

FOR CLARKSVILLE

FOR CLARKSVILLE, PART 1: AGAINST

Christianity has an image problem. If you've lived in America for very long, I doubt this surprises you. Over the past few decades, Christians have lost their influence in culture because they've handled it so poorly. They had power. They had dollars. But instead of using power and the dollars to reach out and love people well...

Christians used power to make a point and dollars to demand their way.

We created an us-versus-them mentality. The church communicated to unchurched people that we didn't like them because of what they did. How they looked. How they behaved. How they voted. What they believed. And now people feel minimized—or worse, demonized—by those who love Jesus.

What's interesting is Jesus never did this. Not once. He had all power and He had every legitimate reason to demand His way, but this is not the example He set. Instead, He leveraged His power to love and serve others, and then He told us to follow His example.

BIG IDEA: The church should be known by who we are FOR, not what we're AGAINST.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. To begin, watch the Small Groups Questions Introduction, part 1:Against (<https://vimeo.com/263675501>)
2. When your average co-worker or neighbor hears the word “Christian,” what top 3 words do you think come to their mind?
3. What top 3 words do you wish would come to their mind when they hear the word “Christian?”
4. Watch the video *UnChristian* by Dave Kinnaman. (<https://vimeo.com/261357039>)
5. Of all of the major outsider perceptions, which one do you feel will be the most difficult for Christians and the church to overcome?

In his book, Kinnaman quotes a person from Mississippi whom he encountered in his research: “Christianity has become bloated with blind followers who would rather repeat slogans than actually feel true compassion and care. Christianity has become streamlined into a juggernaut of fearmongering that has lost its own heart.”

6. This is more than an attitude problem. Our actions, when traced back far enough, are deeply rooted in that which we believe to be true – about ourselves, God, His Creation, human beings, Scripture, the future, etc. What are some specific areas in which warped beliefs have led to behavior on the part of Christians that is wildly different than that of Jesus?
7. Chris said, “Many people are more familiar with what the church is AGAINST rather than what the church is FOR.” What is Christianity FOR? What are you FOR?
8. What are your initial reactions to the results of this video study?
9. *With your Bible or YouVersion, read Ephesians 5:1-2, 8-10.*

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.
Ephesians 5:1-2, 8-10



Chris said, “Paul says the way we follow God’s example in the culture in which we live is we learn to love like Jesus loved. That’s not referring to an emotional, sentimental, easy love. This isn’t about loving the people who love us or loving the people who agree with us. We don’t have to approve of what someone is doing before we love. We just love.”

10. What do you think it means to, “walk in the way of love?” What example did Jesus give us?
11. Chris said, “God’s love is always tied to giving.” Do you agree or disagree? Why? How does Ephesians 5:2, John 3:16, and Romans 8:31-32 support your answer?

If we are the children of God, then we ought to imitate our Father. This is the basis for the 3 commands: God is love (1 John 4:8); therefore, “walk in love” (Eph. 5:1–2). God is light (1 John 1:5); therefore, “walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:3–14). God is truth (1 John 5:6); therefore, walk in wisdom (Eph. 5:15–17).

12. Why do you think Paul chooses these 3 commands? How do they support his previous teaching on unity?
13. What are other attributes of God that we, as His children, ought to imitate? List four or five here. How do we imitate these attributes? Is following God’s example enough? How do we move from “imitating” or practicing certain attributes to actually living them out naturally?
14. Choose one verse or phrase from Ephesians 5 that stands out to you. This could be something you’re intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here. What strikes you about this verse?
15. Paul began with “walk in love” because love is the fundamental factor in the Christian life. If we walk in love, we will not disobey God or injure men because “If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God’s law” (Rom. 13:8). The Holy Spirit puts this love in our hearts (Rom. 5:5).
16. After Paul encourages his readers to walk in love, he lists a number of behaviors to avoid. List these behaviors (5:3–7). How are these behaviors evidence of not walking in love?

MOVING FORWARD

For Clarksville:

Changing the way people **not in church** view **church**.

How?

By **doing good** in our community and practicing no-strings attached **generosity**.

We believe that for far too long the church has been known for what we’re *against*. We want to be known for what we are *for*. We are for Clarksville families, couples, singles, students, and children. We are for our city officials and parks. We are for Sango, Ft. Campbell, Hopkinsville, Oak Grove, and all of the great cities in our county. We are for Clarksville. The reason we are for the people in our county is because God is for them. The most famous verse in the Bible clearly states this: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but will have eternal life.”

Over the next 4 weeks, we’re encouraging everyone to take the FOR Challenge. Every week, we will look at what it means to invest, invite, serve, and give.

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Can you imagine what your workplace and community would be like if you loved the way Jesus calls us to love? Can you imagine what would happen in our nation—in our world—if Christians everywhere began following Jesus’ example? What if you committed to love the people around you?

FOUR CHALLENGE:

1. **Invest** “Get to know your neighbors. You can’t love who you don’t know.”
2. **Invite** “Choose 4 people that you will be FOR by praying and inviting.”
3. **Serve** “We show people that we are FOR them by how well we SERVE them. What have I done for Clarksville today?”
4. **Give** “FOR God so loved that He GAVE. Being FOR is always tied to GIVING.”

CHANGING YOUR MIND

Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Live as children of light...

Ephesians 5:1-2, 8

