



SO WHO IS LIKE JESUS?

When we follow a man or a movement instead of Christ, we end up with an imitation. There is a better course.

By **JAMIE BUCKINGHAM**

Earlier this year, on the crowded Staten Island Ferry in New York City, a wild-eyed man suddenly went berserk. Drawing a two-foot, razor-sharp Japanese sword from a scabbard, he began slashing and stabbing. Before he was finally subdued by a security guard, he had killed two people and severely wounded more than 20 others.

When questioned he told police Jesus told him to do it.

Several years ago a young couple who formerly belonged to my church in Florida moved back to New England. Some time after they settled in their new home I got a call from the local police dispatcher. The husband, who was in jail, had given my name as a character reference. He had taken his wife to a doctor's office. As he was waiting in the outer office he suddenly jumped to his feet and began pulling all the pictures off the wall, smashing them on the floor.

Jesus, he told the police, was unhappy with those secular pictures. He had commanded my friend to destroy them.

A few months later I received another phone call, this one from a state trooper in southern New England. He had chased down and apprehended this same couple. They were driving south—in the northbound lane of Interstate 95. They told the trooper Jesus had told them if they could make it all the way from New England to Florida in the northbound lane, He would give them a marvelous faith ministry.

The trooper wanted to know if these people were following my teaching—or were they simply crazy.

I told him that I couldn't remember the last time I had recommended that my followers drive on the wrong side of the road to test their faith. I suggested the couple should be evaluated by a psychiatrist.

History is full of stories of people—and groups of people—who have done all sorts of strange things, even cruel things, in an attempt to be like Jesus.

Charles Manson not only said Jesus was pleased with his behavior as a mass murderer, he said he was Jesus Christ.

Those two young couples in Pensacola,

Florida, who blew up those abortion clinics at Christmas in 1984 said they were doing it to please Jesus.

A lot of people run for public office to please Jesus. Sometimes they wind up running against others who say the same thing.

In Northern Ireland, Catholics are killing Protestants and Protestants are killing Catholics. Both groups say they are doing it to please Jesus.

Protestants killed Moslems on their way to the Holy Land during the Crusades to please Jesus. On their way they killed Jews also.

Catholics killed Jews and Protestants during the Inquisition to please Jesus.

Hitler believed he was pleasing God by killing the insane, the physically handicapped, the trade unionists, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Jews and Christian dissenters.

Martin Luther, the Great Reformer, called for the burning of all synagogues in the name of Jesus.

It hasn't been too many years ago that Catholic priests led mobs in South America, burning Protestant churches.



All over the world sincere people are doing strange things to please Jesus. "I'm like Jesus," one group says. "No, I'm like Jesus," another group says. We divide our churches into sometimes warring denominations and call them by ridiculous, almost blasphemous names—all claiming the name of Jesus.

So who's like Jesus?

Well, I am for sure.

Yet if I am, then you're not.

And suddenly we're at odds. If we press the point enough, we'll go to war.

Why this great discrepancy? How can so many people say they are like Jesus, yet be so different? Here's the answer: I become like the Jesus I perceive.

If my model for Jesus is a liturgical priest, then I will see Jesus as that—and will eventually become as the priest is.

If my model for Jesus is an angry fundamentalist who is out to get sinners, then I will envision Jesus the same way—and will eventually take on that angry characteristic.

A church with an angry pastor will be a church full of angry people.

A church with an immoral pastor will

spawn immorality.

A church with a money-grubbing pastor will be a church of greedy people.

A church whose spiritual leader believes all Christians should be rich—or poor—will see that trait emulated in the people.

We become like the Jesus we perceive.

Early in his ministry a fisherman by the name of Andrew introduced his brother, Simon, to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and told him he would one day be called Cephas—a common Aramaic name which means rock, or stone.

I imagine Andrew, who felt he knew his brother far better than this young rabbi, probably chuckled. Simon will become a rock? This unruly, unstable, hot-tempered brother of mine whose moods change as often as the clouds cover the sun? You mean his very character will change? No way!

Simon was a man like so many of us. A chameleon, who changed colors according to the environment. He had the direction and stability of a tumbleweed blown across the desert. It was impossible to believe that one day he would be

so strong and solid that people would know him as "the rock."

Yet that day came. After walking with Jesus for two and a half years there came a hot afternoon in northern Galilee when Jesus decided it was time to quiz His disciples.

"Who do people say I am?"

