



Righting Wrongs

RIGHTING WRONGS LESSON 2

IDENTITY CRISIS

Recently a study was done to see what people thought about Christians. Look at some of the things that were said:

Hypocritical

Antigay

Sheltered

Too Political

Judgmental

Wrong: Identity Crisis

As if the name Christian was not bad enough, somehow we have lived in such a way that people have come up with new names for us. I know what you are thinking, "Did you just say that the name Christian was bad?" Yes I did.

Did you know that the first followers of Christ called themselves "The Way"? Following Christ was a way of life for them. They were living so much like Christ that people could think of nothing worse to call them than Christians. You see people back then and people now, often know about Christ. The question becomes do they see us looking like Him? It breaks my heart to hear people say things like, "I think Jesus is great, but I want nothing to do with Christians." That means we obviously have an identity crisis on our hands. There should be no distinction between Christ and the way we live. We need to get back to our roots and follow our model. We need to get back to making Jesus truly Lord of our lives. Part of the challenge in the last lesson was about reading the Gospels. If we are

going to get our identity back we are going to have to know how Jesus lived and what Jesus said. Righting wrongs is an essential part of this process.

I believe part of the problem is the majority of Christians do not really know what Jesus taught. We love Paul and we love the Psalms. We may even love a prophet or two. While there is nothing wrong with that those things are all part of painting the whole picture of scripture which God intends for us, but they pale in comparison to the power of reading the words and examples of Jesus. We have to look at scripture, for the truth because it is not about what you think is appropriate or what someone has told you is right. It is about what God calls us to do and what He expects from us. It is about what His standards are. At times what we think, hear, and feel will be right, but we can only determine that after looking at them through the lens of scripture. Think about it, we have the very words of the Son of God at our disposal. Why wouldn't we want to drink those in every moment of every day? In this lesson we are going to look at Jesus. We are going to see what it is that He has called us to do. We will look at the examples that He set for us. Before we move on there are two things that I would like to make clear.

1. When we choose to live like Christ we will not always be popular.

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. John 15:18

We see this theme over and over again throughout scripture. Jesus warning His followers that when they choose to live for Him and stand up for Him, the world will hate them. To bring some comfort He reminds us that they are choosing to reject Him and not us. Plus, He reminds us that they hated Him too. He lived a perfect life and they still chose to kill Him.

I just want to make sure I am clear that I do not believe if we are living right we will be liked. The problem is not whether or not we are liked. It is that Christianity has become about what we stand for or against, instead of who we represent. We will be hated at times and face troubles. We just need to be careful that it is for the right reasons.

2. When we choose to live like Christ it will not always make sense to others.

Throughout the New Testament and other records of the early church, we see that the way of Christ is peculiar and foreign to the world. We need to not only be okay with that, but we should be passionately excited about it. We should want to be as Paul said, "Fools for Christ." If we are not careful we will be fools for the world, and at least being fools for Christ will lead to things that will last and change our world. I firmly believe that if someone does not think they are a little odd, maybe something in their life needs to change. Now that you are thoroughly excited about how easy this study will be, let's dig in. Let's look at Jesus. How He not only told us how we should live our lives, but He also set the example.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. 'All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Matthew 22:24-40

