



## The Wise Heart

Matthew 5:10, Ephesians 6:18-20

Even though we try hard to make peace with some people, they may refuse to live in peace with us. In an imperfect world not all attempts at reconciliation will succeed. This happens when people reject the Christ we choose to follow. The clash of two different value systems may result in persecution of the

Christian. This is a persecution that is not caused by the incorrect actions of the Christian but is simply persecution “because of righteousness”. Righteousness or proper conduct before God is offensive to the world. Persecution is as much a mark of Christian discipleship as purity of heart or mercy. Every Christian can expect opposition at some point in her life. We may be rejected, despised or slandered. But Jesus gave us reassurance for those times when He spoke these words, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:10)

The values of the Christian faith appear upside-down to the world. Above all, the world values money, power, and technological progress. It is a well known fact that what one values is where one spends one’s time, money and energy. The Christian, on the other hand, places higher priority on the coming of Christ’s kingdom and learning to live as a part of it. Christians are not satisfied with being a part of the Kingdom themselves but they are intent upon bringing others into the kingdom also. Therefore, the Christian’s time is spent on imitating Christ. Those with wise hearts claim Christ’s promise that the kingdom of Heaven will be theirs. All of the rewards Christ promised in the beatitudes were not just arbitrarily chosen but are a nature outcome of living under the kingdom standards.

The dictionary tells us that to be wise is to be able to follow the best course of action based upon knowledge and understanding. For the Christian this means that we must have knowledge and understanding of God’s Word. The actions we do will then be wisely guided by God’s word. “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.” (Proverbs 11:30) But winning souls is not seen as wisdom by the world. When Christians follow Christ’s command to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), they may be scorned by the world. Since the world sees only power, wealth, and fame as valid reasons to “go out into the world” they cannot grasp the fact that Christians “go” for the purpose of building God’s kingdom and not for personal gain.

Along with our knowledge and understanding of God’s word Paul tells us we need to pray. (Ephesians 6:18-20) “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” Paul asked for prayers for his ministry and for other Christians. We must allow the Holy Spirit to guide us in our prayers and to especially pray for those who are in the full-time ministry of winning souls for God’s kingdom. Our church staffs, missionaries, evangelists all need our prayers to sustain

them in their work. This is one of the ways we fulfill Christ's command to "go into all the world and preach the gospel." Without our support whether it is in the form of physical assistance, finances, or prayer these workers in God's kingdom would not be able to go and win more souls.

Christians must also pray for those who persecute them. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:44 and Luke 6:28 to "pray for those who persecute you." After Paul tells us to "put on the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:11), he then tells us to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions" (Eph. 6:18). The world, in general, recognizes only resistance, revenge and retribution as valid ways of dealing with those who oppose them. Christians can never expect their values to be accepted by the world because it requires a heart-change in order to understand the values of God's kingdom. We must understand that the world is simply unequipped to understand. This is why Christians are only called to go and tell the world. It is God's place to prepare hearts and cause the seeds we sew to germinate.

As Christians we should make our performances match our profession. If we say we believe the teachings of Christ, then our daily living should be a witness of Christ to the world. Much of this involves learning to place our priorities correctly. When we each face death, will we regret not spending more hours on our jobs, or not keeping our homes cleaner, or not driving the right kind of car? No. We will then realize, if we haven't done so beforehand, that the highest priority in our life should be to live in the manner Jesus calls us to live. We can't relegate Christ's teachings to the seminary classroom or the weekly Bible study. The important thing is not in the teaching itself but in what we do with that teaching. "Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." (James 1:22) The wise heart will recognize the reality that passive listening impresses no one. The one thing that will make our lives attractive to nonbelievers is that we live what we say we believe.

### **Heart-to-Heart Activities:**

1. Ask the group to imagine what would happen if they were asked to play a game and the correct set of rules was given to one team while a different set of rules was given to the other team. List those results on a chalkboard or chart. Then ask how they might relate this to the clash between worldly values and Christian values.
2. Have each person create a drawing or some type of artwork. Give only paper and crayon to some, while giving lots of supplies to the others. After about 10 minutes, invite the women to talk about the process and share their feelings and ideas. Then ask them how this process might relate to a clash between worldly values and Christian values.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- ♥ With a neighbor, talk about a time you felt as if you were persecuted for righteousness. How did you react to this persecution?

- ♥ How is it possible to live in modern society and still hold on to the characteristics which Jesus taught in the Beatitudes?
- ♥ How can the way we handle persecution witness to others?
- ♥ On your own, list on paper the names of some people that you would like to bring into the Kingdom of God. Then list ways and ideas for accomplishing this goal. Find another person and compare ideas.

**Prayer:**

God of all wisdom,

We thank you for giving your Son, Jesus Christ so that we might be reconciled to you through Him. Guide us in listening to the voice of Jesus in his teaching and then give us the desire to put those teachings into action in our daily living. Help us to have that beckoning brightness from you that shines through us to others in darkness. We ask for your wisdom to lead those we encounter each day toward Your light. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

**NOTE FOR THE LAST LESSON:**

If there is only one more study left for the year ("The Fruitful Heart"), remind the women to bring with them to the next meeting the envelope with its contents from the first, introductory Bible study session. If the leader kept those envelopes, then be prepared to return them to their owners during the final study session.