

How to Ruin the Christian Faith

John 2:12-25

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1. Turn Christianity into a Business

The second half of John 2 is quite a contrast from the joyous celebration at the wedding at Cana. John 2:12-25 is a scene filled with anger and conflict. Jesus goes up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. It's a trip he has made year after year throughout his life. I can imagine that each year His disgust grew more intense. But this year, Jesus takes action; He makes a whip and clears the temple. Jesus thunders, "How dare you turn my Father's house into a house of merchandise?"

The spiritual leaders of the day had learned how to effectively blend temple worship with efficient business practices to "expedite" a more streamlined and profitable approach to spirituality. In the process, selfish human motives got in the mix. This enraged Jesus, who was consumed by a driving passion for two things: The glory of God and the hearts and minds of people. Jesus' action in the temple reminds us that we cannot allow the Church to be infiltrated by commercial interests or dominated by a "business" mindset without losing the heart of Jesus and the power of the Christian Faith.

Questions:

In what ways does Christianity in general or the church in particular get turned into a business? Why does this happen? What drives this? What is lost when this happens? How do people who are not Christians see "church" these days? What is good or bad about that?

2. Turn Jesus into a Wimp

Jesus made a whip of cords and drove people out. This contradicts the way in which Jesus is often pictured by contemporary Christians. The most popular version of Jesus these days is the meek and mild Jesus who mainly listens sympathetically, accepts everything and everybody, and would never cause conflict or an uncomfortable moment. But the wimp Jesus of contemporary thought isn't the real Jesus of the New Testament. Jesus calls us to leave all and follow Him. But no one will leave all to follow a wimp whose primary mode is always passive. It's no wonder people left the faith in unprecedented numbers in response to the "hippie, flower child Jesus" that was promoted for years by liberal mainline Christianity. For the Christian faith to have power in our lives and in our world, it is imperative that we gain a truly biblical view of Jesus in all the dimensions of His character.

Questions:

How do you picture Jesus and why? How was your picture of Jesus first formed? How has it changed or grown? Can you picture Jesus angry?

When is He angry and why? Can you picture Jesus tender and gentle? When is He tender and gentle and why? Is there room in your view of Jesus for many aspects of His character: strong, decisive, angry, taking bold action, humble, gentle and accepting?

3. Turn Relationship with God into Religion

At the heart of this incident is the issue of the temple itself. The temple was to be the meeting place between God and His people. But the temple had become a religious institution that only served to distance people from God. Jesus came to change all that. Jesus came to do away with the temple and to replace the empty religion it represented with a living relationship. He did this through the power of His resurrection. Jesus, the Risen Lord, is the fulfillment of everything the temple stood for as God originally intended. This is why the focus of Christian Faith must always be on Jesus Himself. The tendency though, is to always gravitate to other things. As soon as the focus is removed from Jesus, Christianity becomes another empty religious practice rather than the living faith relationship that Jesus came to give us.

Questions:

In your life, when did Christian Faith become more about personal relationship than religion? How and when did that happen for you?

4. Turn the Bible into a Spiritual Self Help Manual

Note the final outcome: "After Jesus was raised from the dead.... they believed the Scriptures and the words that Jesus had spoken (John 2:22). Here we are given an insight into the real nature of the Bible. The Bible is above all the proclamation of who Jesus is and what He has done on our behalf. The Old Testament is our guide to the New Testament and the life and words of Jesus. One of the surest ways to ruin the Christian Faith is to use the Bible as "God's little instruction book for life," or some kind of "spiritual self help manual," while missing the radical message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

What's up with all this intensity?

If all this sounds a bit tense or controversial, it's OK; Jesus turned over tables and raised His voice out of a deep passion that His people would get it right. May the Lord help us to hear His voice today!