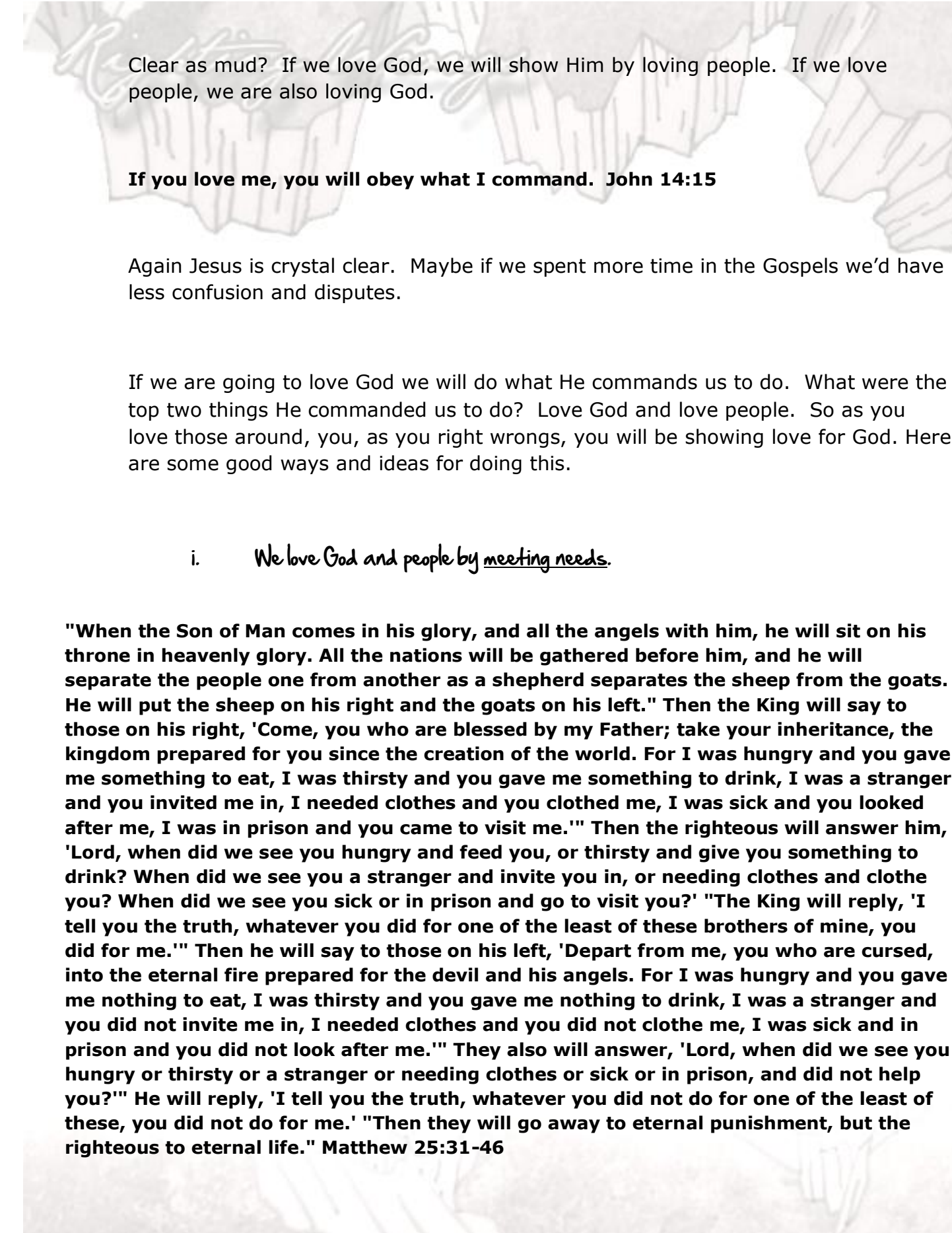
We probably can all agree that there is a lot of stuff in the bible. Now the more I have read and studied the clearer it becomes and I believe the more you study you will find the same. But in the mean time Jesus boils it all down for us. Everything taught, in the Old Testament and the New. Everything that Jesus did and would do after this statement. Everything that we see the apostles and all Christians in the future do should boil down to two things:

1. *All of life boils down to loving God and loving people.*

Look at the list of names that people have for Christians. Does that look like we are loving God and loving people? If we are going to become who God wants us to be and get back to being known for who we follow instead of what we are against we are going to have to get back to loving God and loving people.

And with that, reclaiming our identity by loving God and loving people, we will truly begin to right wrongs. But how do we do that? How do we love God and love people? By looking at Christ. There won't be specifics but general ideas that will guide us as we look for specific moments to love God and people, and to right wrongs throughout our lives.

a. *When we do one, we do the other.*



Clear as mud? If we love God, we will show Him by loving people. If we love people, we are also loving God.


If you love me, you will obey what I command. John 14:15

Again Jesus is crystal clear. Maybe if we spent more time in the Gospels we'd have less confusion and disputes.

If we are going to love God we will do what He commands us to do. What were the top two things He commanded us to do? Love God and love people. So as you love those around you, as you right wrongs, you will be showing love for God. Here are some good ways and ideas for doing this.

- i. *We love God and people by meeting needs.*

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left." Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'" Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'" Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'" They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'" He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." Matthew 25:31-46



Have you ever read this passage of Scripture before?

What do you think Jesus means here?

How would our lives change if we truly believed this passage?

Should our lives be changed? Why or why not?

I am ashamed to say that I did not read this passage until a couple of years ago. I do not know how I missed this. This passage is so heavy to read. I believe we could take the great commandment and the great commission and have almost all we need to live the Christian life. For time sake there are two things we need to be sure of:

Jesus takes meeting people's needs seriously. When we help those in need we are actually helping God.

