

That's Not Who We Are!

As of Nov. 30, 2015, President Obama had told the American people, "That's not who we are," 46 times (www.freebeacon.com).

Now, I totally disagree with the way in which Obama uses this phrase. For him, it is a rhetorical muzzle designed to silence those who criticize his liberal policies.

For example, he said, "slamming the door in the face of [Syrian] refugees would betray our deepest values. That's not who we are."

Um, in truth, the United States has refused to accept questionable groups of people on many, many occasions throughout history. Whether or not these Syrians are even "refugees" is a matter of debate. I get a little irritated to be scolded that I'm not a good American because I want border security and less immigration. To my way of thinking, preventing a million Syrians from bringing their third-world Sharia-based culture into this country all at once is exactly in line with American values.

Sorry, I didn't mean to get into politics. I bring this up because—despite the abuse of it—I find it an interesting turn of phrase. Again: "That's not who we are." It suggests, at least on some level, that being an American is a distinctive thing, and represents a common set of values. (Now, if we could just remember what the American ideal is! You know, the one that used to be taught in elementary school civics class...)

But on to my point. I wonder if we've ever thought that way about ourselves as Christians? Are we true to our values, to our Christ?

Who Are We?

Indeed, as Christians, we are a group of people united around a central core of beliefs found not in some creed book, but in the Scriptures. We believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:30-31). We believe that He died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day (1 Cor. 15:3-5). We believe that, after His resurrection appearances, He ascended to the Father and took His place at the right hand of God, ruling over all things unto His church (Eph. 1:20-23). We believe that His blood provides victory over sin, full atonement and full redemption, to allow us to dwell in God's presence when this life is over (Heb. 10:12-22). We hope in heaven, and we shudder in fear of Hell (John 5:28-29). We study and obey His word (James 1:21-22), and we pray for God's help (Phil. 4:6), seeking to mimic the ways of Jesus Christ in our everyday lives, not only to live a holy life (1 Peter 1:14-16), but also to bring glory and honor to His name (Eph. 4:1).

The New Testament writers appeal to us to learn what it means to be a Christian, and to stay true to that body of teaching. Paul says,

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all"

(Eph. 4:4-6). Simon Peter addressed his second letter “To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours” (1:1). Jude said “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3). Yes, there are objective, identifying marks of a disciple of Jesus.

Is That Who We Are?

Maybe we could appropriate Obama’s phrase and use it properly, to correct ourselves when we betray God’s standards for His chosen people. At the risk of falling into the same trap of misuse (I’ll reference a lot of Scripture to attempt to avoid that), or at the risk of sounding scatter-shot and screechy, let’s give it a try.

I see Christians not getting along in the body of Christ. I see Christians refusing to speak to one another, and who cross the room to avoid one another. That’s not who we are! We are a people who are slow to speak, slow to anger (James 1:19), quick to absorb an insult and longsuffering almost to a fault (Gal. 5:22). We are a people who forgive because we have been forgiven of so much more (Matt. 6:14-15, 18:21-22). We recognize Satan as our adversary; never the one imprisoned by Satan (2 Tim. 2:24-26). We are a people who greet one another in love (3 John 15), who live as beloved family (Rom. 12:5), who bear no grudges (1 Cor. 13:5), who prefer one another’s company to anyone else (Rom. 12:10), and who help one another in sincere service (Acts 4:34), mindful that one day we may stand in need (2 Cor. 8:14).

I see Christians walking according to the pattern of the world. I see Christians indulging in the worst forms of twisted and sick entertainment. I see Christians involved in obvious sin, and I hear Christians falling into profane language. That’s not who we are! We are a people who submit willingly to God’s rules, knowing that He is our trusted heavenly Father and that His rules are for our benefit (1 John 5:3). We are thinking of heaven, not of the corruption of the flesh, even if that means we must suffer scorn and persecution (1 Peter 4:1-5). We’ve stopped celebrating sin (Rom. 1:28-32). We know that God is counting on us to show the world what Christ looks like in everyday life (1 Peter 3:15).

I see Christians not taking worship seriously. I see Christians coming in chronically late. I see 9:00 Bible study starting with only 30 or 40 people in the room. I see able-bodied men refusing to use their talents. I see bored women and children playing on their cell phones. That’s not who we are! We are a people humbly consecrated to enter into His very presence to offer our worship (Matt. 18:20). We can sense the person of God receiving our praise (Rev. 8:4, 1 Cor. 10:16). We are a people assembled to give thanks to God for His great love shown toward us (Heb. 13:15). We are a people determined to get something out of it, to recharge our own spirits, and help our brethren recharge theirs (Col. 3:16), to prepare to go back out into the world stronger and more faithful (Heb. 10:24-25).

I see Christians lacking in Bible knowledge. I hear Christians three-decades in the faith asking “what does God say about divorce?” and “where is that passage about baptism?” That is not who we are! We are diligent to mature into eating the meat of the word (Heb. 5:11-6:2).

I see Christians content with the souls inside the building. That’s not who we are! We are not going to be a congregation of 75, waiting for the inevitable petering out of the church family tree. We are going to take seriously Christ’s commandment (Matt. 28:18-20) or risk irrelevance.

We are going to get excited about the gospel (John 4:34-36), become knowledgeable in its use (Eph. 6:17). We are going to have a leadership that makes plans to take it into the community at large (Acts 6:4). We will not be satisfied until we are a congregation of 175, 275, and beyond; not because we need to feel good about ourselves, but because we know each number on the board represents a soul saved, and because we know there are many more out there who would respond to the gospel if they could just hear it (1 Cor. 3:5-8).

Who are we? We are the body of Christ. We are His hands and feet. And we serve Him faithfully until the end. —John Guzzetta