

WHO IS JESUS?

Sometimes we may be confounded by the variety of opinions and statements about Jesus: the historic Jesus, Jesus of the gospels, Jesus of various religions. We may remain confused and uncertain for ourselves and for what we might tell someone, who does not know Him.

It is then helpful to remember how the Apostle Paul synthesized his own position when teaching the church at Corinth:

1 Corinthians 2:2 *For I didn't think it was a good idea to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. [HCSB]*

Paul identified the Cross as the core and the sum of Jesus' mission and ministry and deeds: he deemed it not a good idea to pay attention to anything else. And we may recognize that he only emphasized — inimitably — what Jesus Himself stated: that the Cross was the purpose of His incarnation.

John 12:27 *"Now my soul is deeply troubled. Should I pray, 'Father, save me from this hour?' But this is the very reason I came!" [NLT]*

For sure, we should be mindful that the importance and the significance of the Cross is not easily understood: the Cross and its message are often rejected as foolishness.

1 Corinthians 1:18–19 *For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." [NASB]*

Hence, there is no point in arguing about the Cross; only the Holy Spirit can do the work of God and open hearts:

John 6:29 *Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." [NKJV]*

The Cross has two key consequences that is helpful to focus on.

First,

John 15:13 *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." [KJV]*

The Cross is the greatest expression of God's love: a God who sacrificed Himself for us. And,

Romans 5:8 *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." [NKJV]*

The redemption by the Cross is not due to any merit of mine, but it is all owed to God's love.

In the same letter to the Romans, Paul declared the strength and power of the love of Christ — a love that overcomes all:

Romans 8:38–39 *For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. [NASB]*

That is the love of the Father for the Son; of the Son for the Father; of the Son for the believers and of the believers for Him and for one another.

John 13:34 *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." [KJV]*

Second, because of the Cross and the Resurrection, the same Jesus, who loved us to the point of dying for our sin, is the One Who (as we recite in the Creed) "will come again to judge the living and the dead."

As Paul explained at the Areopagus in Athens:

Acts 17:31 *"..... he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." [NRSV]*

The reason we know Jesus is the appointed judge is that He was resurrected after the Crucifixion.

John 5:26–27, 30 *"For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; ²⁷and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. ³⁰I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me." [NRSV]*

Finally: Jesus did come to save and not to condemn.

John 3:17–18a *"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ^{18a}Those who believe in him are not condemned" [NRSV]*

However:

John 3:18b *"..... [but] those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not*

believed in the name of the only Son of God."
[NRSV]

Those who reject Christ are condemned already and therefore they do not need any further condemnation. Hence, Jesus will not condemn, but He will judge:

John 5:22 "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son."
[NASB]

So it is for us: that we love one another and discern, but not condemn.

What Jesus will do is discern and separate those that are condemned already and those who have eternal life and that will be His judgment: the separation of the sheep from the goats.

Matthew 25:31–34, 41 *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: ³²And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: ³³And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. ³⁴Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ⁴¹Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*
[KJV]

It is important to keep in focus both Jesus' love, which is infinite, and Jesus' judgment, which is just and final — with no appellate court.

Let us not harbor the deception that, since the love of God is widely available to all, it is indiscriminate, thus encouraging licentiousness. Nor let us mislead by portraying a vindictive and punishing God, thus alienating many from the gospel.

It is important to know that God is just and righteous and therefore He will judge; after all, who would want a Kingdom of God overrun by sinners? However, as the all-Loving Father, He has made a way for anyone to be saved, on judgment day, from eternal damnation. That way, the only Way, is the Cross and the Resurrection.

A first corollary question is: "Who is Jesus to me?"

Jesus is the Way for me to be spared from the just judgment, to be reconciled with God and to receive eternal life.

A second corollary question might be: what is the nature of Jesus?

There is one prayer of the Lord (repeated in all the three synoptic Gospels) that shows both His fully human and His fully divine nature.

It was in the garden of Gethsemane:

Mark 14:36 *And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will."*
[NASB]

There are two parts of His prayer.

The first request to the Father is direct and unequivocal: "remove this cup." Jesus, as anyone of us — or any human — would, did not cherish the prospect of being nailed to the Cross and, since "all things are possible for the Father," it stands to reason that the Father could grant the request.

In the second part, Jesus first acknowledges that there is such a thing as His own will of Son ("what I will"): there is a will there, separate from that of the Father. This confirms the full and complete humanity of Jesus Christ.

Next, comes the confirmation of Jesus' divinity. This is not the acknowledgment of the obvious: the Father's will must ultimately carry the day.

It is the spontaneous willingness of Jesus to submit Himself unconditionally and to subordinate His own independent will to the will of the Father.

What Jesus shows us in His prayer is that it is not a matter of suffering the Father's will, as of one saying: "I want this, but if You — God — would rather do that, that's fine: have it Your way. I shall manage."

Rather it is this: "Here is where I am, Lord, being open and 'transparent' in my poverty of spirit. However, my belief in You makes me abide in You, and, abiding in You, I have an overriding desire, an overriding motive: my will is to be united with Your will. My will is that Your will be done."

In other words: "My will — far more than that 'this cup be removed' — is that 'Your will be done.'" It is a deep and formidable promise and commitment by Jesus to surrender His will to the will of the Father.

It is not: "if it is Your will"; rather, "I want Your will, because I am one with You."

John 10:30 *"The Father and I are one."* [NRSV]

That is the oneness towards which we are also aimed:

John 17:11 *And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.* [NRSV]