



Storming Fortresses

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh,
but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:4

Vol. 20; No. 7

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July, 2001

Thought Provokers:

As bread is made of wheat, and wine is made of the grapes, so Christ is made of a woman. His body was part of the flesh and substance of the virgin.

Thomas Watson

The awful majesty of the Godhead was mercifully sheathed in the soft envelope of human nature to protect mankind.

A.W. Tozer

God became man to turn creatures into sons; not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man.

C.S.Lewis

WWJD Rhymes with Heresy

Part 2: Sins of Omission and Commission

By

Murray McLeod-Boyle

Introduction

In part one of this article we looked at the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the necessity of Jesus partaking of two natures in order to realise salvation. We did this in order to set a foundation for our criticism of the WWJD cliché that has raised its head and which seems to be gaining in popularity. This cliché has a real air of orthodoxy about it, however, many pious sounding words have been used to disguise error.

In initially assessing WWJD, which stands for "What Would Jesus Do?", we noted that this cliché

certainly has high ideals. To say to a Christian that 'Jesus Christ must be his example in everything' has a definite air of credibility. Therefore we asked, "Is Jesus our example in everything?" To this question we gave the answer, No! To put it unequivocally so that no one misunderstands: Jesus was not, is not, and never intended to be our example in everything. This said, let us explore the reasons that, despite the pious sounding nature of WWJD, this cliché is, in fact, a monumental error.

It is our contention that the WWJDites make two critical errors, both of

which correspond directly to the two natures of Christ as outlined in part one of this article.

1. Sins of Commission

The first aspect concerns Jesus Christ the Son of God. WWJD does not adequately give place to the divinity of Christ in the incarnation. This is the first and most fundamental error.

A. More Than a Man

As Jesus Christ was eternally the Son of God, it is a sheer impossibility to mimic Jesus at any point where His divinity comes

STORMING FORTRESSES is published monthly by REFORMATION MINISTRIES, a non-denominational organisation committed to maintaining and implementing Biblical truth as reasserted by the Reformers.

Subscriptions run from July 1 to June 30. Pro rata rates apply at other times. Current rates are as follows:

- \$40.00 Australia and New Zealand, (GST. Incl.)
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Amounts payable in Australian currency. Cheques made payable to:

REFORMATION MINISTRIES,
PO Box 1656,
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to the fore. Throughout His ministry Jesus demonstrated a consciousness that no ordinary mortal man can. We are dead in trespass and sin. Jesus Christ took on the form of a man yet without sin. His body was the same as ours. It was identical. Do not think for a moment that Jesus had a superhuman body. He did not. He ate. He drank. He tired. He slept. He bled. He died.

The point of difference was that in the human body there dwelt the divine Son of God. As such, Jesus was not merely man. Finite. Dead. Out of touch with God. Unable to know of the existence of God. Jesus had come from God. He knew God intimately. He knew God existed. Thus, when Jesus is a child, separated from His human parents at the feast, we are made aware of the fact that He was in *His Father's house*. A place He had to be.

Jesus knew who He was, from whence He came, and the specific purpose for which He was born. No ordinary man knows this. Even regenerate men struggle with these questions and certainly never attain the clarity of understanding that Jesus displayed.

B. Superior Discernment

The Scriptures also teach that Jesus was able to discern the thoughts of men and to know the time of His own death (Matthew 9:4; Luke 6:8; 9:47; John 13:1, 3; 16:19 & 30; 18:4; 19:28 and 21:17). These are traits that normal men do not display. No man knows the day of his death. No man readily knows the exact thoughts and intentions of another human heart. This again indicates the uniqueness of Christ.

