

The Spiritual Battle No One Is Talking About

In episode 16 of my new series, *Questions With God*, I ask the question, “Can Anyone Do What Jesus Did?” For the past 10 years I’ve made a career out of trying to prove that we can do what Jesus did, and in fact, it’s kind of a non-negotiable as a Christian. That being said, I want to focus on something that doesn’t get talked about much, especially in the circles in which I typically roll these days. As far as I can tell, there is an underlying spiritual politic at play surrounding this topic, which causes much confusion even as it attempts to bring protection and balance.

In any belief system, there will always be a sliding hierarchy of what people believe to be essential for their faith, moving on down to fringe matters that we either don’t care about or don’t think about often enough for them to carry much weight in our lives. Charismatics (and I realize I am painting with a very broad brush here) tend to view “doing what Jesus did” as one of the main essentials of their faith. They put a high emphasis on the Holy Spirit and are adamant that we should be using the spiritual tools made available to us by that Spirit. More mainline evangelicals (again, broad brush) tend to put a higher emphasis on belief and the disciplines, with a bent towards being a little more cautious towards things “of the Spirit.”

Those two camps and the gulf between them appear to be right where God has plopped me, whether I like it or not, in an attempt to pull each of them closer together. On the one hand, I want to make clear that the gifts of the Spirit should be a part of every Christian’s tool belt, but on the other hand, I also want to underscore the deep importance of sound biblical understanding and, yeah, not all of your personal issues are spiritual ones. While inner healing can be helpful, sometimes

you may just have to make better choices. But things get tricky when you start to take a closer look at these camps and realize that neither can truly be painted with a broad brush, because there are infinite nuances and shades within each spectrum, depending on one's experiences, background, upbringing and current spiritual journey.

These two hills—one hill preaching that you must take risks and, yes, even fail, if you want to grow in the gifts of the Spirit; the other hill preaching that yes, God is more than able to work through you, but we need to be careful—seem so close to one another, but quite often, they are miles apart. This isn't, I think, because of irrevocable theological issues, but rather because on both hills reside scores of people with vastly different levels of understanding of these issues. And both hills are filled with people who are not only very comfortable on their hill, but who are also convinced that they are right.

In many ways, it reminds me of the story of David and Goliath, found in 1 Samuel 17, where on one hill, you have the armies of Israel encamped, and on the other the army of the Philistines, with a valley between them. For 40 days they just kind of stared at each other, with the big bad Goliath strutting out to insult the Israelites each day, challenging them to a fight. They're on separate hills; they know they're opposed to one another, but no one seems willing to really commit to engaging the other. So there's just a constant restlessness while everyone waits for someone else to do something about this situation.

In the same way, it sometimes feels like evangelicals and charismatics have a sense that they're somehow opposed to one another ("You're too rigid and cautious!" "Oh yeah, well you're too reckless and presumptuous!"), yet instead of engaging one another—not in a fight, but in true bi-partisan love and trying to understand each other—we just sit around on our own hills singing our songs, digging our trenches a little

deeper and wondering when God will wake that other hill up to what they're doing wrong for the kingdom.

The problem with this thinking, and indeed this undercurrent of spiritual politics, is that God isn't a charismatic, nor is He an evangelical. He's not a Catholic. He's not an Episcopalian or a Lutheran. He's a Father. He has a lot of kids who are wildly different from one another, and I think He knew right from the start that we were going to have a hard time getting along with one another, which is why Jesus tells his disciples in John 13:35 that "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

I had always read this command as our marching orders for the world, for those outside the fold, but I think Jesus had more than our outward focus in mind when He said this. True disciples of Christ will be identified as the ones who love those who disagree with them. Even the disciples themselves, who unquestionably had a better "pastor" than any of us ever will, struggled with getting along. You've got James and John scheming behind the scenes with their mother to try to elevate their status in the coming kingdom, while Peter is letting his jealousies get the better of him when he inquires about the "beloved disciple's" future.

Can anyone do what Jesus did? Typically the question is being asked from the standpoint of the gifts of the Spirit, but maybe we should take a step back and ask this same question on a more fundamental level. Can anyone do what Jesus asked us to do? Can anyone love those who disagree with them well? Will you be the David who finally breaks from the comfort of your own camp to engage with the camp across the valley? In the Old Testament this involved a fight, but in the New Covenant it requires peace and love and a desire for unity. You may still have to slay Goliath, but more often than not, that Goliath is found inside your mind. The only time you see him is when you look in the mirror.