They replied, "Some see You as John the Baptist, others as Elijah, and still others as Jeremiah or one of the other fiery prophets."

"But what about you?" Jesus asked. "Who do you say I am?"

It was Simon who answered, almost blurting out his answer. "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

This time it was Jesus' turn to chuckle. "You did not receive that from someone else, Simon. That is revelation knowledge—straight from God." He then called him, for the first time, *Petros*, which is the Greek word for rock.

The basis for this is in the question Jesus asked His disciples. "Who do you say I am?"

Some people, they said, perceived Him as John the Baptist. Others as Elijah. Still

others perceived Him as Jeremiah or some other prophet.

In a recent sermon, Jack Hayford, pastor of the Church on the Way, Van Nuys, California, equated John the Baptist with the modern evangelicals. Hayford indicated many of them perceive Jesus as a straight, single-minded, no-nonsense type person. He equated Elijah with the Pentecostals, who have a strong emphasis on miracles and the supernatural. He saw Jeremiah and the prophets as the modern fundamentalists. They hate sin, demand righteousness, and will demonstrate and die for their cause.

Who, then, is like Jesus? All are. None are. He is all this—and much more. He is evangelical, charismatic and fundamentalist. He is also Catholic. He is formal, informal, conservative, liberal, black, white, single, married, male, female, adult, child, rich, poor, Democrat and Republican. He is all this—and much more. He is God.

It was that revelation that Simon Peter received. His model for Jesus was not John the Baptist, Elijah or Jeremiah. His perception was based on revelation knowledge. On that revelation, Jesus said, He would build His church.

Unfortunately, most church leaders have forsaken that concept. They have built their churches, not on revelation knowledge, but on Jesus as perceived by John Wesley, Martin Luther, Roger Williams, Alexander Campbell or the Pope in Rome. Others, unfortunately, have not chosen such good models. They perceived Jesus in Jim Jones, Mary Baker Eddy or Joseph Smith.

Today we are in danger of propagating this same concept as new churches—and denominations—are being formed on the basis of how certain men perceive Jesus. Strong charismatic leaders teach on riches, poverty, healing, miracles, discipleship, evangelism methods or personal lifestyles. Based on how we perceive Jesus in them, we become like the Jesus we perceive. The result is more groups following more men, all saying “We are of Jesus” but actually meaning “We are of Paul, we are of Apollos, we are of Tilton, Wimber, Hagin” or any other strong leader.

Problems invariably arise in our churches—and our personal lives—when we look for Jesus in each other. Jesus Christ is not a system of morals. He is not a pattern of behavior. He is not a way to get well or to get rich. He is not our servant whom we can order around by saying, “Jesus, fetch!” He is Lord.

All this came into focus earlier this

year when I was asked to speak at a minister’s meeting held at Jim Bakker’s Heritage Grand Hotel. Bakker, who founded the PTL Television Network, was to share the platform with me. Our subject: “Ministerial Lifestyle.” Bakker was to come at it from his perspective, I from mine.

I thought it would be a good time to air all of my pet peeves about ministerial excesses. Yet as I prepared for my time to speak, I began to realize that while others do not have the same lifestyle as Jesus did, neither do I.

I looked out across that room full of ministers. All were different. Some were wearing religious garb—clerical collars. Some were dressed like carnival hucksters with flashy coats and toothy smiles. Still others had adorned themselves with gold—bracelets, rings, huge watches, heavy crosses dangling from their necks. Some had arrived in royal chariots and used royal titles when introducing themselves. Scattered among them were the poor, men and women who either did not have—or chose not to use—money for lavish personal adornment. All believed differently, behaved differently and had different lifestyles. Yet every one of them loved Jesus, wanted to please Him and believed they were—the best they could—imitating Him.

I knew many of these men and women. I also knew their churches. These leaders were the “eye of the body” to their churches. They reflected what Jesus said in Matthew 6:22 (NIV): “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.” In short, the people of each church perceive Jesus as He is reflected in their pastor.

My first thought was: That’s an awesome responsibility for each leader. Then I thought again. But it is not God’s best will for any of us to perceive Jesus through another person. God’s best will is for us to perceive Jesus as Simon Peter did—by revelation knowledge. He’s not an evangelical (John the Baptist), nor a Pentecostal (Elijah), nor a fundamentalist (Jeremiah). He is the Son of the living God.

But such knowledge can only come by revelation.

There is only one way to be like Jesus—by allowing His Holy Spirit to reveal Him to us. ■

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