

There is a common view in our society that Jesus is not divisive. That Jesus would never divide friend from friend or husband from wife or mother from son. There is a funny (well, to me) meme of the well-known acronym, WWJD, which reveals a slightly more biblical understanding here:



Many people today are “just fine” with the popular view of Jesus, but they are somewhat nonchalant in their rejection. This is because the Church has been deceived into gift-wrapping Jesus as a therapist to help them with their life, a coach to help them achieve their goals, or a sage with some advice on how to live a good life. Thus, Jesus can be rejected easily if I don’t see a need for a therapist or a life coach. Frankly, even if I do need such help, I only come to Jesus on my own terms, the terms of my felt needs and Jesus as the corporation of soul widgets that meet such needs. Anything beyond these needs Jesus has no right nor authority to interfere with my life. In essence, I am

god and Jesus serves me. If I don’t like him, I simply say, “Thanks, but no thanks. You stay over there in the religious section of the library of my life.”

Yet, this is not how people responded to Jesus in the Scriptures, is it? How did they respond? “They picked up rocks to stone Him.” (John 8:59; 10:31) They plotted to kill him (Matt 26:4). They attempted to silence him and His disciples when they told who He was (Luke 19:39). The response to Jesus was never, “eh”, but always worship or hatred, submission or despising, discipleship or rejection. He was divisive because He left no other option. They killed him and the crowds chanted for Barabbas. They persecuted His apostles, jailing them, beating them, commanding their silence, stoning them, and eventually taking their lives *for their message*, not for some violent or oppressive behavior on their part, but for their words. The gospel divides because truth always divides from error, and justice always condemns injustice. It is, by the nature of holiness and sin, always exalting Truth and judging Falsehood.

But this view of a divisive Jesus is not popular fare for most people. They will pick and choose the J in their WWJD. Therefore, if Jesus didn’t speak on abortion, he surely wouldn’t have become divisive over it, and He surely wouldn’t have said anything that made anyone feel bad. One of the most commonly quoted verses in the Bible today, as you may recognize, is “Do not judge, lest you be judged.” Now, it is taken entirely out of context, as is obvious from its immediate chapter, where Jesus pronounces woe on those who are loved by everyone and who trust in their own provision and wisdom, and even goes so far as to label those who oppose the truth as dogs and swine. The gate? It’s narrow and few enter it, and that there is an evil person who produces evil words out of an evil heart and is due for destruction in the Day, and that there are those whose houses are built upon rock and those upon sand and the distinction is foundational, i.e. what is capable of holding firm in the day of distress. These are divisive words which drive a wedge between self-trust and Christ-trust, between truth and error, between salvation and judgment, between justice and injustice, sin and holiness.

The divisive message of Christianity is, ultimately, not about Judeo-Christian morality, although that is divisive, but more foundationally: What does one do with Jesus Himself? Jesus’ claims were about Himself, and in the words of Alistair Begg:

“If the message of Christianity is true, it is not arrogant. If it is untrue, it is, frankly, irrelevant.”

Jesus is not using soft words in this passage, but chiseled, intolerant words of truth. We recognize that Jesus is not a tame lion, as we read them. He is not “safe”, yet we also see in these flaming words that he is good.

Jesus divides because His teaching is self-centered. Thus, he uses the imagery of families divided and “no peace” but division, with the warning to make peace with your accuser while you can. Jesus is also showing that He is in deep distress – because the work which has come to perform is self-denying and deeply frightening.

You don’t know the real Jesus until you know that Jesus is both divisive and distressed and that it eternally matters.

