

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."



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Was Jesus a Rebel?

-- By Terry Carter

It seems that the world has decided that Jesus was a rebel. Some preachers have been saying this for years and I've read it in a number of books written by preachers. What I don't hear or read is anybody challenging this assertion.

Lately, even the pop singer, Madonna, has jumped on that bandwagon. Her new album is titled "Rebel Heart". The cover pictures her face bound with straps. As part of the publicity for it, she posted similar images of Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, and many others including Jesus to represent the "rebel hearts" in history.

She came under fire for this for two reasons:

First - Some saw it as racist to have images of black leaders bound by straps. Those making this complaint apparently didn't mind others being pictured as bound by straps.

Second - Some objected to her comparing herself to Jesus. They saw this as blasphemous.

What I didn't hear is anyone complaining about Jesus being characterized as "a rebel". It seems that we have simply come to accept this as a truism. But I think a fair look at the Scriptures indicates otherwise.

First of all, we need to establish what it means to be a "rebel". Too many see it as simply going against the norms of society. There are times when this might be done out of rebellion, but it is not in and of itself rebellion.

My dictionary gives two definitions for the noun "rebel":

1. A person who rises in opposition or armed resistance against an established government or ruler.
2. A person who resists authority, control, or convention, disobedient.

It is clear that Jesus was never involved in armed resistance against any established government or ruler. Not only did He tell Peter to put his sword away, He refused to use the power that He had to resist those who

came to arrest Him. Instead, He submitted to Scriptures and the Will of the Father.

"51 And suddenly, one of those [who] [were] with Jesus stretched out [his] hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. 52 But Jesus said to him, "**Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.** 53 "Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? 54 "**How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled**, that it must happen thus?" **Matthew 26:51-54**

He told Pilate that His servants would not take up swords and fight because His Kingdom was not of this world.

"Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. **If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight**, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." **John 18:36**

In fact, Jesus never arose in opposition of any kind to an established government or ruler. He said we ought to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

"They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "**Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.**" **Matthew 22:21**

He told the multitudes and His disciples to obey the religious leaders. Even though the leaders themselves were wicked, they were in a position of authority.

"1 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, 2 saying: "**The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.** 3 "**Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, [that] observe and do**, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do." **Matthew 23:1-3**

When Jesus was left at the temple at age twelve, He was not rebelling against the authority of Joseph and Mary. He was submitting to the authority of the Father.

In fact, He was subject to Mary and Joseph.

"48 So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us?"

Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." 49 And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? **Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?**" 50 But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them. 51 **Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them,** but His mother kept all these things in her heart." **Luke 2:48-51**

I believe that when people characterize Jesus as a rebel it is the second definition above that they have in mind, i.e. one who resists authority, control, or convention - disobedient. The question is, "Does this description fit Jesus"?

Certainly there were times when Jesus found Himself in opposition to the religious leaders of His day. But the crucial question is whether this was a result of a rebellious and disobedient attitude on His part. Clearly this is not the case.

At times Jesus went out of His way not to cause offence. He had the right not to pay the temple tax. Still, He paid it so that He would not offend anyone. This is not the action of a rebel.

"24 After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax came to Peter and asked, **"Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?"** 25 "Yes, he does," he replied. When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. "What do you think, Simon?" he asked. "From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes--from their own sons or from others?" 26 "From others," Peter answered. **"Then the sons are exempt,"** Jesus said to him. 27 **"But so that we may not offend them,** go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and **give it to them for my tax and yours."** **Matthew 17:24-27**

Matthew says Jesus fulfilled the prophecy from Isaiah that says He would not quarrel or cry out. Jesus was a religious reformer, not a political one. He never joined any protest march or political movement. Rebels are always quarreling or crying out. They might even join a protest just to oppose authority whether they care about the issue or not.

"17 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 18 "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. 19 **He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets.** 20 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. 21 In his name the nations will put their hope." **Matthew 12:17-21**

The Scriptures make it clear that Jesus was our model for obedience, humility, and submission.

He submitted to the baptism of John despite the fact that He had no sin.

"13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. 14 And John [tried] [to] prevent Him, saying, **"I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"** 15 But Jesus answered and said to him, **"Permit [it] [to] [be] [so] now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."** Then he allowed Him." **Matthew 3:13-15**

When Jesus washed the disciples' feet, He plainly said He was giving them an example to follow.

"For **I have given you an example** that you should do as I have done to you." **John 13:15**

Paul plainly said that we should imitate him as he imitated Christ.

"Imitate me, just as I also [imitate] Christ"
I Corinthians 11:1

His apostles taught submission to authority. Peter said to submit to every ordinance of man.

"13 Therefore **submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, 14 or to governors,** as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and [for] [the] praise of those who do good. 15 **For this is the will of God,** that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" **I Peter 2:13-15**

Paul said to be subject to the governing authorities.

"1 **Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.** For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. 2 Therefore **whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God,** and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves." **Romans 13:1-2**

Paul even commanded that we pray for all who are in authority.

"1 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, [and] giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 **for kings and all who are in authority,** that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. 3 For this [is] good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior" **I Timothy 2:1-3**

Why then, did Jesus so often find Himself in opposition to the religious leaders?

The answer is simple. He was in full submission to the ultimate authority of God the Father, but they were not. When Jesus did the Will of the Father, it put Him in direct conflict with those whose will was out of line with the

Father's. Certainly this is a result of rebellion and disobedience, but not on the part of Jesus.