C. I AM God

John 8:58 records these startling words: "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.'" In saying this, Jesus declares his divinity openly. Not only did He exist before Abraham, but Jesus also claims to be the "I am" and thus equates Himself with Yahweh. It is important to understand this covenantally. Abraham was the first Israelite. God called him out of Mesopotamia in order to make him into a great nation in which all the families of the earth would be blessed. In God's plan this family ended up in Egypt where they became slaves, yes, but importantly where they also became a nation. To lead His people out into their land, Yahweh raised up a faithful servant, Moses. In calling Moses to this task, God revealed Himself as Yahweh—I Am who I Am (Exodus 3:14). Later, this Moses leads the people to Sinai where they are covenantally bound to be the people of God. The covenant is sealed by blood and by the law—the binding stipulations of the covenant. Thus Jesus is not only stating that He preexisted Abraham, the father of the race, but that He also commissioned Moses, the lawgiver and saviour (type) of the Jews.

To accomplish both these feats, Jesus must have been none other than God Himself. This point was

not lost on the Jews. With greatest piety they sought to stone Jesus for what they believed to be blasphemy (v. 59).

For us the point is simple. Which man can ordinarily claim to preexist Abraham and to be the great I Am?

D. Power Over Nature

The Gospel also teaches us that Jesus had the power to command or suspend the laws of nature by which we, as men, and the world around us, are governed. Hence, He could calm the storm, turn water into wine, fill empty nets with fish, heal the sick, give sight to the blind and raise people from the dead.

At this point I admit that others have performed similar miracles, however, it is not the norm for fallen man. Also, it is important to note that those performing the miracles were the Prophets and Apostles commissioned by God to proclaim and attest the truth of the Gospel. Importantly, however, there is a single difference that sets Jesus apart. Jesus commanded or suspended on His own authority. The Prophets and Apostles appealed to His authority. Thus the prophet, Elijah, laid on the dead boy and cried to God (1 Kings 17:18 ff.). Peter commands, "In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!" (Acts 3:6). As God, Jesus had the authority to act in this way. He did not need to appeal to anyone higher than Himself in order complete a work of power. Being Himself God, He could appeal to no higher authority.

No other man has been able to claim this.

E. Agent of Creation

Related to this is the testimony of Colossians, where we learn that Jesus is the agent of Creation. Colossians 1:16 reads, "For by Him all things were created, *both* in the

heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him.”

Suffice to say, this is one more element that no other man can claim!

F. The Exact Representation

Before altering tack, we would adduce one more set of texts. These are Colossians 1:13-20 and Hebrews 1:1-4. In these texts we have revealed some significant truths about the uniqueness of Christ as God. He is the one who obtains salvation for His people. He is the ultimate revelation of and from God. He is higher than the angels. He is heir of all things (Cf., Psalm 2). Oh, yes, one other detail—one the WWJDites ignore—Jesus is the exact representation of the Father in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells (Cf. Colossians 2:9).

These texts mark Christ as totally unique. Jesus *is* something that no man born in the likeness of Adam is. Jesus is God! No other man can claim to be the Son of God.

G. Attributes

Last of all, we would like to make reference to the taxonomy applied in systematic theology, namely, the communicable and incommunicable attributes of God. Whilst there is debate on this subject as to what terms should be used, there is general agreement about the concept.¹ In essence, these terms are used to refer to those attributes which God alone possesses in contrast to those which are analogous in man. For example, God alone is eter-

nal. Man may live eternally, but he knew a beginning. God did not. God is self sustaining and relies on no one for His existence. Man is totally reliant on God for life. If God says “die,” we die. If He says, “live,” we live. We may also use the old terms of Omniscience, Omnipresence and Omnipotence. Man does not share these qualities. They belong to the absolute essence of God and not to His personal being. In contrast, all men are made in the image of God and therefore bear certain characteristics of God (characteristics of His Person). Man knows what it is to know, to love, to joy, to hate, to care, to think, to create, to develop and to speak. He does so because he is made in God’s image and therefore partakes of these qualities.

H. The First Error

It is at this very point that the WWJDites make their first error. They confuse these attributes and therefore corrupt the truth as it is found in the Scriptures. They ascribe to man the attributes of God and fail to recognise that Jesus Christ is unique as the eternal Son of God.