1. Jesus is Divisive –
 - a. “Peace on earth, goodwill to men”?
 - b. Jesus polarizes people because his teaching is self-centered.
 - i. Now, Jesus is not self-centered, but rather Father-centered and Spirit-dependent, but his teaching is thoroughly self-centered.
 1. “Truly, truly, I say to you.”
 2. “I am the way, the truth, the life. No man comes to the Father except through me.”
 3. “I am the door of the sheep...whomever enters through me will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.”
 4. “I am the resurrection and the life; whomever believes in me will live even if he dies”
 5. “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”
 6. “I and the Father are one.”
 7. “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never hunger...”
 - ii. Jesus, unlike other founders of religions, claims to be the way, not merely show the way. His teaching makes Him the doorway, not merely a signpost to the doorway.
 1. To enter the Kingdom of God, you come not by opening your own door, but by having Him opened for you. The entirety of His teaching is centered and rooted in Himself, not in something else to which He is pointing.
 2. This is profoundly self-centered teaching. Every other teacher basically claims, as I would, that it doesn’t matter what you think of me, but Jesus claims that it matter eternally what you think of Him.
 3. What you think and believe about Him determines your destiny! Your entire life depends upon what you think of Him!
 - iii. This self-centered teaching is offensive.
 1. Now you would find self-centered teaching problematic, narcissistic, would you not?
 2. How far would you get in your relationships if you broke into a conversation with, “Well, that’s enough talk about you. Let’s talk about me.”
 3. That is exactly how Jesus speaks. You have to love me more than mother or brothers. Speaking to the rich young seeker, he tells him to sell everything he has and to follow Him. “I must be more important to you than every last cent and every last security and every last possession.”
 - a. When Nicodemus approached Jesus and wanted to talk theology, recognizing that Jesus was a *godly teacher*, Jesus interrupts him with self-centered talk. “If you don’t believe in me, you’re in darkness and you’re doomed. Whoever comes to me will live and whomever doesn’t is condemned.”
 - c. Jesus’ Claims are Divisive
 - i. Well, how is it that Jesus can teach so self-centeredly and not be a put off. Well, frankly, He is! That is what causes division, offense, and hatred. Those of us who believe find His claims to be true, thus not arrogant.
 1. You see, if I claimed to be the only way to God, the bread of life, the fountain from which all the goodness of God flows, then it would be arrogant, *because it is untrue!*
 2. However, if the claims made by Jesus are true, then it is not arrogant at all, it is true and right and good. It is His mercy that makes these claims if they are true, not a power-hungry lie. Thus, if His claims are true, they are to be believed and our lives are to be Christ-centered.
 3. However, if Jesus’ claims are untrue, then we are to be the most pitied people in all of existence and Jesus the most evil man to ever walk the planet.

4. But to say that He is a good man, making the claims that He made, and to be found untrue, then how could He be good?! That is utter foolishness!
- ii. The reality is that when Jesus comes again and people line up expecting to get into heaven, if Jesus looks at you and says, "I don't know you. Depart from me." You don't get in!
 1. Jesus says, "Whomever believes in me is not condemned, but whoever does not believe in me is condemned already."
 2. Jesus is constantly asking, "Who do you say that I am?" He does not ask what you think of His teaching, but of Him!
- iii. The people who came to Jesus and loved Him were the outsiders, the powerless, the prostitutes, the lepers, the tax collectors, the widows, etc. It was not the Hollywood types, where power is based upon pretense and falsity is rather accepted as the coinage of the trade.
 1. Have you ever noticed that? Everyone knows it's all a show, but that's what makes it what it is. In politics, entertainment, sports, even business, we expect reality to be far different from what is revealed to the public. You can often be phony and do very well with powerful people and celebrities.
 2. The disenfranchised and the powerless can see right through pretense of power.
 3. So, the fact that the poor accepted Jesus, even loved to be near Him, loved His counsel and His grace, His kindness, *and* His truth claims and didn't claim it was pretentious says something.
 4. People who talked the way Jesus talked and claimed the things Jesus claimed about Himself are NEVER likable people.
 - a. They are never good counselors, nor do the poor and disenfranchised and powerless flock to people like that.
 - b. People don't want to talk about their problems to somebody like that.
 5. But Jesus combined this very self-centered teaching with a humble, compassionate, merciful moral character that is simply way off the map.
 - a. He loved to be near the powerless and they loved to be near Him, yet the people who had power in the society and expected pretense couldn't stand him.
 - b. They couldn't stand him. It's backwards from the way it usually works, because Jesus is the most unique person who has ever lived.
- d. Jesus did not come to bring peace because He claims to be the Son of God and the only way to God. You cannot be neutral to that or admiring of that if you don't believe it!
 - i. If you are somewhat blasé or neutral about Jesus, then you are not looking at the real Jesus.

