

Grace to You :: esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time

Was Jesus Always "Nice"?

Scripture: Luke 20:45–47

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I never could believe in the Jesus Christ of some people, for the Christ in whom they believe is simply full of affectionateness and gentleness, whereas I believe there never was a more splendid specimen of manhood, even its sternness, than the Savior; and the very lips which declared that He would not break a bruised reed uttered the most terrible anathemas upon the Pharisees. —Charles Spurgeon

Modern writers, agnostic academics, and liberal theologians *always* stress the kindness and gentleness of Christ. Their Jesus—not the One found in Scripture, but the one concocted from their own imaginations and preferences—is effectively an ideological and theological pacifist. He preached only love and self-sacrifice, never judged or discriminated, and wasn't dogmatic about the truth. In effect, the Jesus they've manufactured pleads "Can't we all just get along?" with people of all faiths.

That perspective betrays a deep and dangerous ignorance of the truth about Christ, the exclusivity of the gospel He preached, and how He confronted religious error. Even the kindest, gentlest shepherd sometimes needs to throw rocks at the wolves who come in sheep's clothing.

The Great Shepherd Himself was never far from open controversy with the most conspicuously religious inhabitants in all of Israel. Almost every chapter of the gospels makes some reference to His running battle with the chief hypocrites of His day, and He made no effort whatsoever to be winsome in His encounters with them. He did not invite them to dialogue or engage in a friendly exchange of ideas.

In fact, Jesus' public ministry was barely underway when He invaded what they thought was their turf—the temple grounds in Jerusalem—and went on a righteous rampage against their mercenary control of Israel's worship. He did the same thing again during the final week before His crucifixion, immediately after His triumphal entry into the city.

One of His last major public discourses was the solemn pronouncement of seven woes against the scribes and Pharisees. These were formal curses against them. That sermon was the furthest thing from a friendly dialogue. Matthew's record of it fills an entire chapter (Matthew 23), and it is entirely devoid of any positive or encouraging word for the Pharisees and their followers.

Luke distills and summarizes the entire message in three short verses:

And while all the people were listening, He said to the disciples, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the

synagogues and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation." (Luke 20:45-47)

That is a perfect summary of Jesus' dealings with the Pharisees. It is a blistering denunciation—a candid diatribe about the seriousness of their error. There is no conversation, no collegiality, no dialogue, and no cooperation. Only confrontation, condemnation, and (as Matthew records) curses against them.

Jesus' compassion is certainly evident in two facts that bracket this denunciation. First, Luke says that as He drew near the city and observed its full panorama for this final time, He paused and wept over it (Luke 19:41-44). And second, Matthew records a similar lament at the end of the seven woes (Matthew 23:37). So we can be absolutely certain that as Jesus delivered this diatribe, His heart was full of compassion.

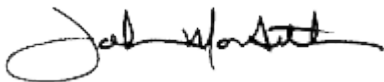
Yet that compassion is directed at the victims of the false teaching, not the false teachers themselves. There is no hint of sympathy, no proposal of clemency, no trace of kindness, no effort on Jesus' part to be "nice" toward the Pharisees. Indeed, with those words Jesus formally and resoundingly pronounced their doom and then held them up publicly as a warning to others.

This is the polar opposite of any invitation to dialogue. He *doesn't* say: "They're basically good guys. They have pious intentions. They have some valid spiritual insights. Let's have a conversation with them." Instead, He says: "Keep your distance. Be on guard against their lifestyle and their influence. Follow them, and you are headed for the same condemnation they are."

Jesus' approach would surely earn Him a resounding outpouring of disapproval from today's postmodern culture. Exclusive truth, discriminating instruction, and confrontational teaching simply don't fit the "good teacher" narrative the world promotes. In fact, by today's standards, Jesus' words about the Pharisees and His treatment of them are horrifyingly inappropriate.

Christ wasn't an ideological pacifist. He knew which fights to fight, and He stood up for the truth with clarity and—when necessary—severity. But that kind of commitment to and love for the truth is totally foreign to modern society, so they either dismiss or ignore it.

More and more these days, people are talking about Jesus, but what they're saying has no biblical basis. We need to do what we can to shatter the phony caricatures the world has developed, and bring people face to face with the Christ revealed in the pages of Scripture.



(Adapted from [*The Jesus You Can't Ignore*](#).)

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