“How do they do this,” you ask? Well, simply take the WWJD cliché as the starting point. What would Jesus do? Jesus would be totally obedient to Our Father. This we know. However, in what word, thought or deed, this obedience would take shape is totally beyond any man to know. Asking this very question is ascribing to man nothing less than omniscience. In asking the question, they are positing that they can arrive at a definite and correct answer. This is omniscience. This is an attribute of God, not of man. It is an attribute that has no place in man.

It is man once more reaching beyond his station and contemptuously searching for equality with God.

Likewise, in seeking to be omniscient, the WWJDites implicitly deny the divinity of Christ. They do this by failing to recognise that Jesus is the exact representation of the Father and that in this He is more than man and cannot be mimicked by man. In His divine-human nature Jesus Christ stands alone. We as mere men cannot presume to know what Jesus would do, beyond knowing that Jesus would be obedient.

This is the sin of commission committed by those who subscribe to WWJD. As men, they take to themselves the attributes of God whilst at the same time denying the uniqueness of Jesus Christ who, as God, clearly has and demonstrates attributes and abilities that mere men cannot.

2. Sin of Omission

The second aspect, which we shall deal with in two parts, has to do with the failure of the WWJDites to deal correctly with Christ’s life as an example for Christians. To illustrate this and to make the point, we would like to refer to a comment by John Murray in relation to a sermon by B.B. Warfield:

It may not be out of place to remark that the title of the sermon, ‘Imitating the Incarnation’ is scarcely accurate. It is not the incarnation we are to imitate; it is the *mind* that was in Christ that we are to emulate, not the incarnation by which, in our Lord’s case, that mind was expressed.²

Murray’s comment is accurate and pertinent to the subject before

¹ For a discussion on this subject see Berkhof, *Systematics*, 55 ff.; For a slightly different perspective see Hodge, *Systematics*, 1:374 ff.

² John Murray, *Collected Writings*, 4 vols., (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, vol., 1 1977, reprint 1989; vol., 2 1977, reprint 1984; vol., 3 1982; vol., 4 1982), 3:360

us. Correctly, he notes that *we are to imitate the mind of Christ in the incarnation*, not the incarnation itself. Put another way, we are to pursue the attitudes, ethics, and morals of Christ in relation to the things of God, in order that we as men may know how to live appropriately before God. Imbibing these ethical standards will, in turn, lead us to action. We will seek to implement these standards and will thereby transform our lives. In this way we will truly imitate Christ.³

This is the acceptable Biblical idea of what it means to imitate or follow Christ.

A. Ethics

We have noted that Jesus divinity sets him apart from man. He has attributes which we do not. Equally, as we saw in part one, Jesus is truly man. He is not an apparition or phantasm. Therefore, there are points at which Jesus does serve as a perfect paradigm for the rest of mankind. This is the area that we need to focus upon here. Though, first, we need to put a qualifier in place. Following Jesus' example or following in Jesus' footsteps does not mean that we imitate Him word for word, deed for deed, or thought for thought. It means, more accurately, living in accord with the same precepts that Jesus followed. As Murray pointed out above, we do not mimic the incarnation, we mimic *the mind of Christ in the incarnation*. This must be understood. Many today try to

follow the exact deeds of Jesus as though that constitutes obedience. This is wrong. Paul tells us to be "transformed by the renewing of our minds." By renewing our minds and saturating them with the Gospel (the whole counsel of God) we will have the ethical and moral standards that will allow us to conform to the image of Christ. Again, this is what Paul categorically states in Romans 8:29, is it not? Those whom God appoints to life are to be conformed to the image of the Son. Hodge is correct when he writes, "The end to which those whom God has chosen are predestined, is *conformity to the image of his Son, i.e., that they might be like his Son in character and destiny.*"^{4, 5}

Therefore, the very first aspect of Jesus humanity that we as men should imitate is His devotion to the ethical standards of God, namely, those revealed in the Scriptures. Thus, if we would truly imitate Christ, we should be studying the Scriptures often. Not in isolated chunks, but in its totality. Not playing one Testament against the other, but studying the Bible as a unified whole. Not holding one writer as higher or more inspired than another, but reading and studying every word as breathed by God.

