



He Doesn't Fit My Mold

Do you know what I just discovered? I've made Jesus into a Presbyterian! Is that crazy or what? Don't get me wrong...I think he should be.

In fact, for years I tried to force him into that mold—correct, nice, proper and, if he lived in the 21st century, an owner of blue chip stocks.

I always thought that Jesus would be comfortable in most Presbyterian churches and would subscribe to *The Westminster Confession of Faith*.

If Jesus' incarnation had taken place in modern times, I was quite certain that he would be a Republican.

That was before the real Jesus showed up.

Perhaps the most salient fact about Jesus is that he surprises us. Well, "surprise" may not be the right word. He offends, amazes, shocks and, of course, confuses us.

And he refuses to fit into the mold we have designed for him.

If Jesus were just a man, that would not be such a big deal. There is nothing surprising about people who do weird things.

I can deal with a psychotic megalomaniac, or, perhaps, a neurotic religious nut.

But when Jesus offends, amazes, shocks and confuses me, that is another matter altogether because he isn't just a man. He is God.

Beggars' cups of blind men, crutches of cripples and caskets of the dead were thrown away because of him. Lew Wallace, the 19th century military leader and writer, said this:

After six years given to the impartial investigation of Christianity, as to its truth or falsity, I have come to the deliberate conclusion that Jesus Christ was the Messiah of the Jews, the Savior of the world and my personal Savior.

That's so true. But an impartial investigation of Christianity isn't enough, is it?

The relationship isn't a relationship of the mind...but of the heart.

I've walked with Jesus for more than six years, and the more I hang out with him, the more I've learned that he isn't what I always thought.

I, for instance, have had an increasing awareness that he doesn't like religious people very much...and Presbyterians are quite religious.

Jesus was never angry at the prostitutes (Luke 7), the woman caught in adultery (John 8) or the woman who had been through a series of husbands (John 4). His harshest words were reserved for those who were very religious and who did everything right.

That can be disturbing to someone like me. I am, in fact, probably the most "religious" person you know. I teach religious stuff to religious students at a religious institution. I write religious books.

I teach religious seminars and I preach religious sermons.

I'm really religious, and I thought that Jesus would be pleased with that because...well, because he was religious, too.

Now, I'm not too sure.

In fact, not only have I come to see some things about him, I've come to see some things about me that are not altogether that flattering.

I've come to see the number of times that I've used religion as a substitute for God, a method whereby I could be self-righteous and display a badge of honor among the less religious.

Now all of that isn't looking so good. So, I repent.

Richard Pratt, my colleague at the seminary, says, "Those who make their

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he asked me to remind you

living at religion will lose one or the other."

I don't agree with that totally (I need the job), but I know what he's saying.

Be careful about religion—it will make you feel that you are close to God, that you are pure and that you are serving him when you're not.

For instance, Jesus refused to choose sides, and I'm always choosing sides.

A friend of mine told me years ago, "Steve, I don't know where you will be in 20 years but, wherever you are, you'll be waving a flag for something."

Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees was so harsh one can't read it without wincing. And yet, on more than one occasion, he is at a dinner party with Pharisees.

What's with that?

He reached out to the oppressed and was on the side of the poor and, at the same time, became friends with the oppressor and the ones that made the poor poorer.

I just can't understand why he loved Matthew, or why Jesus was so close to the affluent.

He was clear about sexual morality. In the Sermon on the Mount, he went further than the law in his comments about lust being as bad as the actual sin of adultery. His teaching on divorce is quite cut and dried.

In fact, he goes beyond Moses. Okay. I can understand that...but why in the world is he spending time with adulterers and divorced people?

He is living in the middle of an occupied country, and yet he is often seen reaching out to the occupiers. Man, that just doesn't make sense. I want to say, "Jesus, just choose a side and stand with your side."

He says, "I don't have a side."

As you know, I'm quite political. I have, on occasion, been called opinionated...well...uh...maybe more than occasionally.

The more I walk with Jesus, the more I'm learning to see people

through his eyes. That means I'm called to reach out to people who aren't the kind of people I want to know...people who are on the "other side."

I like Republicans and Presbyterians, but I have the feeling that Jesus wouldn't spend as much time with Republicans and Presbyterians as I do.

Jesus was not very proper. Presbyterians may be mean, sinful and arrogant...but we are always proper. As you look at the social events Jesus attended, you begin to realize that he is not necessarily someone you would invite to your dinner party. Talk about offensive...offensive as in affirming a prostitute who crashes the party, making wine so a party wouldn't be spoiled and pointing out the ego at the head table.

Did you hear about the man who, in a dream, was being given a tour of the different levels of hell? In the first level, things were horrible and he asked his tour guide what they had done.

The guide said, "Those are Baptists who danced."

Then they went to the second level and it was even worse. To his query, the guide said, "These were the Episcopalians who spent their capital."

When they got to the third level it was getting a whole lot worse. The man asked the tour director what they had done. "They are Pentecostals who refused to raise their hands."

Finally, they reached the deepest level of hell. The people there were in agony. "Good heavens," the man asked, "what did these people do?"

"They are Presbyterians, who smiled, said 'Praise the Lord!' in a formal worship service and used the wrong fork at dinner."

Okay, I repent.

You too...even if you aren't a Presbyterian.

He asked me to remind you to go and do something that causes an uptight Christian to doubt your salvation. □

—Steve Brown

THE PLAIN TRUTH