

SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD: WHEN IT COMES TO OTHERS

Text: Luke 6:31-33 And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.

American culture has progressively shifted toward hyper-individualism and inward self-focus. Hyper-individualism is an extreme cultural and social mindset that prioritizes the personal freedom, rights and desires of the singular self over collective well-being and community responsibility. It's a technical way to say that the rule of the day has become selfishness. For decades now the bookstores and daytime talk shows focused on one topic, self! Self-help, self-evaluation, self-preservation, self-expression, and ultimately self-glorification has created a "me first" mentality that is poisoning our civilization. Social media and modern technologies act as powerful catalysts for this trend, driving the "me culture" where individuals increasingly strive to make their personal presence known and valued. This generation only feels good about themselves if they have thousands of subscribers and millions of likes on their content. Mottos for years have been "find yourself" "be yourself" "love yourself" because we have become so self-centered that the world must surely revolve around us.

What is more alarming is that because we live every day in this culture, that kind of thinking has crept into the minds of believers and is affecting the church. Christian consumerism has filled the hearts of most people today. People shop for church online all the time. Rather than viewing church as a place to serve others, be disciplined to follow Christ, and be apart of a community of fellow believers...they treat it like a retail experience. They select churches based on amenities like merchandise, music preferences, coffee bars, and specialized children's programs, utilizing a "customer is boss" approach. Pastors aren't satisfied with faithfully shepherding the assembly that God has placed them over. The term "celebrity pastor" has become apart of western church world. Prominent religious leaders who gain national and global fame, often by leading a megachurch or broadcasting through podcasts, social media and television. They've traded ministry for branding and content. They don't provide hands-on, personal care to a local congregation because they remain distant figures to their massive on-line followings. They view themselves as the central

draw of the church rather than just a spiritual leader. All this usually leads to a lack of accountability and then to scandal or moral failure.

The glaring problem with all of this is that this is the exact opposite of what God's kingdom calls us to. In Jesus' sermon on the mount, he repeatedly refers to the heavenly community that the saved belong to. When he gave the prayer template, he started with "Our Father, who art in heaven, give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, lead us not into temptation" because the kingdom of God is about community, not hyper-individuality!

We've investigated seeking first the kingdom of God in our marriages, homes and workplace. Today I want to bring you a message called "Seek first the kingdom of God when it comes to others". God has definite commands, not suggestions, for how He wants us to treat others. There are three categories of others that are in all our lives:

- **Neighbors** – In the Bible, a neighbor is anyone you encounter who needs help or crosses your path. The law commanded you to love your neighbor as yourself. The scripture we read at the beginning tells us how to do that practically. We're to put ourselves in the shoes of our neighbors and do for them that we would want done for us in those situations. A certain lawyer tempted Jesus with questions about eternal life and Jesus turned the question back to him by asking him what was in the law. The lawyer responded with "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself". Jesus said you have answered right: do this, and thou shalt live. He then asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Thinking that neighbors were only other people who were like himself. Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan to highlight that your neighbor is anyone in need that you cross paths with. The Samaritan was not the same race, social class or religion as the man lying broken in the street, yet he was neighbor to him. Going to him, binding his wounds, trading positions with him, taking him to an inn and paying his bill. This teaches us that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, even when that neighbor isn't anything like us.
- **Brothers and Sisters - John 13:34-35** A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. *Brothers and sisters in Christ are on another level than neighbors in that Jesus Christ has commanded us to love one another in the same manner as he has loved us.* This emphasizes unconditional affection and selfless devotion. **1 John 3:16** Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. Laying down our lives for brothers and sisters in an

everyday practical way looks like – **Investing your time:** devote your schedule to helping the vulnerable, mentoring others, or supporting the tired. **Give generously:** Share your resources and material possessions with the poor or those facing financial hardships. **Be emotionally available:** be a good listener to help bear the burdens of others instead of focusing solely on your own ambitions. **Extend grace and forgiveness:** Absorb offenses without retaliating, choosing to forgive and let go of hurts. **Philippians 2:3-4** *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*

- **Enemies - Matthew 5:43-48** Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more *than others*? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. *You are never more like your Heavenly Father than when you love your enemies.*

We need to understand that the Bible says without this kind of love, we are nothing! 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become *as* sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. *Charity is God's love in action, love that can be seen.*

How do we live out these commands obediently? All Christians have a carnal nature that is instinctively self-centered. That's why church fights and splits happen because people, even saved people, think of themselves first. In our strength alone, most of this would be impossible. But the great thing about salvation is that anything God commands us to do, He will also help us to do.

Turn in your Bible to **1 John 4:11-12** Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. *The phrase "his love is perfected in us" means that His love reaches its intended goal. We don't produce the love of God or work up the love like God;*

we have God, which is love, living inside of us. And what God wants is to love others through us.

- **Completing the goal** – God’s love for humanity isn’t meant to stop as a feeling or idea. It is “perfected” or completed when it flows through believers and manifests how we treat each other.
- **Making God visible:** Since no one has seen God, our love for one another acts as an earthly reflection, allowing the invisible God to become visible in the world today.
- **Divine abiding** – When Christians choose to love one another, God actively abides in them, and His love fulfills its ultimate purpose.

The fire hydrant is a perfect illustration of this idea. In the early 20th century, cities utilized fire hydrants to wash down streets, remove foul-smelling horse manure, and improve sanitation. Fire hydrants act as a valve connected directly to an underground water main. Firefighters remove the caps and use a wrench to open the internal valve, releasing pressurized water. Even though the hydrant is small and insignificant, it is connected to an inexhaustible amount of water. Christians are like that, to look at us there’s nothing grand or spectacular about us, but we’re connected to the inexhaustible love of God through Jesus Christ! **John 7:38** He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But also like the fire hydrant, Christians can plug up the love of God from flowing through them and out to the world. **Three things that can plug up the love of God from flowing through you:**

- **Not abiding in Christ - John 15:4** Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. Jesus taught that we abide in him and he in us by maintaining our connection with him. Do you connect with Christ daily?
- **Loving the world instead of the Father - 1 John 2:15** Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. What you spend your time thinking about, talking about and pursuing, is what you love.
- **Grieving the Holy Spirit - Ephesians 4:30-32** And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.