



CHRISTIAN: Part 3: Insiders Outsiders

INTRODUCTION

The juice goes out of Christianity when it becomes too based on faith rather than on living like Jesus or seeing the world as Jesus saw it.

—Steve Jobs

If you're a follower of Jesus, nonbelievers expect you to act like Jesus. They expect you to care about and value the things that Jesus cared about and valued. They judge your likeness to Jesus largely on the way you react and respond to people outside the faith. And you know what? They're right to do so.

Given that truth, what does the Bible say about how followers of Jesus should treat nonbelievers?

WEEKLY READING

Before he left them, Jesus told his followers what he wanted them to do:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Matthew 28:19-20

He didn't say coerce, threaten, or guilt people into following them. His plan was that his followers would draw others in—*through love*.

For three hundred years, followers of Jesus were great at doing just that. But then Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. With that shift, Christians began leveraging political power and influence over non-Christians instead of simply loving them.

That was never part of Jesus' plan.

In a letter he wrote to the first-century church in the city of Corinth, the apostle Paul contrasts how followers of Jesus are supposed to treat each other with how they're supposed to treat outsiders. In the letter, he addresses sexual immorality happening inside the church: "*A man is sleeping with his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this?*" (1 Corinthians 5:1-5).

And then he clarifies some confusion about what he'd written them in a previous letter: "*I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters*" (1 Corinthians 5:9).

WEEKLY READING (Continued)

Paul didn't expect non-Jesus followers to behave like Jesus followers. He writes, "*What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?*" (1 Corinthians 5:12).

Too often, followers of Jesus do exactly what Paul chastised the Corinthians for doing—judging nonbelievers, while failing to hold themselves and other followers of Jesus accountable for their behavior. It's not a Christian's job to judge the behavior of a nonbeliever. In fact, followers of Jesus lose influence when they approach nonbelievers with anything but love.

Love one another. Stop judging outsiders.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Talk about a time when someone at work, in your family, or at church held you accountable. How did it help you grow?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 5:12. How does this passage challenge your assumptions about what the Bible says regarding judging others? How does it square with Matthew 7:1-2?
3. If you're a follower of Jesus, why is it so difficult to not judge nonbelievers?
4. What is most uncomfortable about holding other followers of Jesus accountable for their behavior? How do you know when it's your duty to do so?
5. Is there a nonbeliever whose behavior you tend to judge? What can you do to put aside judgment and love that person the way Jesus commands?

MOVING FORWARD

When we judge nonbelievers, we lose our influence. Can you imagine where we'd be if we'd never abandoned love as our primary influence? Let's decide together that we're going to work to love one another better and we're going to stop judging outsiders.

CHANGING YOUR MIND

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.

1 Corinthians 9:19