

## #2 Jesus Human and Divine

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### Part 7

#### *Internal Conflict*

Before we could get into a discussion of why Jesus' ministry defied the conventional wisdom of his day and ours, we needed to explore the nature of Truth. There are over seven billion people on this planet. Therefore there are over seven billion versions of Truth. Each one of us has our own way of looking at the world. Christians believe that Jesus' way of looking at the world should also be theirs.

Of course, there is a great deal of overlap in how the world is viewed by groups of human beings. We are conditioned by many factors. These include physical factors such as our gender, race, age, and overall health. There are geographic factors such as our nationalities, location (urban or rural), climate, and the ease of access to food and water.

We are conditioned by our cultures, which are so complex I'm not even going to explore that avenue. We are conditioned by our religious beliefs and our understanding of the existence of a "higher power," conditioning which is influenced by personal experience, participation (or lack of participation) in a faith community, and the examples of our families.

I can go on, of course, but I think you can appreciate just how many variables go in to making us who we are and therefore influencing how we act in the world and what we say to each other.

Ideally, we all seek a certain consistency in our lives. In other words, we can define our happiness as being in a situation in which the way we understand the world internally pretty much matches our observations and experiences externally.

For example, there are highly diverse ideas and attitudes about the issue of immigrants — not just in the United States but in almost every nation. We debate whether people from other countries should be allowed to enter ours. Some people spread or believe rumors about how strangers or foreigners bring crime, disease, and steal jobs. Such beliefs are hardly confined to the present day. There are endless pictures of signs from decades ago bluntly stating things like, "No Irish Need Apply," or "Whites only," or "Women are not admitted to this college." Prejudice is as old as humanity itself.

The problem comes, of course, when the people who have such ideas actually come into contact with those whom they are trying to exclude. The normal process of such interactions can lead to more and more internal conflicts in those holding prejudicial views. Suddenly, the internal prejudices they have been conditioned to believe come into conflict with what they actually observe in the world. In other words, once prejudiced people have to start working, talking, and interacting with strangers, foreigners, and people who are just plain "different" they often realize that these strangers, foreigners, and otherwise different people are in fact no different from themselves. Yes, there may be outward physical or language differences, but basically, many prejudiced people start to realize that their worldview, their idea of truth, is almost the same as that of the so-called stranger.

People like stability. People like consistency. When they begin to realize that what they have believed internally differs significantly from what they experience externally, they have a conflict. Psychologists call

this conflict “cognitive dissonance.” Either they have to pretend to ignore the evidence of their senses and experiences or they have to change their internal beliefs to match the new reality.

Is it any wonder that in most countries, people’s attitudes about immigrants and strangers are far more open and relaxed in cities and large towns than they are in the countryside? It’s caused in part by the fact that people in cities generally must interact with a much greater variety of people than people residing in the countryside. City people who have prejudiced views have to, for the most part, modify them or even abandon them just because of what they experience in real life every day.

So what does all this have to do with following Jesus? Next week I want to start to explain how Jesus entered the world to create more internal conflict in human beings than anyone before or after him. If anyone can be said to be the father of cognitive dissonance, it is Jesus.

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Grace and Peace to You!

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***Please join us for Sunday Worship online at 10:30!***

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