

# It Is Written

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## The Problem Of People

By Doy Moyer

While many turn away from God due to some perceived problem with God (e.g., allowing evil to exist), I have found that just as prominent is a problem that they have with those who call themselves Christians. Because Christians have been hypocritical, unloving, divisive, and abusive, some have walked away thinking that if this is what Christians are like, they want no part of them. We might respond, "But our faith resides in God, not people, so turning from God because of people isn't justified." While that is technically correct, we do need to factor in what the Lord said about His disciples and their relationship to how the world perceives Christians:

"I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35, CSB).

"I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word. May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me" (John 17:20-21, CSB).

Jesus makes clear that the world sits in some form of judgment on whether disciples reflect their Lord. If they see a lack of love, they may conclude that we are not really disciples of Jesus. And let's be honest: who really wants to be around those who lack love while calling themselves something they are not? Then, if we are divisive and fail to reflect the unity to which Jesus calls us, the world will conclude that Jesus Himself is a fraud ("that the world may believe you sent me"). Do we think about that when we are fighting, fussing, and feuding with each other?

There is, then, a great responsibility we have as citizens of heaven to walk worthy of the gospel (Philippians 1:27). If we know that our actions demonstrate that we are not serious about our calling and that our divisions might turn people from Christ, then we need to think deeply about how we interact with both the world and one another. We might comfort ourselves with a technically correct concept, but can we escape the consequences of our actions that may contribute to disbelief?

While many have overcome the problem of people and stayed true and faithful to the Lord, that is not an excuse to misbehave, for the next person we influence might not overcome the problem so well. If our actions contribute to this issue, then we will be called to account. May God help us if we act so unbecomingly that we turn people off to the gospel! If people are going to be offended and put off, let it be by the gospel itself and not our own unrighteousness (cf. I Corinthians 1:18ff).

There is more, though, and this is confession time. If ever there is something that makes me question what I know is right, it is the problem of people. It is not the veracity of Scripture, the identity of Jesus, or the character of God that makes me wonder. And here I am not just talking about the people of God. I am talking about people in general. Why are people so stubborn, so mean, so selfish, so oppressive, so...? You get the idea. II Timothy 3:1-5 is a catalog of the types of behaviors and attitudes I am talking about. Why are people this way? Why are we so set to continue in evil while we run roughshod over fellow human beings? The world would be great were it not for people. And, as we often hear, the church would be great were it not for people. (That generally leads to very hesitant chuckles.)

But here's the rub: I am one of those people! It's easy to point fingers and talk about why "others"

are so terrible, but the truth is that I am the one. The words of Nathan often ring in my thinking: "You are the man!" And now the problem of people takes on another dimension, for the question I have is not why God allows people to behave so badly. It's not why He allows me to be so bad.

The question I have is why God is so kind to bad people. Why does God provide such grace to people like me? Why does He act in mercy toward people who have been so stubborn, selfish, and wicked? Why would He send Jesus to die for us knowing how we would continue to behave in insolence and rebellion? Why does He have to be so good? Why can't He just leave us alone in our badness?

It is precisely because of God's actions toward us — His kindness and mercy — that brings me back around to Him. How can I reject the One who showed such mercy to me when I could in no way expect it from Him? The problem of people is real, but the bigger question is how God can continue to be gracious to any of us. That breaks me. I will serve Him!

If this doesn't ultimately bring us back to God, we are indeed most miserable.

## **Courageous People**

By Kyle Campbell

Trusting and serving God gives the Christian courage to face the adversities of life. Courage means the ability to do something frightening. Courageous means that you are not deterred by danger or pain; you have strength in the face of pain or grief.

Courageous examples are found in Elijah, who opposed the false prophets of the Baal in 1 Kings 18, Daniel, who refused to defile himself with the king's food in Daniel 1, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who refused to bow down to the image Nebuchadnezzar built in Daniel 3; Peter and John, who refused to stop preaching about Jesus in the face of imprisonment in Acts 4; Stephen, who held fast his faith when being killed for the cause of Christ in Acts 7, or Paul, who defended himself before a hostile crowd in Jerusalem in Acts 21.

Knowing that these people went through what they did gives me encouragement that I can stand when the time comes to do so. I share this devotion with many of my brothers and sisters in Christ. But sadly, some are not even motivated enough to attend or participate in the work of God's kingdom. If called upon to stand, would they? Their past performance would argue the negative. A child of God can take courage (John 16:33), but courage desperately needs faithfulness. Build yourself up in "the most holy faith" (Jude 20), and then be courageous like people of faith were in the past when the time calls for it.

## **God Comes First**

By Frank Himmel

Loving Him with our whole heart is the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36-37). We say it and sing it, but do we practice it? What do our calendars say? What about those Sundays when the kids have a ball game or when we are on vacation - does He come first those Sundays? What do our checkbooks say? Does He come first in finances or is He somewhere down the list, perhaps even beneath what we spend on recreation? What do our closets say? Do our wardrobes reflect godliness or worldliness? In the Apostle's words, "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:18).