



## INTRODUCTION

Throughout this series, we've talked about how Christianity has a branding problem. Part of that problem is terminology. In the first century, "Christian" was a derogatory term invented by people who disliked followers of Jesus. It doesn't have a concrete definition, which leaves us a lot of leeway to define it for ourselves. We tend to attach particular doctrinal or political beliefs to the word—beliefs that are important to us personally. For some people, "Christian" is synonymous with "conservative." For others, it's synonymous with "liberal."

But Jesus never called his followers "Christians." He called them "disciples." That's a scarier word because it actually means something. A disciple is a pupil or follower. A disciple learns and grows by obeying and imitating his or her master. And Jesus made it very clear how he wanted his followers to behave:

*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

*John 13:35*

## WEEKLY READING

If Jesus commands us to love one another, we need to ask: What does love require of me? Jesus was once asked which of God's commandments was most important. His answer tells us what love requires of us:

## WEEKLY READING (Continued)

*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.’”*

**Matthew 22:37-39**

That means every time we pick up a Bible, teach a lesson, or struggle to figure out how to deal with a difficult situation, we need to filter our experiences through loving God and loving others. This is a game-changer. Jesus understood a profound truth: *when it comes to influence, behavior is more important than belief.*

Two categories of people influence who we are: those who hurt us and those who loved us. Behavior determines those categories, not belief. We can be hurt by people with impeccable theology. The wounds they inflict may haunt us for a lifetime. On the other hand, we can be loved by people with poor theology, and walk away from the experience with extraordinary self-esteem.

This is why what Jesus said and did was so profound. He interacted with people based on their stories, not merely on theology or religious doctrine. He treated different people differently because they were different people with different stories. We’ve all experienced this. You’ve met people who rubbed you the wrong way until you heard their stories. Their particular experiences changed your attitude about them. Jesus always kept people’s stories in mind.

## WEEKLY READING (Continued)

To follow Jesus' command to love God and others:

*Don't do anything that will hurt you.*

Your heavenly Father love you, so you can't hurt yourself without hurting him. Don't make any kind of decision—moral, ethical, relational, financial, sexual—that hurts you.

*Don't do anything that will hurt someone else.*

Everyone you're eyeball-to-eyeball with is someone God loves. Christ died for them—even the people who hurt you most.

*Don't be mastered by anything.*

When you're mastered by something, it keeps you from loving someone. No one should have to compete with your addiction to work, anger, porn, alcohol, or prescription drugs. Refuse to be mastered by anything, because God is your master. Love requires that you get rid of anything that competes with his Lordship.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Talk about someone who loved you well when you were growing up. How has that person's influence carried over into your adult life?
2. Read **Matthew 22:37–39**. What is most challenging about loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind?
3. What is most challenging about loving others as yourself?
4. When it comes to influencing others, behavior is more important than belief. Talk about that idea. Do you agree? Is there anything about it that bothers you?
5. Think of a person in your life who is difficult to love. What does love require of you in your interactions with this person? What's one thing you can do this week to demonstrate love?

## MOVING FORWARD

Can you imagine what would happen in our families and communities—even our nation—if, for a month, we asked what love requires of us and then responded accordingly?

If you want to influence someone's future, you have two options: hurt them deeply or love them profoundly. What you believe isn't a factor.

## CHANGING YOUR MIND

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**Matthew 22:37-39**