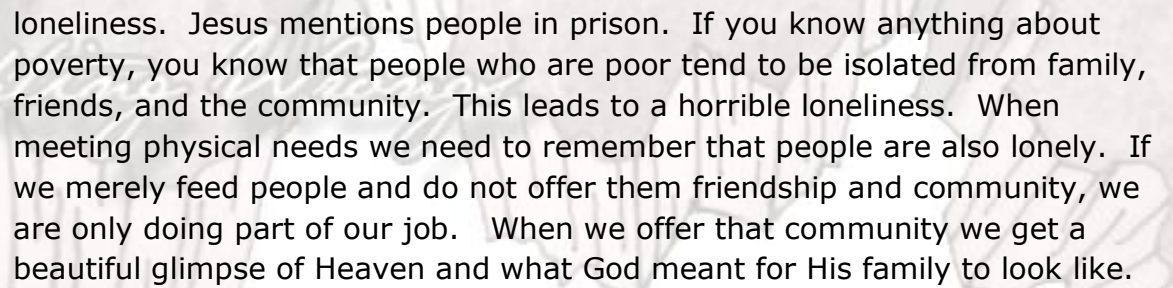
I have heard it said that if you want to see God look into the eyes of the poor. The more I work with those in need the more I believe it. But it is easy to say people are poor or in need, but until we gain some focus to specific types of needs I do not think we will ever be able to take action.

a. People have physical needs.

In this passage Jesus talks about people being sick, hungry, and naked. These all have to do with our physical body. We need to make decisions and build relationships that put us in a place where we can meet the physical needs of those around us. And if we do, this passage shows us we are literally helping God. On the other hand, if we do not, if we isolate ourselves from people who are in need, we are turning away from God.

b. People have emotional needs.

Mother Teresa talked about how the greatest poverty in the world is



loneliness. Jesus mentions people in prison. If you know anything about poverty, you know that people who are poor tend to be isolated from family, friends, and the community. This leads to a horrible loneliness. When meeting physical needs we need to remember that people are also lonely. If we merely feed people and do not offer them friendship and community, we are only doing part of our job. When we offer that community we get a beautiful glimpse of Heaven and what God meant for His family to look like.

c. People have spiritual needs.


Just in case you forgot, sharing the Gospel is key to righting wrongs. If we don't do that we are just doing good deeds. We can feed people but still leave them feeling lonely. We can offer great friendship and just love people to Hell. If we meet all three needs we will start to look like Christ again. We will start to regain our identity and right the wrongs in our world.

