the rules on the playing field dramatically. No longer do God’s people bow to the violent bully standards of the world. We look beyond this realm and are commanded to live civil lives as pilgrims who do not belong here. (1 Thessalonians 4:11, NIV)

1 Corinthians 2:12-14 (NIV)

“We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught us by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

Islam is still living in the sandbox. Unlike those who have grown beyond the use of violence to solve their problems, the Muslim holy book has never lifted its people above the bully rules of cruel coercion. Because a good Muslim refuses to accept Jesus as God’s Son, he cannot appreciate the standards of life on a spiritual plane, “...they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:12-14, NIV)

May every Christian everywhere see it as his personal responsibility to draw others out of the sandbox of human immaturity through the acknowledgment of God’s only begotten Son.

Practical Suggestions

- 1. Avoid large concentrations of people.**
- 2. Have a safe location to which your family can go in times of persecution.**
- 3. Buy a gun. Teach your family to respect it and how to use it. Support gun ownership laws.**

Christians are not called to be violent aggressors, but we are not called to be naive either.

Matthew 10:16-17, 22-23 (NIV)

“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard.... You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another.”

Romans 12:17-18 (NIV)

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

Value life, especially the life of the aggressor, but remember you are also called to protect the innocent and defend the weak.

With great intention, the Prince of Peace fashioned a whip and cleared the temple in John 2. In Luke 7, Jesus awarded great praise to a commander in the Roman army, yet He did so without even a hint of admonition that the Centurion should leave his military profession. In Matthew 23, Jesus launched a verbal barrage against the hypocrisy of His day and, in Luke 22, He instructed His followers to buy swords. Jesus is not a pacifist, yet He is the Prince of Peace.

We too must find the balance between “turn the other cheek” and “if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one.” (Luke 22:36, NIV)

4. Pray for wisdom

As the politically incorrect material for this book was being compiled, I found it interesting that the following lead story was posted on FoxNews.com. Is it irony or is this a sobering warning about the reality of real-time challenges facing Christians today?

Headline: Feds creating database to track hate speech on Twitter

“The federal government is spending nearly \$1 million to create an online database that will track ‘misinformation’ and hate speech on Twitter.

The National Science Foundation is financing the creation of a web service that will monitor ‘suspicious memes’ and what it considers ‘false and misleading ideas,’ with a major focus on political activity online.

The ‘Truthy’ database, created by researchers at Indiana University, is designed to ‘detect political smears, astroturfing, misinformation, and other social pollution.’” (FoxNews.com, August 20, 2014)

I guess it’s that last phrase that troubles me most, “and other social pollution.” How long will it be until Christianity is considered a “social pollution?” How long until material like this and other expressions of opposition to Islamic barbarism are found to be hate crimes? How long until the presentation of truth about Islam’s holy book is no longer protected by free speech?

Are you ready?

About the Author

Sonny Childs is an author and motivational speaker. He and his family live in Paragould, Arkansas.

For more information about him and his work, please visit HeyBrotherSonny.com.