



Minutes With Messiah

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THIS IS US

We may not all a-gree or think a-like. We may not all be wise or look a-like. We
may not all be free to act a-like. But in the love of Christ we are a-like.
This church of Christ, this church you see, What we are is fam-i-ly. This is you and
this is me; But this is us.

This is a song written for Spiritual Explosion XIX, the annual youth rally of the Riverside church of Christ in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This year's theme is This Is Us.

In the final section of the chorus the idea is to present one hand ("this is you"), then the other ("this is me") and finally to clasp both hands together ("this is us").

The term "church of Christ" is used generically, as in scripture, and not in reference to a specific denomination.

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RED LETTER EDITION

Back in the 1950s and 1960s, many popular Bibles were sold as “Red Letter Edition.” The words of Jesus were highlighted in red. That meant that the gospels, the Revelation, and one passage in Paul’s writings were in red, and the rest of the text was in black. Some of the newer translations got away from that practice for a while, but now we see the practice coming back. Christian musician Crowder even has a popular song about being saved after reading the red letters. The words of Jesus may be very important, but there are some problems associated with the red-letter philosophy.

Which Words?

One minor issue is determining which words should be in red. Much of the time this isn’t a problem. Most of the writers make it very clear when Jesus was speaking and when not. Still, there are some basic questions, particularly when it comes to the writings of John.

The books of the New Testament were almost entirely written in Greek. That is significant, because

Should John 3:16 be in red or not?

Greek does not use punctuation and word order is essentially irrelevant. As with many languages, Greek word order doesn’t usually make a difference, unlike English. Where in English there is a distinct difference between “dog bites boy,” and “boy bites dog,” in most languages that distinction wouldn’t matter. If “dog” is nominative (the subject), then wherever it is in the sentence people know that the dog is doing the biting. If “boy” is predicative (the object), then even if it comes first people will know that the boy got bitten. That usually won’t effect knowing who the speaker is. A lack of punctuation will.

In English, the famous example of the importance of punctuation is the difference between “Let’s eat, grandma,” and “Let’s eat grandma.” Lawsuits have occurred over the placement or lack of a comma. The problem with Greek, as it relates to this discussion, though, is the lack of quotation marks. This feature did not exist to set of quotations specifically until the 1600s.

In the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, this is usually not an issue. It is very clear when Jesus starts and stops speaking. Quotations are often introduced by some form of “he said.” An action verb usually indicates that the writer moved from quoting to narrating. This is true even in Matthew, where long discourses are recorded.

John, however, may have a habit of adding his own commentary. One example of this is the conversation with Nicodemus in John 3. In the early verses we know when the speaker changes because we are told. However, when Jesus begins a more lengthy discourse in verse 10 we don’t have a clear indication of when his words end. Some red-letter editions end the words of Jesus at verse 21, making the whole section a direct quotation. Others may end it at verse 17, making it more accurately rendered:

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”

“He that believeth on him is not condemned:”

Still others think the commentary begins with verse 16 because it is almost a repetition of verse 15. If that is the case, then what is perhaps the most famous quotation of or about Jesus may not be his words. Should John 3:16 be in red or not? It is really a technical question of interest primarily to scholars. But otherwise does it really matter? That is the second issue with red-letter editions.

So what?

Does it really make a difference whether John 3:16 is in red or not; whether it is a quotation from Jesus or not? That depends on who you ask.

Essentially the question boils down to this: are the words of Jesus more important than the rest of the Bible? If so, what is the comparative weight?

There are a couple of discussions that come from these questions. The first is a matter of context. Jesus was a Jew living under the Law of Moses and speaking primarily to Jewish listeners. He even emphasized that when a gentile came to him to be healed.

But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. (Matt 15:24-28)

In John 10:16 he refers to “other sheep..which are not of this fold,” probably referring to the gentiles. He emphasizes that his primary audience is Jewish.

Because this is true, some of the words in red letters may even be less important to gentiles today than to those to whom he spoke. Are we to make some sort of distinction (orange letters?) between those words and the words that apply generally? Do we assume that everything spoken to Jews as Jews also applies to gentiles. In spite of Acts 15, some hold that doctrine. Do we go to the other extreme, and argue that nothing Jesus said applies to gentiles? That contention has also been made. Or do we let the context rule, and not worry about the color of the letters? That seems to be the most likely correct choice.

