

Imagine: Six for One...

(or, *Meet the New Lyric... Same as the Old Lyric*)

New Year's Eve, 2011, passed quietly for our family, worshipping God and singing praises to Him. Meanwhile, in Times Square, New York City, people were singing other songs. Among them (on one of the television networks covering the festivities) was Cee Lo Green, a judge on the television program, *The Voice*. Shortly before midnight, Green sang the late John Lennon's song, *Imagine*, which has become something of a secular hymn in the years since Lennon's murder. However, there was one slight difference; according to The Wall Street Journal, Green sang the last part of the second verse as follows:

*Nothing to kill or die for
And all religion's true.*

Those familiar with the tune, of course, know Lennon's original lyric was,

*Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion, too.*

Needless to say, Lennon purists were not happy with the alteration of the lyric. Green himself, trying to diffuse criticism, explained in a message on Twitter, "I was trying to say a world were u could believe what u wanted that's all." I understand Green's intent - inclusiveness, let's all get along, etc. But as far as the message speaking truth is concerned, Green might just as well have left things well enough alone and the lyric intact.

People still don't get it, and I understand why. Many still operate under the belief that all faith gets you to the same place; or, to quote another Lennon lyric, *Whatever gets you through your life is alright*. And yes, I suppose it would make things a lot easier if that were true - if it didn't matter what form your belief takes, one's just as good as another, and so on.

But then Jesus comes along and upsets the apple cart, so to speak:

I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

(John 14:6)

And if that wasn't plain enough...

I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate (referring to Himself), but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.

(John 10:1, emphasis mine)

The point is that, regardless of whatever else people may invent, think, wish or believe, Jesus put that statement out there, and we have to deal with it. Which, in turn, brings us back to C.S. Lewis' *liar, lunatic or Lord* argument. Any honest study of the claims of Jesus will bring you to the conclusion that what He said *is* true, and that He is, in fact, Lord of all creation.

The irony in all this is that when the Kingdom of God is established on Earth, most of the very conditions Lennon described in *Imagine* will exist, but under the Lordship of Christ, through Whom it will all take place. It is only He who is capable of ruling the nations with true justice, because He knows the hearts and motives of every person. No one else can do this, because no one else is simultaneously both fully God and fully human – knowing what we are tempted by and the struggles we face in our daily lives, yet overcoming them by the power of God. Every religion on earth is based on works, or what a person does to earn their way into Heaven. Dr. Charles Stanley, however, offers a good argument against the works concept. What exactly do you have to do, and how much of it, before you “make the cut?” How do you know when you’ve done enough? Can you ever be certain? I would add one other qualifier; is your god the type (as is found in so many religions) that, if he/she/it is in a bad mood that day, you can either get more or less added to the “do list,” or be ejected from contention for a spot in Heaven... forever?

Jesus offers us access to the Father through a covenant relationship with Him. Although God is Sovereign over all creation, and can dictate the terms of our dealings with Him any way He pleases, He chooses to operate out of love for us and relates to us on that basis. Rather than dictate to us, He wants us to *voluntarily* enter into relationship with Him – in essence, worship Him not out of a sense of duty or threat, but because we *want* to.

Take a look at what people used to worship, once upon a time. The Greek/Roman mythological system was populated by “gods” whose qualities reflected human characteristics; there’s strikes one and two, right there. (Seriously, would you want to worship a god who was like *you*? Some people wouldn’t stand a chance.) The Norse system, from which we get Odin, Thor, Loki, Asgard, Valhalla, the Valkyries and the concept of stoic behavior even when put to horrible, mangling death, is one that faces its own doom – Ragnarok, or the day when those gods are defeated. Even among those faiths practiced today, things do not fit perfectly. Remember another music act, Seals and Crofts? They were practitioners of the Bahai faith, which says that every religion is but a manifestation of one source. One

explanation they liked to give is that one light is Jesus, another is Mohammed, a third is Moses, etc., but they all draw power from the same source. The problem is, Jesus says He is the Son of God and Mohammed says God has no son, Hinduism has multiple gods (almost too many to keep track of) while Buddhism rejects the concept of a permanent part of the self (or a soul) as a person goes through a continuing system of rebirth. And that's just the main religions - get into the area of the cults, and the thicket grows even more dense.

If a person presented such differing faces to everyone he or she meets, that person would likely be diagnosed with Multiple Personality Disorder. God does not suffer from this condition. He presents Himself in one way, and declares *I, the LORD, do not change* (Malachi 3:6). Jesus carries that concept further: *Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father* (John 14:9). He even offers us additional evidence in the miracles, the signs and wonders He worked while on Earth and that He continues to work through His Body, the Church, those who believe on Him and have staked their eternal future on what He said. Being human and hard-wired (if you will) to do what God expressly forbids, we're caught in a trap that we cannot get out of except by death and separation from God. Jesus knows we cannot get out of this ourselves, so He took on human form and that punishment for us. God confirmed this by raising Him from the dead, offering us the same resurrection body that He has now.

"All religion's true" is an old argument, one that has been trying to turn people away from the Gospel for millennia. Whether one argues for that or for Lennon's original lyric, there's really not much difference - neither one can truly deliver a person from past sins and into God's original design for their life. Although atheists frequently charge that religion is merely a crutch and a comfort for the fact that we will die one day, it can also be argued that atheism itself is a form of denial, a way to keep from facing and dealing with the consequences of our actions. At best, religion keeps you busy so that you don't do the former, but cannot release you from any guilt over past actions nor offer any assurance that you are delivered. Only Jesus is bold enough to offer such things, because He is God made flesh. Life is not a song lyric, but an adventure created by God for those who are willing to come His way.