

Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."
Isaiah 40:31*



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Christ the Divider

People are bothered that Christianity seems to engender so much divisiveness. Surely it doesn't have to be that way. True, but the real cause should make each of us a little uncomfortable.

"Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." (Lk. 12:51-53).

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The Bible describes Jesus Christ as the "Prince of Peace," one who breaks down the walls that divide humanity (Isa. 9:6; Eph. 2:13-18). Yet here Jesus claims that He has come not to unite people, but to *divide* them. Even families, He warns, will be torn asunder by His presence. Clearly, these two descriptions don't match. How can we reconcile His claim of divisiveness with His role as a peacemaker?

The gospel of John provides clues that help us resolve this contradiction. John recounts several occasions where division followed in the wake of Jesus' teaching. For example, during a Feast of

Tabernacles there was widespread disagreement about who Jesus really was: "Some said, 'He is good'; others said, 'No, on the contrary, He deceives the people.'" (7:12); some said, "This is the Christ" while others argued, "Will the Christ come out of Galilee?" (7:41). The result: "there was a division among the people because of Him" (7:43).

Later, the healing of the blind man at the Pool of Siloam and the teaching that followed created a similar split in opinion: "Many of them said, 'He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?' Others said, 'These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?'" (10:20-21). In other words, "there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings" (10:19).

The sequence in all these stories is the same: Jesus taught something radically new, and individuals who heard it came to entirely different conclusions about its legitimacy. In every case, the problem was not what Jesus taught or did, but *the different ways in which people responded to it.*

When Jesus chose Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Zealot—bitter political enemies—to serve in His inner circle of disciples, He risked a spectacular blow-up. But no division occurred, because both were willing to subjugate their prejudices to His higher purpose.

On a larger scale, the blending of Jews and Gentiles into a single body in the first century was the result of people from vastly different backgrounds yielding to a common standard of truth. Many others rejected that standard and division—sometimes violent—followed.

Jesus is indeed a peacemaker—but only among those who are willing to submit their lives to His authority. Of course, not everyone is willing to make that concession, so division is the inevitable result. Does that make Jesus "divisive"? In a sense, yes; but it can hardly be blamed on Him alone.

The religion of Christ is not inherently divisive. Division is the fault of human pride and intransigence. Peace is possible, but people must first learn to open their hearts and minds to deal honestly with the truth, whatever it may be.

— David King