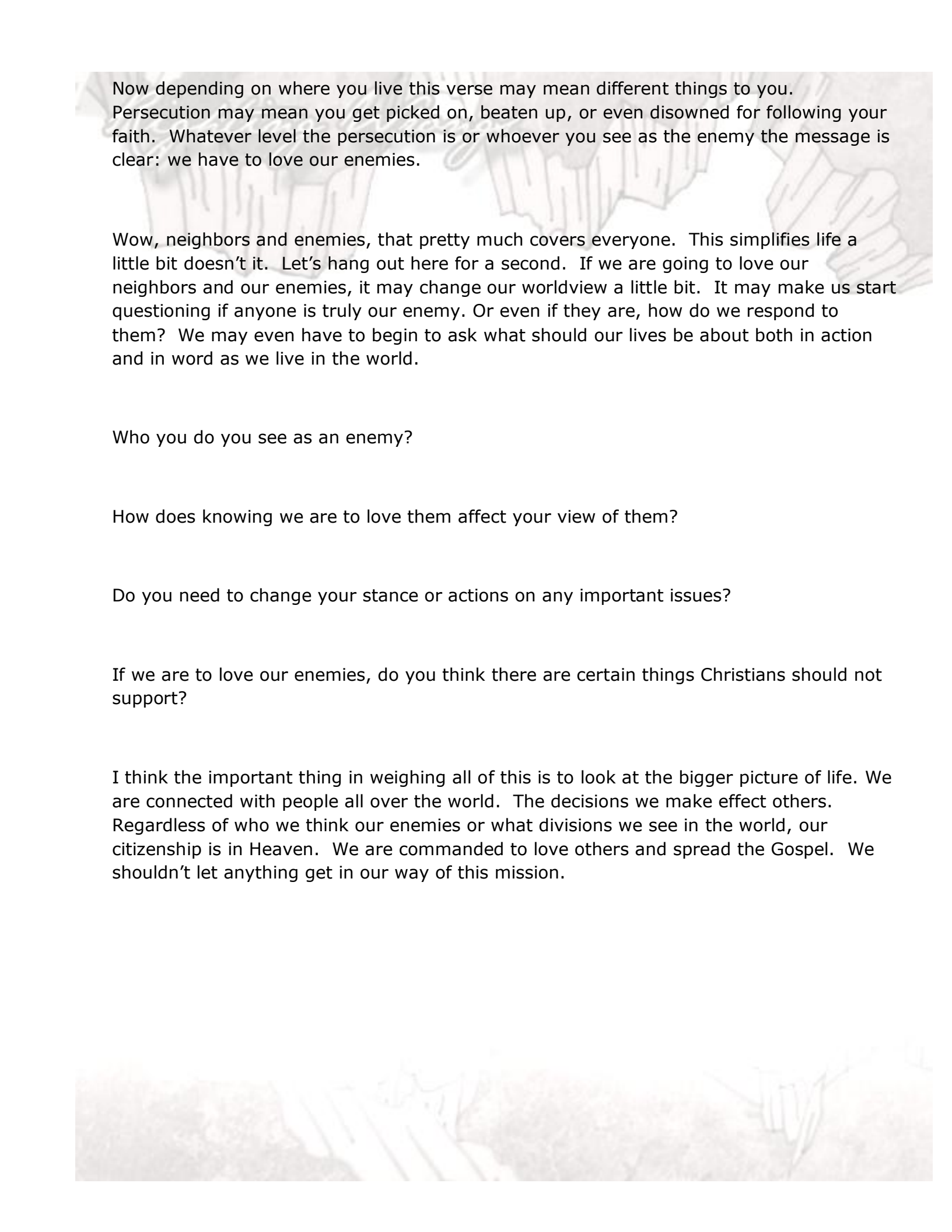
Now that we are good and warmed up, let's look at some things Christ called us to do. If we hope to regain our identity as followers of Christ, we will have to live out the easy and difficult parts of Jesus' teaching. Now we will have to look at both the comfortable and the uncomfortable teachings.

1. We need to love our enemies.

"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Luke 6:27-28

When we often think of neighbors we think of people who live nearest to are like us. Of course we love them. But Jesus taught that if we love people who also love us, so what. Everyone does that. When we think of those in need, we should have compassion. On some level we should love them and help them. We have to do even better than that. Many people can love in such a way. We have to hold ourselves to a higher standard. We are to even love our enemies. We are to pray for and bless those that persecute us and mistreat us. That flies in the face of what so many of us think and feel.





Now depending on where you live this verse may mean different things to you. Persecution may mean you get picked on, beaten up, or even disowned for following your faith. Whatever level the persecution is or whoever you see as the enemy the message is clear: we have to love our enemies.

Wow, neighbors and enemies, that pretty much covers everyone. This simplifies life a little bit doesn't it. Let's hang out here for a second. If we are going to love our neighbors and our enemies, it may change our worldview a little bit. It may make us start questioning if anyone is truly our enemy. Or even if they are, how do we respond to them? We may even have to begin to ask what should our lives be about both in action and in word as we live in the world.

Who do you see as an enemy?

How does knowing we are to love them affect your view of them?

Do you need to change your stance or actions on any important issues?

If we are to love our enemies, do you think there are certain things Christians should not support?

I think the important thing in weighing all of this is to look at the bigger picture of life. We are connected with people all over the world. The decisions we make effect others. Regardless of who we think our enemies or what divisions we see in the world, our citizenship is in Heaven. We are commanded to love others and spread the Gospel. We shouldn't let anything get in our way of this mission.

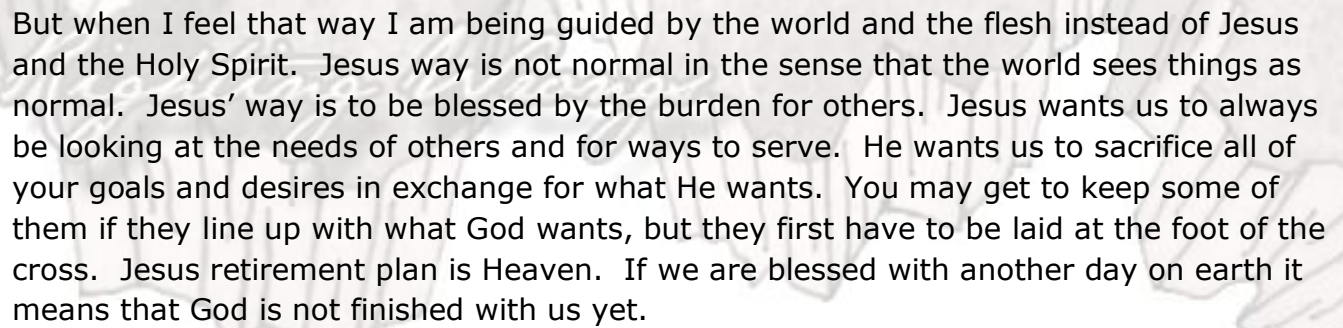
2. We must lay down our lives.

