

Factions and Functions

When Jesus came to the people of God, He found numerous factions among them. There were among the Jews all the groups that most of us know about, like the Pharisees, the Saducees, the Scribes... but there were other groups too. There were the Synagogue Rulers, and the Rabbis. There were the Zealots, the Tax collectors and those who sympathized with them, and there was that reclusive community of the Essenes... and let's not forget the rank and file. Add to those groups the cultural Jews, or what *we* might call the unbelievers, whose understanding was that they were “in” because their families were “in” before them. To which group do you suppose Jesus gravitated? You are correct! None of the above!!

But Jesus was the *King of the Jews*, was He not? He was the only, the singular, the legitimate ruler and Lord over all of those groups. By rights, by Jewish tradition, by Holy Scripture, by Law, He had utter authority over each and every group, and every individual regardless of their group, their beliefs, their affiliation or even their lack of affiliation.

In addition to that, He was factually, actually, divinely, *sent* to those Jews. His follower John wrote in his Gospel account, in fact in the eleventh sentence of the book - very early on, in order to establish it as foundational to all that he would say subsequent to that - “*He came unto His own, and His own did not receive Him*” (John 1:12). Jesus came to all these groups, as One coming to His own. They were not only His own people, they were His; all of them.

But they did not receive Him. This is patently obvious from history and from all that is written in Scripture. In spite of having been sent to them, and obediently coming to them, Jesus Himself did not join any of these groups or factions. But neither was He stopped by not having done so, in His fulfillment of His role in the Earth; to serve and to glorify God, bringing about God's own will and Kingdom.

One might assert that Jesus just did what He did, not concerned about the community that rejected Him; that He was only concerned about healing the sick, and rescuing the poor, and the like. But that would be not only an erroneous assertion, but a blasphemous one. For Jesus Himself decries such a notion. Observe.

Toward the end of His ministry, immediately after Jesus “fussed out” several of the dominant factions in Judaism, whom even after observing and following Him for over three years, still didn't realize that He was the one about whom they'd been teaching, for whom *they said* they'd been waiting, Jesus spoke about the state of Judaism saying,

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Matt 23:37, Luke 13:34)

So you see, it wasn't that Jesus wanted nothing to do with Judaism - working His miracles, teaching and ministry “apart” from it - but it was very much that what Judaism had become was

not what God had intended it to be! What God intended it to be was what Jesus modeled; what Jesus taught; what Jesus preached, lived and advocated.

Jesus ministry, in spite of the fact that it was performed utterly outside of the very Judaism that He not only fulfilled, but which was *Him, Himself*, was summed up by the Apostle Peter when he was chosen by God to open the door of Gospel preaching, to bring the Good News to the Gentiles. While in the home of a Gentile, perhaps for the first time in his life, Peter said...

"In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ— He is Lord of all— that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree." (Acts 10:34-39)

Peter, a product of 1st century Judaism himself, makes no mention of Judaism other than to say that Jesus did His obedience to God in the land of the Jews, and they killed Him for it... factions notwithstanding.

He went about doing good. Neither the Pharisees nor the Scribes told Jesus what was good, Scripture did. The Essenes did not define for Jesus what was good, Scripture did. Those same Scriptures that He read, we read now. His Apostles read them, His brothers read them. Indeed the factions all read them! They haven't changed. In the same way that Jesus' ministry can be summed up as Peter summed it up, that He went about doing good, Scripture sums up the manner in which *our* Christian lives are to be lived out. I can think of two places... no three...

"You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." (Deu 6:5)

"... you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am Yahweh." (Lev 19:18)

And last but not least,

"He has shown you, O man, what is good and what Yahweh requires of you; but to justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

Our mandates come not from any faction, nor from any group, board, council, sect, clique, nor anything of the like. They come from the Word of God; in person, and in print.

Pastor