

“Don’t Speak That Way Around Me! I’m A Christian!”

One of the things people hate about those who claim to be Christian is their self-righteousness. If you’ve been around long enough, you’ve probably heard someone using profanity, answered by another voice: “Don’t use that language around me; I’m a *Christian*.”

Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” (Luke 15:1-2) NASU

Vulgarity has been with the human race for thousands of years, though it was probably not as commonplace as it is today. The point is, you never find Jesus or His apostles parading through the streets of Galilee, warning everyone, “Stand aside, everyone! God’s Son coming through! Watch your mouth!” Indeed, much of His ministry was done among the crude and the unsophisticated—sinners, as the religious elite called them.

Individual denominations are rife with this kind of pious hypocrisy. I lived many years in the part of Tacoma, Washington, which was predominantly African-American and Baptist/Pentecostal. Spent a few years in a black church, where I got to know the folks and the preacher. Many of them wore their Sunday best and would go into religious ecstasy as they “got the Holy Ghost.”

Yet I knew Sister X was committing adultery with Brother h. I knew who got drunk every Saturday night, nursing hangovers the next day in church. I’m not trying to highlight the faults of a particular people or community. I shopped in the black-owned stores on K Street and walked their sidewalks. I knew their kids and many of the old folks. My boss was black. I worked on all-black construction crews. I knew the pulse of the neighborhood.

So when I heard Sister So-And-So tell someone, in a self-righteous voice, not to “use that language around me!” I had to bite my tongue.

The early church had the same issue, which Paul had to address in his letter to the church in Rome. He essentially told the two feuding groups in the Roman church, “Let us not judge one another anymore... The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God.” (Rom 14:13 – 22) In other words, what you believe is between you and God; it’s no one else’s business. He did add the caveat not to rub it in someone else’s faith.

The Jewish Christians, who had lived with all kinds of dietary restrictions, refused to eat certain foods. They also continued to observe various Jewish customs. (Acts 18:18) The Gentile Christians in the same church, who had come out of rank paganism, had no qualms about eating anything that crawled, slithered, or flew. They knew nothing of what we now call the Old Testament. On one side of the aisle, you had the Jewish Christians (who were the weaker in the faith), giving the evil eye to the Gentile Christians. “You can’t eat that.” “You’re sinning by drinking that.” “Don’t say those things around me!”

There was more to the dynamics at Rome, but you get the picture. Today, there are Christians who think drinking alcohol in any form or amount is a sin. Paul cautions that those who indulge do so in “their own conviction before God.” (Rom 14:22)

Today, we have the same problem wearing modern clothes. I know those whom I still consider my brothers and sisters, who have excommunicated me because I now attend a church that uses musical instruments. Except for the music, our doctrines are identical. Having been a Church of Christ member and preacher for many years, I know they sit in their pews, convinced that they are the only ones going to heaven. And it's partly based on an idiotic notion that most of them have never bothered to study.

“Look at him...he hangs out with sinners.” He goes to church with those people. You see, I have sufficient faith—which comes by understanding the Word of God (Rom 10:17)—that I can worship in the Christian Church, with all the instruments blaring, and be confident in my salvation. Those of the weaker faith can't handle it because they've swallowed the propaganda spewed from preachers. I don't chide them for their lack of faith. Alas, my words fall on deaf ears. They don't want to hear it.

Am I above any guilt? I see folks coming to Sunday services wearing urban clothing—sagging pants, caps worn sideways, etc.—and I get that urge to tell them, “Hey! You can't come in here looking like that!” I have to remind myself that God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart. (1 Sam 16:7)

Our church has several thousand members; perhaps the largest congregation in Boise of true believers. Figuring we had some gimmick, another smaller church invited our preacher over to see why they were losing members and we were still growing. While he was there, a young man walked into the sanctuary wearing a ball cap. One of the elders told him, “You can't come in here wearing that hat.” The young man turned around and walked out. Our preacher then understood part of their problem.

Like the Pharisees, we think we have it down pat, and anyone not agreeing with us are lost to an eternal damnation over some nonsense that God cares nothing for. We look at folks who are different, who are lost, who are seeking Christ and reject them for something that rubs us the wrong way.

We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Therefore, from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh... Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. (Emphasis mine.) (2 Cor 5:10; 16-19)

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