It is only in the study of the Scriptures that we will learn about the character of God and our reasonable response to that character. We must first learn of God's character in order to know what pleases and displeases Him. Without this knowl-

edge it will be impossible to render full obedience.

To illustrate this, please consider the following. A man stands at a public meeting to make comment upon the character and standards of another individual. After speaking for several minutes a person interjects and asks, "have you meet this person or read any of his writings?" To this our intrepid commentator replies, "No, but I do not see the relevance of that to my giving an opinion about his character." We are not sure about you, but we believe the next scene would be scornful laughter and derision. "How ridiculous! This man claims to speak about this person's character and yet he neither knows him nor has read his works, preposterous!"

Such a scene is ludicrous. Most would find this completely absurd. Yet, we would venture to suggest that this exact scenario is played out time and again within Christian circles. Particularly, we would lay this criticism squarely at the feet of those who subscribe, in any form, to WWJD. Often they presume to speak in the name of God without having studied God's revealed will on the matter. At other times they attribute qualities to Christ or limit Christ's behaviour when there is no warrant or attestation to this found in Scripture.

They make up their mind as to the character of God based solely on their own desires and opinions or upon a truncated view of Scripture. Thus, the God they present is very

3. At this point we do not have in view acts which are associated with Jesus' divinity. We are not expected to die upon the cross as Jesus did for the sins of God's people. Indeed, as sinners, we cannot. Yet it is equally true that "greater love has no man than he lay down his life for another." We can follow Christ's example of what it means to live sacrificially, but the results and consequences will never be the same. This distinction must always be maintained.

4. Charles Hodge, *Romans*, The Geneva Series of Commentaries (1835; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975) 285. Italics original. Bold added.

5. Now, there is general agreement that Romans 8:29 refers to the consummation and to that final act of conformation by God in which the elect shall be totally and completely formed in the image of Christ (the exact representation of God). However, to rule out the process as having no legitimate application now is to deny the work of sanctification. In the consummation God will complete the good work which He has begun (Philippians 1:6).

often a god shaped after their own imagination and not according the revelation of Scripture.⁶

This distortion then has wider implications for how these people perceive the actions of Christ.

B Actions

As the WWJDers, to all intents and purposes, invent a Christ of their own making, it is no surprise that they typically speak of “love” and “grace,” but have little emphasis upon law, righteousness, and sanctification. What we mean by this can best be illustrated by Christ’s just rage when He entered the temple courts and drove out the money-changers.⁷ The WWJDites talk of following the example of Christ, but at this critical juncture they fail to live by their own mission statement. When was the last time that you saw a WWJDer grab a whip and go through the local church turning out all the hypocrisies and heresies to be found therein? We cannot say that we have seen anything akin to this of late.

Maybe that is a little too radical for the modern WWJD mindset—a mindset that follows the modern (worldly) trends and philosophies rather than the Biblical ethos. Let us make it simpler. When was the last time you heard a WWJDer engaged in a bitter debate with a politician, refer to that person as an old fox.⁸ Again, we have not heard this lately. Not that we really expected to. After all, the WWJDites tend to come

from traditions that do not engage in political debate. That is worldly and a little too tacky for Christian people to be involved in.⁹

Alright, let us move a little closer to home. When was the last time you heard a WWJDer dress down a local church leader by telling him he was a viper on his way to hell?!¹⁰ No joy here either? Do not worry. We did not expect any positive replies.

Thus we see the second failing of this cliché. Where Jesus was involved in political action the WWJDers hold Christ up, but not as an example of righteous conduct. Where Jesus was justly enraged at the mockery made of His Father’s house the WWJDers hold Christ up, but not as an example of righteous conduct. Where Jesus engages the ecclesiastical leaders and presents them with the uncomfortable truth the WWJDers hold Jesus up, but not as an example of righteous conduct.

