

Are You A Controversialist?

By Roelf L. Ruffner (2011)

How do you envision Jesus Christ? Many see him as the pale, limp figure of Renaissance art. We know this is not correct because the New Testament pictures Jesus as a **hardworking** carpenter for some thirty years before he began His ministry in Galilee.

Another misconception about Jesus is that He was not a **man of controversy** and merely went around consoling the sick and the downtrodden with encouraging words. Yet, again, this is not the Jesus Christ of the Bible. The Jesus of the Bible has been called the “Great Controversialist”. Everywhere He went during His 3 ½ year ministry there was a whirl of controversy and debate. Jesus was not a trouble maker but the **soul cleansing questions** He asked turned His world upside down. He confronted young and old, rich and poor, religious and infidel with **the word of God** – a mirror to their souls. As He said, “*Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell ye, Nay; but rather division*” (Luke 12:51).

Many Christians today see religious controversy (i.e. legitimately promoting and defending the truth) as “unloving and un-Christ-like”. They run from it. They hold to a Jesus who never challenged or rebuked anyone. Yet Jesus **loved** His critics enough to say to them, “*Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell*” (Matthew 23:33)?

Why is this? It may be because they do not know their Bible, Old or New Testaments. Or perhaps they have accepted the prevailing philosophy of religious **pluralism** which maintains that all religious beliefs are of equal value. Others have bought into the idea that all truth is relative and there is no such thing as **an absolute**. Yet Jesus Himself refuted these outlooks when He said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*” (John 14:6).

After Jesus ascended into Heaven the church He established also became the center of controversy. She was persecuted by the religious authorities and later the civil authorities. Christians **challenged** the beliefs of others in truth and love. For example, the Apostle Paul spent a good deal of his time debating and in heated discussion with opponents of Christianity. When he was in Ephesus the historian Luke records, “*And he went into the synagogue, and spoke boldly concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not but spake evil of that way before the multitudes, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus*” (Acts 19:8,9).

Even today, if Christians truly follow Jesus, they will find their lives often **embroiled in controversy**; whether it is over the necessity of baptism for salvation or same-sex marriage. Yet I wonder if we could have survived one day in the life of Jesus Christ?