

The Jesus Way – For or Against

Have you been watching the Olympics?

I love seeing competitors from different tribes, nations, & tongues come together under a common cause (the Olympics) and cheer one another on!

If such comradery & unity is possible under the umbrella of “sport”, why can’t it be true under the umbrella of “Christianity” & the cause of the gospel of Christ?

Athletes are competing against one-another, and yet they are each other’s biggest cheerleaders... **If the world can achieve this, why can’t the Church?**

A similar example is seen in “marriage...” 2 different people, with different backgrounds, cultures, beliefs, families, etc. If they can unite under the banner of “marriage” & figure out a way, despite their differences, to remain in union together. **Why can’t “the Church”, united in Christ, do the same?**

Catholics & Protestants... Baptists & Pentecostals... Calvinists & Arminians... Paedo-Baptism & Believers’ Baptism... Egalitarians & Complementarians... 6-Day & Old Earth creationists... Pre-Millennialists & Post-Millennialists...

We have our different **theologies**... different practices... but can we be united under the banner of Christ, and united together as heralds of the gospel?

I believe that “The Jesus Way” both tells us, & shows, that it’s possible! One of the best examples of this in Scripture is in **the relationship between the Jews & the Samaritans**... Are they both “true-Israel...” “God’s chosen people...”

If you asked either camp, they would make suspect the other, but what did Jesus say/do? Did He operate under their self-made constraints, or under God’s sovereign plan & His own saving power?

Luke 9:51-56 - Why did the Samaritans not receive him? B/c **Jesus set his face to Jerusalem**. Remember the conversation Jesus had w/ the Samaritan woman at the well... It revealed one of the major points of division between them.

But that didn’t stop Jesus from offering her living water that wells up to eternal life? **There was a theological, & practical, divide between them, but nothing that Jesus could not bring together!** Unfortunately, the disciples missed this!

But in Luke 9 they didn’t. Their response to the Samaritans is clear, & it’s no better than how the Samaritans responded to them... James & John wanted to **“call down fire from heaven to consume them!”** It looks & sounds a lot like our divisions in the Church today!

The text says that Jesus rebuked his disciples... but he goes on & does even more... In **Luke 10:25-37**, **Jesus sets a Samaritan up as an example to follow!**

The very people the Jews refused to see as their neighbors, is the one Jesus commends as the one truly faithful to God’s commands! Why would Jesus do this? **Because what divides us, in our minds, does not divide us in His!**

And if this parable/story wasn’t enough, Jesus shows them in real life a different perspective on these Samaritans – **Luke 17:11-19**. Only the Samaritan leper responded to this miracle by praising God & falling on his face before Jesus!

What the disciples were quick to conclude about the Samaritans, Jesus rebukes & redefines! **Who they declared as foreigners, Jesus declared as their neighbor!** And a neighbor is to be loved, welcomed, & considered a part of the family!

Does this mean that Jesus doesn’t care about what we believe? No! **But what we believe about Him, and how we live in response matters more!**

If I disagree theologically with a brother or sister in Christ, our status in Christ matters more! How we live out God’s greatest 2 commandments matters more!

So, should we never dialogue about doctrine, or pursue truth in matters that often bring about disagreement? No! Truth matters, but the One who embodies truth, & living out the gospel truth in community takes precedence!

The labels we create that separate us... many of them have been around for ages... and they will most-likely outlive us... **The question is do we want to be known/remembered for what separates us from others in God’s Kingdom, or what unites us together in Christ?**

You can’t love God with all your heart, soul, mind & strength without loving your neighbor as yourself... And you can’t love your neighbor rightly without loving God as He truly is... **and the Bible defines Him as “Love!”**

Yesterday was Valentine’s Day, so what better time to be reminded of what love is, as defined by God, and embodied by Him? **1 Corinthians 13:1-7, John 13:35**

“Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, & a divided household falls” – Luke 11:17. God’s household is not exempt from this – OT, NT, today

“Whoever is not with me is against me, & whoever does not gather with me scatters” – Luke 11:23. Are we better at scattering or gathering the flock?

The Jews & Samaritans had plenty to divide over, but Jesus & the gospel is what united them, & is the only thing with eternal implications! What about us? **Will we be known for what we are against or for in the Kingdom of God?**

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