The other “so what” discussion has also led to extremes. If we hold the red letters to be of more importance than the rest of the Bible, what conclusions can be drawn? Do we reject the rest of the scriptures entirely; do we give them less weight than the words of Jesus; or do we accept the entire Bible as the inspired word of God?

Over the past half century (and possibly much longer) there has grown a movement that says that the church that Paul preached and developed is not the church that Jesus intended. In a sense this dates back even to the discussion in Jerusalem in Acts 15. Some argued that Paul was preaching a doctrine to the gentiles that differed from what Jesus taught the Jews. For about ten years the church had been almost exclusively made up of Jewish members, either by birth or by conversion. When Paul preached that the gentiles could be Christians without following the Law of Moses, some objected. In essence they said that Jesus was Jewish and never taught against circumcision, so it must also be binding on those gentiles who wanted to become Christians. The elders in Jerusalem (who had oversight over those people) and the apostles took the opposite view, that Jewish believers could continue to follow the restrictions of the Law but could not bind that Law on gentiles.

Today this same attitude is expressed beginning with the phrase, “But Jesus didn’t say anything about...” There are a lot of things that we don’t have recorded words of Jesus about them. That doesn’t mean he didn’t say something; it just means we don’t have anything recorded. Therefore, absent any other scripture about the topic, it is apparently not an issue for the church. But here is where the anti-Paulines come in.

“Jesus didn’t say anything about women speaking in the assembly, so it must be OK; that Paul fellow was just a misogynist and forced his opinion on the church.” If the red letters are more important, then maybe we can ignore Paul’s clear statements about the role of women in the assembly. After all, this is the twenty-first century and a different culture. Of course, that ignores Paul’s argument that this was the God-ordained order from creation. (1 Tim 2:11-14)

“Jesus didn’t say anything about musical instruments in the worship.” That is actually a two-sided argument. Instruments were used in the Temple, but not in the synagogue. Since the assembly of the church is patterned after the synagogue worship, then his silence on the matter would tend to argue against the use of musical instruments. Paul was very specific that the body was the instrument to be used; but Paul’s words aren’t in red letters.

“Jesus didn’t say anything about homosexual behavior.” Paul did, but apparently Paul is not to be trusted since his words aren’t in red. If truth be told, Jesus did speak about homosexuality. He condemned adultery and fornication, sexual activity outside of marriage. When he spoke of marriage he said, “For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?” (Matt 19:5) From the beginning, he says, marriage was between a man and a

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woman, and any sexual activity outside of that (homosexual or heterosexual) is sin.

If the words of Jesus have precedence over those of Paul, what about the other apostles and writers. Do we reject the marvelous structure of Hebrews because we don’t know which man wrote it, or even if it was a man that wrote it? Matthew, Peter, and John were direct disciples of Jesus. In fact, it is only through them (and one instance through Paul) that we even have the words of Jesus (assuming Mark was taught by Peter). Luke was Paul’s disciple, but his carefully researched account accords in almost every way with the other gospels. Do we reject the letters of Peter and John (and that of James, as well) because they are not the direct words of Jesus in red letters? If we accept Peter’s writings as authoritative along with the words of Jesus, then we must also accept Paul’s writings, because Peter did.

There may be value in red-letter editions. It may be nice to know specifically what the gospel writers credited Jesus with saying, even if sometimes the editors may get it wrong. Ultimately, though, two things stand out. The entire Bible is the inspired word of God, not just the words of Jesus. And it is less important to know what Jesus specifically said than to know that Jesus died to take away sin. It is important to accept what he said, but more important to accept what he did.

THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS

Twelve men went in - to the land to see what God had in store.
Sha - dows will grow t'ward the night. Il - lu - sions, and noth - ing more.

Ten men on - ly saw gi - ants; Prom - ise was seen by two more.
Gi - ants may just be small, with sha - dows to e - ven the score.

They might be gi - ants or just sha - dows in the ev' - ning. They might be
gi - ants or a trick of the light. They might be prob - lems, or if
trust - ing and be - liev - ing, You might hear God say, "I will win your fight."

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It features a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a common time signature (C). The melody is primarily composed of eighth and quarter notes, with several triplet markings (indicated by a '3' above the notes) throughout. The lyrics are printed below the vocal line, with some words underlined to indicate syllable placement. The piano accompaniment consists of chords and single notes, often mirroring the triplet patterns of the melody.

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