

*To smite an Israelite is as if one smote the Shekinah.*  
— Sanhedrin, 58

### What can Christians do to make it up to Jews?

Be sensitive to Christianity's checkered past. For example, while the "Campus Crusade for Christ" has done immeasurable good in the name of Jesus, its name still betrays a complete failure to admit the horrible history of the crusades. Would anyone think of naming a Christian ministry the "Holy Ghost Holocaust" for example? Don't make this kind of mistake yourself.

Be sensitive to Jewish beliefs about Jesus. For example, in conversations with Jews we can call our Savior "Jesus," or we can call him "Christ." One is his name, the other a title, meaning "anointed one," or "Messiah." Since Jews do not believe Jesus is the Messiah, why rub their face in it every time we refer to him as "Christ"? How would we feel if they insisted on referring to him as "that imposter"? It is no denial of our faith to call him "Jesus." It is his name, and he does not mind.

Be sensitive to Jewish beliefs about the Bible. For many Jews, when Christians call the first half of our Bibles the "Old Testament" it sounds like we are saying their scriptures have been replaced by our New Testament. Of course, this is not what Christianity teaches at all, but the misconception is widespread nonetheless. Rather than risk causing offense, why not say "the Hebrew Scriptures"? After all, 99.9% of this portion of the Bible is indeed written in Hebrew, so it's not as if we're saying anything insulting or untrue about the Lord's word. Christians can also use the Hebrew name most common among Jews today, the same name for the Hebrew Scriptures that Jesus and the apostles probably used, which is the *Tanakh*, (pronounced "ten-ahk," with the accent on the second syllable). See **Luke 24:27**, **Mt 11:13** and **Mt 22:40**, and bear in mind that the word "Tanakh" is derived from three Hebrew words meaning "law, writings, and prophets."

Focus on what we have in common. As we have learned in prior lessons, and will continue to learn, Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism have more commonalities than differences. Our scriptures---*Tanakh* portion—are exactly the same. We share a common foundation in Biblical history, and have very similar beliefs in the areas of sin and redemption, good deeds and grace, justice and mercy, righteousness and evil, trials and sanctification, faith and doubt, mystery and revelation, repentance and forgiveness. When it comes to the fundamentals of our faiths, there is only one major, irreconcilable difference, who is of course, Jesus. While no Christian can compromise on what and who

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we think Jesus is, it's also true no fair minded Jew would ask that of a Christian anyway. As Peter said, we must always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that we have, but it is also common courtesy to avoid topics that cause dissension and arguments.

- ▶ See **1 Cor 9:19-23**. and **Acts 17:22-23**. What do you think Paul would say to the advice offered above?
  - ✓ Paul believed in exactly this kind of respectful behavior toward unbelievers.
  - ✓ He did his homework before talking to people about the Lord, taking time to learn about their beliefs, culture and customs. (Note that he did not talk to the Greeks in Athens about Jesus just anywhere; he did it at the time and place of *their* choosing. Note also that he was able to speak to them in *their* terms.)
- ▶ Can you think of a time when Jesus imposed his message on anyone? What does your answer tell you about God's opinion of those who do?
  - ✓ Jesus never forced anyone to listen, and makes no such demands today. God wants all to come of their own free will (as He has foreknown and predetermined, of course).

### **With such a history, why should any Jew believe in Jesus?**

It is common for Christians to experience a crisis of confidence when they learn of so much evil in the church's history. Often, Christians wonder why anyone would or should trust them about Jesus. But consider...

*"If the crimes of the church throughout the centuries were proof that Jesus' teachings are untrue, then the repeated failure of Israel to keep all of God's commands would also show the Torah for a lie. But of course the Torah should not be judged on the behavior of Jews, just as Jesus should not be judged on the conduct of Christians. Although the world does indeed draw conclusions about Jesus from my behavior, that merely shows how unwise the world can be, because in this universe it is always cause then effect, never the other way around. My behavior does not change God, so whatever the truth about Jesus may be, it remains true whether I obey his teachings or not." (TGAM)*

So while every Christian ought to confess and repent of the crimes done to Jews by the body of Christ, there need be no despair. But every Christian should also remember Jesus expects our behavior to reflect the difference he has made.

*It is a serious thing to live in the society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or the other of these destinations. ("The Weight of Glory," a sermon by C.S. Lewis at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Oxford, England, on June 8, 1941)*

*(continued)*

- ▶ Consider **Mt 5:13-16**. What does this say about the purpose of loving obedience?
  - ✓ Jesus expects our obedience to demonstrate his love on earth, so unbelievers will be drawn to him in faith.
- ▶ Consider the meaning of the C. S. Lewis quote above, in connection with what we have learned in this lesson about Christian anti-Semitism. While the crimes of the church against Jews have been horrific on an earthly level, what added horror do Lewis' words imply?
  - ✓ When we betray the gift of sacrificial love Jesus has given by responding with evil, we risk becoming the cause of a soul's eternal suffering.
  - ✓ Even if all of the excuses above were fair and true, this alone should prevail against them for the cause of love.

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