

## Who Is Your Teacher?

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Today is often spoken of as the age of information. Information is vital to all we do, of course, but then it always has been. What distinguishes the present time is that there is a lot more information (and misinformation) available than ever before, and a lot of people are trying to sell it to us.

What happens to Jesus in the crush of the information pushers? Unfortunately he is usually pushed aside. Many Christians do not even think of him as one with reliable information about their lives. Consequently they do not become his students. What does he have to teach them? It is very common to find Christians who work hard to master a profession and succeed very well in human estimation, while the content of their studies contains no reference at all to Jesus or his teaching. How could this be?

A short while ago I led a faculty retreat for one of the better Christian colleges in the United States. In opening my presentation I told the group that the important question to consider was what Jesus himself would say to them if he were the speaker at their retreat. I indicated my conviction that he would ask them this simple question: Why don't you respect me in your various fields of study and expertise? Why don't you recognize me as master of research and knowledge in your fields?

The response of these Christian professionals was interesting to observe, to say the least. Some thought the question would be entirely appropriate. Many were unsure of exactly what I was saying. Quite a number responded with: "Are you serious?" The idea that Jesus is master of fields such as algebra, economics, business administration or French literature simply had not crossed their minds--and had a hard time finding access when presented to them.

That brings out a profoundly significant fact. In our culture, and among Christians as well, Jesus Christ is automatically disassociated from brilliance or intellectual capacity. Not one in a thousand will spontaneously think of him in conjunction with words such as "well-informed," "brilliant," or "smart."

Far too often he is regarded as hardly conscious. He is taken as a mere icon, a wraith-like semblance of a man living on the margins of the "real life" where you and I must dwell. He is perhaps fit for the role of sacrificial lamb or alienated social critic, but little more.

But can we seriously imagine that Jesus could be Lord if he were not smart? If he were divine, would he be dumb? Or uninformed? Once you stop to think about it, how could he be what Christians take him to be in other respects and not be the best informed and most intelligent person of all: the smartest person who ever lived, bringing us the best information on the most important subjects.

What lies at the heart of the astonishing disregard of Jesus found in the moment-to-moment existence of multitudes of professing Christians is a simple lack of respect for him. He is not seriously taken to be a person of great ability. But what then can devotion or worship mean, if simple respect is not included in it.

By contrast, the early Christians, who took the power of God's life in Jesus to all quarters of the earth, thought of Jesus as one "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Col. 2: 3 NAS) They thought of him as master of every domain of life.

A natural progression of this confidence in him was toward "doing everything, in word or deed,

all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father." (3:17) That is, they learned to do everything they said or did in co-operative action with Jesus their always present teacher.

If we would live the life which God made us for, we must take our guiding information from Jesus in three respects:

First, we must learn from him the reason why we live and why we do the things we do. Here as elsewhere we are constantly bombarded by misinformation that leaves us to be manipulated into misery by our own desires and the will of those who would use us. The usual human fate is to choose a job, a profession, a spouse, or a house, only for one's own greater pleasure, power and glory. Here rules "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life." (1 John 2:16)

Jesus brings us reliable information about who we are, why we are here and what the humanly appropriate motives are for doing whatever we do. First he informs us that we are by nature unceasing spiritual beings with an eternal destiny in God's great universe. We will never stop existing, and there is nothing we can do about it.

While we have already fallen from God's intentions for us, he can restore us into the flow of God's life if we will only count on him for everything. That is, we must trust him, and really to trust him is to take up his cause, his "yoke." (Matt. 11:29) Then he will teach us how to make our choices with the aim of glorifying God by doing good to human beings. Under his instruction, this will prove to be the most exhilarating kind of life imaginable, with a scope and richness of personal creativity that never stops increasing.

Second, we must learn from Jesus, our 'informer', a new internal character: new "bowels," one old translation says. New guts we would say today. (Col. 3:12) He teaches us in the first place that this is what God intends for us, and what he makes possible.

The central teachings of Jesus about the good heart, given in Matthew chapter 5:21-48, deal with all those day-to-day attitudes that keep the pot of human evil boiling: contempt and hostility toward others, sexual lust and disgust in the heart, the will to manipulate others verbally, revenge and "pay back," and so forth. These, Jesus tells us, can all be replaced with genuine compassion, purity and good will.

And when we ask "How?" he points us back to his first lesson, above, that assures us of our place and future in God's eternal purposes. In the clear light of that, our angers and lusts seem repulsive, or even silly, since we see them as God sees them.

Then he invites us to follow him into his practices, such as solitude, silence, study, service, worship--we call them spiritual disciplines. There, with him, the readinesses to do evil that inhabit our bodily members through long practice are gradually removed, to an ever increasing degree. Our flesh increasingly comes to the side of our spirit in service to God. The disciplines for the spiritual life are a central part of the crucial information which Jesus brings to us, and we dare not neglect it.

Then, as we are advancing in the first two areas of Jesus's teaching, he will begin to teach us in a third area of absolutely vital information. We must learn of his positive interactions and involvements with us in the concrete occasions of our day-to-day activities. When we act "in his name" we act on his behalf, and he always involves himself in the process. We have to learn how this works, and he will certainly teach us as we expect him to move in our circumstances and are attentive.

I have personally experienced this "interaction" in many types of contexts, from family matter to large-scale writing projects, intense committee meetings or counselling sessions, speaking

occasions, or repairing a broken water pipe or automobile. You may be very sure that if your sincere intent is to glorify God and bless man in your effort, and you are not motivated by unloving attitudes, you will see the hand of God move with you as you expectantly do your work. Your part is simply to expect it, watch for it, give thanks as you see it, and, on the basis of your experience, encourage others to do the same.

If you trust Jesus Christ as your teacher, he will teach you in all these ways. You should always put forth your very best efforts, of course, and you will always find room for improvement. But you also will certainly know the astonishing reality of God's eternal kind of life flowing through you moment by moment and forever. And the effects of your efforts will, as is seen in persons and events in the Bible, be vastly greater than what could result from your abilities alone.