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. Matthew 16:21-25

Peter seems like a good friend. He's saying, "Jesus, we have your back. We won't let anything bad happen to you or let anyone kill you." They may have even asked Him why they should go to Jerusalem if He was so sure about all of this. I am sure they were a little scared or concerned that Jesus was crazy.

We have "good" friends. The more you follow Jesus, the more "good" friends you will have. Following Jesus is about laying your life down, and many people will not understand that. When Jesus talked about taking up your cross, the people in His day got a picture of sacrifice and death. When you abandon everything for Jesus, there will be people with the best of intentions that will try to convince you that you do not have to be that extreme. They may even tell you that you are misunderstanding scripture or taking Jesus too seriously.

As I said earlier, following Jesus is not always popular and does not always make sense, but following Him is always worth it. Often time it will look to the world like Jesus is messing up your life. To some extent He does. There are times when I wish I could be "normal". There are times when I wish I could look away when people are in need and just enjoy life. There are times where I wish I could be good at my job and just go home at the end of the day without worrying about the bigger picture of reaching the lost people around me. There are even times when I want to just plan on retiring like the rest of the world instead of being completely spent at the end of my life.




But when I feel that way I am being guided by the world and the flesh instead of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Jesus way is not normal in the sense that the world sees things as normal. Jesus' way is to be blessed by the burden for others. Jesus wants us to always be looking at the needs of others and for ways to serve. He wants us to sacrifice all of your goals and desires in exchange for what He wants. You may get to keep some of them if they line up with what God wants, but they first have to be laid at the foot of the cross. Jesus retirement plan is Heaven. If we are blessed with another day on earth it means that God is not finished with us yet.

Too often we get so used to compromising that we do not notice it. Too often we take the easy way out because it is easy. We forget to look at the words of Christ as we live out the moments of our lives. When Jesus called people to follow Him, He said things like take up your cross. He told people to sell all of their possessions. There are some of the stories of people coming to follow Jesus.

We usually take a different approach in calling people to Christ. We say things like come along and we will coach you. We would tell them to just do the best they can. In our view, we want to make it as easy as possible to follow Christ. Jesus knew if there was any distraction or compromise in them that they were not fit to follow Him. One man wanted to go bury his father and Jesus told Him to let the dead bury their own dead. He tells another man that anyone who puts His hand to the plow and goes to work for Him, and then looks back to his mother and father is not fit for the kingdom. In yet another passage (Luke 14) Jesus said whoever does not hate his brothers, sisters, mother, father, wife, children is not fit to follow Him. Do we need to wrestle with what this looks like in different stages of our life? I believe there is a balance between wisdom and passion. I also believe it is okay to love our families. We should not allow anything to cause us to compromise and turn away from God. Jesus wants all of us at all times and absolutely nothing can stand in the way. For example, relationships, hobbies, possessions should not interfere with our relationship with Jesus. This is not easy for us to swallow. It will not make any sense to those around us. But these things come from the Gospels. Just because we often choose not to read them does not mean that they will go away. Have the courage to wrestle with all of the scriptures. Give yourself to Christ.

So many of those names we listed at the beginning of this lesson can be traced back to Christians living for themselves, for comfort, and for the way of the world. Christ's plan for our lives is the exact opposite of that.





Righting Wrongs

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think about the names at the beginning of the lesson?
2. Do you think they are bad? Why or why not?
3. Can you think of some reasons or situations that may have cause people to start using those names?
4. Talk about the different needs that people may have. Discuss situations where you could have met those needs.
5. Talk about some ways you can meet needs in the future.
6. Loving our enemies is not easy. What are some ways we can hold each other accountable to love our enemies.
7. What do you think it looks like for us to lay down our lives to follow Christ?
8. Are there any verses you heard today that you have never heard before? What were they? What do you think about them?