The rebellion was on the part of the religious leaders who opposed Jesus. Had they been in submission to the Father and willing to obey His ultimate authority, there would have been no conflict between them and Jesus.

Jesus never resisted the authority or control of the Father, but his enemies did. Jesus was never disobedient to the Father, but the religious leaders were. When He said, "Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone," they all left. But when He asked, "Which of you can convince me of sin," they could not meet the challenge.

"So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, **"He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first."** John 8:7

"Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?" John 8:46

What about resisting convention? That depends on whose convention you are talking about. He never resisted the convention of the Father. At times He did resist the convention of the Jewish leaders, but it is important to note that this was only when they were in conflict with the Will of the Father. He never resisted their conventions just to be contrary or difficult. He did heal on the Sabbath, but this was to teach them about mercy and justice.

Someone may claim that Jesus turning over the tables of the moneychangers in the temple is a clear example of His rebellious nature. I would disagree for a number of reasons.

First - Jesus acted alone. He did not get others to join Him in some kind of an organized movement.

Secondly - This was not a political issue, it was a religious issue. That is, He was not rebelling against or resisting any government or authority.

Thirdly - Jesus was not rebelling against authority, He was submitting to the ultimate authority of the Father. It was the moneychangers that were the rebels. They were in rebellion towards God Himself. I know this is true because Jesus quoted Scripture as the basis and authority for what He did. He quoted from **Isaiah** and **Jeremiah** and the disciples realized He fulfilled a prophecy from the **Psalms**.

"12 Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. 13 **And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of**

prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.' " Matthew 21:12-13

"14 And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. 15 When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. 16 And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" 17 **Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."** John 2:14-17

It must also be noted that Jesus was a greater authority than any of those that He opposed. This is true of the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, lawyers, Herodians, and moneychangers. You can't be rebelling against authority by simply exercising your own greater authority. Those who opposed Jesus were the rebels resisting His authority which was much higher than their own.

He was Lord of the Sabbath and greater than the Temple. You can't rebel against something over which you are Lord. It is subject to you, not vice-versa.

"5 "Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? 6 "Yet I say to you that **in this place there is [One] greater than the temple.** 7 "But if you had known what [this] means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. 8 **"For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."** Matthew 12:5-8

When the Jews asked Him what sign He gave to prove His authority for driving out the moneychangers, He pointed to His resurrection. This demonstrated that He was Lord of the temple and all creation.

"18 Then the Jews demanded of him, **"What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"** 19 Jesus answered them, **"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."** 20 The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" 21 **But the temple he had spoken of was his body.** 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken." John 2:18-22 (NIV)

We ought to consider carefully the implications of calling Jesus a rebel. Samuel told King Saul that obedience was better than sacrifice and rebellion was as the sin of witchcraft. He also said, "Stubbornness (which is a kissing cousin to rebellion) is like iniquity and idolatry". Calling Jesus a rebel is akin to accusing Him of witchcraft. Saul could not be king over God's people as a result of his rebellion. How could Jesus be King over God's people if He was a rebel?

"22 Then Samuel said: "Has the Lord [as] [great] delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, **to obey is better than sacrifice**, [And] to heed than the fat of rams. 23 For **rebellion [is] [as] the sin of witchcraft**, And **stubbornness [is] [as] iniquity and idolatry**. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from [being] king." **I Samuel 15:22-23**

Moses was not able to enter the Promised Land after calling God's people "rebels". How can we expect to enter the promised land of Heaven if we call God's Son a rebel?

"And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, "**Hear now, you rebels!** Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" **Numbers 20:10**

Sometimes Jesus is portrayed as someone who just enjoyed upsetting people in positions of authority. He is presented as someone who woke up each morning and asked Himself, "What can I do to make them angry today?" He is seen as someone who constantly went out of His way to offend and resist authority. This is simply not true.

Jesus lived every day in total submission to the ultimate authority of the Father. If this put Him in conflict with lesser authorities, He still obeyed the Father. He often did what was unpopular, but it was always because it was right in the sight of God. This is not what a rebel does. This is the opposite of rebellion. This is what is required of us as Christians.

Perhaps the clearest passage in this regard is what Paul said in **Philippians**:

"3 **[Let] nothing [be] [done] through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.** 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 **Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,** 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, **taking the form of a bondservant,** [and] coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, **He humbled Himself and became obedient to [the] [point] [of] death, even the death of the cross."** **Philippians 2:3-8**

Imitating Christ means that we throw out selfish ambition and conceit and embrace humility. It means that we esteem others above ourselves. It means that we are willing to be a bondservant. But most importantly, it means that we humbly obey the Father even to the point of death. This is not rebellion. It is submission and obedience to the ultimate authority.

Madonna and others like her who are claiming that Jesus was a rebel may understand rebellion, but they don't understand Jesus. He is the antithesis of rebellion. He is the ultimate example of humility, submission to authority,

and obedience. I have yet to see a rebel who imitates Jesus in these things. Those who insist that Jesus was a rebel are really no different than the animal rights activists who claim that Jesus was a vegetarian, the drinkers who claim He was a party animal, or the homosexuals who claim He was gay. They are trying to justify themselves by forcing Jesus into their mold. It is not only dishonest and inaccurate, it is blasphemous.

Instead of trying to remake Jesus into our image we need to transform ourselves to His. Instead of being conformed to this world, we need to be transformed.

"But we all, with unveiled face, **beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image** from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." **II Corinthians 3:18**

"**And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed** by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what [is] that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." **Romans 12:2**