2. Jesus is Distressed

- a. FIRE For Which Jesus Yearns
 - i. Judgment, the cleansing fire of His holy wrath
 - ii. Isaiah 66 – "see the LORD is coming with fire...execute judgment upon all"
 - iii. 2 Thess 1:5-10 – God considers it righteous to afflict those who afflict you and to give you comfort, "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."
 - iv. Luke 3 – John the Bapt: The One coming after me will baptize with the Holy Spirit and Fire
 1. There are two baptisms – HS and Fire – salvation (belonging) and judgment
 2. v17 – and His winnowing fork is in his hand...and the chaff is burned with unquenchable fire
 - a. "The one coming after Me" is coming to divide wheat from chaff, to baptize in HS and fire, to cut down the trees that bear no fruit, etc.

- b. John used this to move people to check their hearts and repent – he purpose of all biblical warning
- v. Fire purifies lasting things, like precious metals, but it consumes that which is not lasting
 - 1. Thus, fire separates (divides) the gold from the dross
 - 2. The world is full of decay, wickedness, oppression, evil, injustice, death
- vi. Thus, when Jesus brings fire of judgment, everything that is not lasting will be burned up – no evil, no suffering, no sin, only what is beautiful and lasting and glorious and godly, only a bright beautiful new heavens and new earth
 - 1. Fire is a severe cleansing agent, but a powerful and necessary cleansing agent – you can't purify gold with a wire brush or a sponge, it takes fire. It takes a severe cleansing to purify for sin and to raise the holy.
 - 2. What type of fire will it take to burn the Universe?
- vii. Jesus "yearns" for this fire of judgment
 - 1. What? We must remember that Jesus is the most compassionate person who has ever lived, the most uniquely loving person who expressed mercy to the point where sinners rejoiced to lay down their lives for Him
 - 2. Yet, we must also recognize that anyone who sees this present world rightly will long for purifying fire.
 - a. The fire that consumes evil is good! To be purified is glorious!
 - b. How do you face life if you believe that someday evil and injustice and oppression will not be rectified, dealt with, extinguished, and resolved?
 - 3. We all have this innate desire for justice, for evil to be rectified and dealt with, and it is a good desire.
 - a. Rectifying it oneself is not always good (vengeance, vigilante), because we are flawed judges who don't always see correctly, but the idea of justice and judgment are not the problem in that.
 - b. But not all villains are dealt with in the here and now and not all victims are vindicated in the here and now, and that bothers us, doesn't it? Does crime really never pay?
 - 4. Revelation 6 – John the apostle sees martyrs under the altar and they were calling out in a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"¹¹ Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. (Rev 6:1 ESV)
 - a. Think about all the innocent that has been shed. Genocide, oppression, injustice, all the widows and orphans crushed into the dust, the young girls sold into slavery, the young boys abused and the poor starved, the political prisoners beaten and killed. What if there is no afterlife, no heaven or hell, no judgment day? What does this say about injustice here and now? Not only does that mean that we will never overcome injustice, but we cannot even identify it, for unless there is a Real standard by which everyone is judged who is say what is just or unjust, right or wrong, evil or good?
 - b. If I destroy you to gain power or money or land, who is to say that is wrong? Who are you to say that this is wrong? People that don't want judgment only believe so because they don't *want* to be judged, yet at the same they inconsistently call out for justice and for others to pay for their crimes. Either you believe in anarchy, pure social and moral Darwinism, or you believe in judgment.