So why do these people hold Jesus up? Primarily they do so as a source of ridicule. So pathetic is their Jesus that more often than not they cause this precious Name to be defamed. Secondly, they hold Jesus up as a radical example of a counter-culture. Unfortunately though, it is not a Christ-ian counter-culture. You will hear them speak of this radical, Jesus, who turned over tables and told the Pharisees a thing or two. They will hold Jesus up as an example of someone who overthrew the oppressive shackles of Church leaders. You will hear them proclaim Jesus to be the great example of why

we should avoid politics and not engage the world. You will even here them proclaim Jesus to be the greatest example of love and the very reason that we should not frighten people with the ugly concept of hell. However, you will not find them declaring that this Jesus exemplifies for His people the way to live before God Almighty. You will not find them declaring that Jesus is the standard of all righteousness which we as His younger brothers should follow.

These people only know a Jesus who is a counter-revolutionary who attacks all authority figures as tyrants and despots who are opposed to true human freedom. Make no mistake. This includes our beloved God and Father. These are the people who dissect the Godhead. They tell us that the angry, misunderstood, and judgmental God of the Old Testament could not communicate with man adequately because of all His problems. Thus it took the kinder Son, Jesus, to come and explain the Father to us. This Jesus, being love and grace, accepted everyone and spared them from the gruff older god. As such, Jesus is opposed to the Father and to all rule and authority and thereby becomes the ultimate anarchist and antinomian.

This is a blatant and unmitigated distortion of the truth posited by Scripture. When our God is mocked we should be filled with fury. When politicians live immorally we should condemn them. When Church leaders stand clearly outside of Christ, they should be told that they are on

6. Marcion, a heretic of the Second century, denied the Old Testament and most of the New Testament. In short, he did not accept the canon of Scripture. He was condemned by the early Church. One then asks, how is it that we allow practical Marcionism to prosper in the Church today? Furthermore, it is worth noting that Marcion was a docetic.

7. See: Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-46; John 2:13-16.

8. Luke 13:31-32.

9. The absolute contradiction here is that these people deny political action and a host of other things as too worldly and therefore to be shunned. Yet the very philosophy they live by is based solely on the perception of the world and not the Scriptures.

10. Matthew 12:34; 23:31-32.

their way to hell. This is the example that Jesus left for us. It is the example of righteousness. It is the example of the sanctified life. It is the example of a mind tuned to God. It is the example of knowing the precepts of God. It is nothing less than God Himself demonstrating to us what man should be in the example of His beloved Son, Jesus.

This is the sin of omission committed by WWJDers. When Christ holds out to us, His people, a true example of how we should live, these people deny its validity. For all the seeming piety involved in this cliché it is actually bankrupt of any Biblical warrant. After claiming omniscience for fallen man and thereby robbing Jesus of His divinity, WWJD then fails to call man to

the total obedience which he is obliged to render to God.

True to its forerunner, bumper-sticker theology, WWJD has proven to be nothing less than an anti-theology. It does not exhort the Christian population to greater obedience and higher standards of personal righteousness and sanctification. What it does do is reduce Christianity to a cliché—a cliché that bears absolutely no resemblance to the Name that we bear or the example we are to follow.

Conclusion

In short, Biblical truth is turned on its head. At the very point where Christians are obliged to follow the example of Jesus Christ the

WWJDites stand huddled in the corner like deaf mutes. They have no voice, they hear no evil, and facing the corner like disobedient school boys, they see no wrong doing. Yet, in contrast, where Jesus Christ's uniqueness as the Son of God comes to the fore, these people find a voice to equal that of the three tenors. Using this medium they call people to follow Jesus' example—to be omniscient and omnipotent—things which mortal man can never be; Things which mortal man should never desire to be.

This emphasis is wrong. It is un-Biblical. Therefore it should be spurned.

In a phrase, all we can say is, WWJD rhymes with heresy!