



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

An Overlooked Side of Jesus

David Anguish

According to a notation inside the cover, I bought John Stott's *Christ the Controversialist* in May 1981.¹ I rate it as one of my best book purchases.

The summary on the back cover says, "Jesus lived a stormy life. His teachings angered the Establishment and brought him face to face with those who disagreed—Pharisees who were shocked at his lack of respect for their traditions, Sadducees who could not accept Jesus' view of the afterlife, prostitutes and other social outcasts who could hardly imagine how a good man would even talk to them."

Stott began the Preface by saying, ". . . Jesus Christ engaged in controversy. . . . My objects in studying these controversies of Christ are to clarify issues being debated, to demonstrate that they are live issues still, . . ."

Chapter one begins with the affirmation that, "the popular image of Christ as 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild' simply will not do. It is a false image. To be sure, He was full of love, compassion and tenderness. But . . . Christ was a controversialist. . . ."

In his exchanges with his opponents, Jesus intended to prod, provoke, probe, and disturb. He challenged their wrong and simplistic understandings as well as their spiritual complacency. He wanted them to make the changes necessary to know God.

Stott's selections for study include exchanges with people who had been "going to synagogue" all their lives. They were the ones who "led the services." No, they were not always wrong, and where he could, Jesus commended them. But in the main, even though they were seriously committed to religion, their thinking needed to be stretched and their eyes opened so their wills could be changed.

¹ Stott's book was updated and reprinted in 2013, with the new title, *Christ in Conflict: Lessons from Jesus and His Controversies*. It can be purchased at various bookstores and online vendors; search for ISBN-13: 9780830844029.

Stott chose just eight of Jesus' debates for his study and aimed only for the high points in each of them. He still wrote a book over 200 pages long. I understand his need to be selective and take note of it only to point out that another book could be written on the times Jesus provoked and prodded his *disciples*.

It is important to remember that Jesus' provocative exchanges are as much a part of the gospels and his story as his birth, beatitudes, parables, crucifixion, and resurrection. My sense is that some are long overdue in studying, pondering, and being challenged by them.

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www.davidanguish.com