- c. If you do not believe in eternal judgment, in the final divisive say of God, then any claims of evil or injustice against another is inconsistent. Or, you are a cultural elitist who believes, on some other grounds than justice, that your culture is superior to theirs.
- d. Ironically, they would say the same thing. So, who is right? Who is to say? There MUST be a judgment if we are to do anything about injustice and evil in the world, in our own country, and in our own hearts. Without a final judgment, all bets are off and we have no right to call anything evil, even intolerance.

viii. If there is no judgment, what hope is there for the WORLD? But, if there is a judgment, what hope is there for ME?

b. Besieged Under Baptism

- i. Jesus feels “under attack”, besieged and surrounded, about to fall
 - 1. He feels the holy dread of crushing
 - 2. Jesus knows about stress, about suffering, about doom
- ii. If Jesus Christ had only brought the message of fire and judgment and winnowing, what hope would we have? We would vacillate between the desire for justice and the implication that we, too, will be judged with holy fire, and the only other alternative that there is no judgment and the world is, in the end, screwed and that I have no right to claim injustice toward anyone or anything, including myself and my oppressor, the victim or the villain.
- iii. BUT, there is a baptism into which Jesus Christ was baptized
 - 1. What is it?
 - a. Mark 10:38 – Are you able to be baptized with my baptism *or drink the cup that I am to drink?*
 - b. The cup upset Jesus so greatly that His distress led to great bloody drops of sweat in the Garden of Gethsemane
 - c. The cup is the wrath of God, the fiery judgment of God’s holy consuming flames towards sin and rebellion
 - d. Thus, the fire, the baptism, and the cup are all the same thing!
 - 2. Why did it distress Him?
 - a. What did it mean for Jesus to drink the cup of God’s wrath, to be baptized in the fire of His holy wrath against sin
 - b. I am going to bring fire upon the earth, but before I do that, the Fire must consume me!
 - c. Even the prospect of this experience was enough for the Son of God to feel doom, to severe shock of bloody sweat, what must this experience have been?
 - d. “Christ’s agony” by Jonathan Edwards
 “The thing that Christ’s mind was so full of at that time was, without doubt, the same with that which his mouth was so full of: it was the dread which his feeble human nature had of that dreadful cup, which was vastly more terrible than Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace. He had then a near view of that furnace of wrath, into which he was to be cast; he was brought to the mouth of the furnace that he might look into it, and stand and view its raging flames, and see the glowings of its heat, that he might know where he was going and what he was about to suffer. This was the thing that filled his soul with sorrow and darkness, this terrible sight as it were overwhelmed him. For what was that human nature of Christ to such mighty wrath as this? It was in itself, without the supports of God, but a feeble worm of the dust, a thing that was crushed before the moth, none of God’s children ever had such a cup set before them, as this first being of every creature had.”
 - 3. What does it accomplish?

- a. Chicken analogy – rescue by sacrifice
- b. Jesus being baptized in the fire of God means that those who are hidden under His wings by faith in Him will find refuge

Conclusion: Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man, was consumed by the holy fire of God for you and me. Baptized in our fire and consumed by the holy furnace of God's wrath, the True Phoenix rose from the ashes of those glowing coals vindicated and victorious that we, the unlasting things, would be purified and tempered by His blood to eternity. He doesn't pull punches, what you believe about Him is the only thing that matters, on that day and on this day. If He is whom He says that He is, nothing else matters. And if He isn't whom He claims to be, then nothing else matters. His death was His baptism by fire that you might, through entrusting your souls to Him, would be baptized by His eternal Spirit and be made safe in the shadow of His mighty wings. This is the glory of the divisive and distressed Jesus Christ who is worthy of all honor, praise, submission, and love. May this be the cry of our hearts this day and forever. Amen.