

how people treat the NT shows how they truly feel about Jesus and his Father. (See 1 Thess. 2:13)

To whom is Jesus referring when he talks of a prophet, a righteous man and one of these little ones?

He is talking about his disciples, whoever they may be. Whether they are one who speaks on his behalf or one who lives a righteous life for his sake or even if he or she is the most insignificant of Christians. We know he is talking about categories of his followers because he uses the pronoun “these” in “these little ones because they are my disciples”. He views prophets and righteous ones as one of “these little ones” and all “these little ones” are his disciples.

What is the promise Jesus is making in verses 41-42 and to whom does the promise apply?

He is promising to give individuals a prophet’s reward, a righteous man’s reward or a disciple’s reward. The condition of the promise is how an individual treats the prophet, the righteous man and the little one and why he treats them the way he does. If a person receives any of Jesus’ disciples because they are his disciple, then he will give to that person the same reward he gives to the disciple. “Receiving a disciple” is as simple as offering him or her the most basic of human kindnesses (a cup of cold water). However, it must be because of who the disciple represents, not for any other reason.

How is this not salvation by works?

Jesus is simply showing what is always true of those who trust and love him as their Savior. All who love him love to love his disciples. This is just another way of saying what he says in John 13: 32-33, “By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love for one another.” This is the same as what John says in 1 John 4: 7-12. If you love a person, you love whom they love. If you love a parent of children, then you love their children. If you don’t love their children, then you don’t love them no matter what you say. Your love for Christians is the natural result of being born by God’s Spirit.

When you put these verses with 10:10b-12 (see also 1 John 3: 11-15) it becomes clear that receiving Jesus’ disciples means at the minimum providing for the physical needs of other Christians. Thus, Jesus is declaring that those who find him to be a treasure delight to sacrifice their personal comfort in order to meet the needs of other Christians. How we treat other Christians is the measure of what we think about Jesus.

If someone were to secretly watch how you treated other Christians, both those in your family and those outside it what would they conclude that you think about Jesus? Do you gladly sacrifice personal comfort in order to love other Christians because you are delighted with Jesus?

Jesus presents himself as more desirable than personal comfort

him more than they love even their own family. They even kill their own attempts to find happiness in this life in order to follow the one who is so valuable (v. 38). So if you love your family more than Jesus and thus do not act in a manner that corresponds to the value of Jesus, when you stand before him at the judgement he will treat you as you acted. If he, who is infinitely valuable, was not valuable to you on earth you will be judged according to your estimation of Jesus. Your estimation of his value is shown by whether you love him more than even your family and if you regularly kill your desires to find happiness on earth apart from him in order that you may more faithfully follow him.

How are we to reconcile v. 37 with passages like Eph. 5: 23, 25 & 6: 1-3?

Christians don't become the enemies of their family members by hating them and treating them bad. Rather Christians treat Christ as supremely valuable by loving their family members better than they used to until their family members require them to abandon Christ in order to love them. Christians ought to be better spouses, better parents, better children. But when their family members require them to disobey or renounce Christ, then they must hold fast to Christ and disappoint their family member.

What might be some examples of a time when a family member would have to show their loyalty to Christ over their loyalty to a family member? What might be some examples of when loyalty to Christ might require you to be an obedient child or a loving wife rather than disappoint your non-believing parent or husband?

When your dad tells you that if you don't renounce Christ he will disown you, the choice is obvious. When your dad tells you that he doesn't want you to be a missionary the choice may or may not be obvious. If you are going to disobey your dad you have to be absolutely convinced that being a missionary is exactly what Christ is calling you to do and not just some romantic notion you came up with on your own. When your husband commands you to stop reading the Bible and fellowshiping with God's people, the choice is obvious. But when your spouse asks you, politely, to stop trying to convert him, the choice is not so plain. You cannot stop praying for his salvation. You cannot stop

living like a Christian in all your life. But you should stop talking about Christ in ways that your spouse finds offensive.

How would you formulate a principle that would help you know when to apply this verse?

When loyalty to family requires that you disobey a clear command of God in the Scriptures, then your choice is obvious, you must obey God rather than man. But when your family disapproves of something that is not so clearly commanded, the choice is not so obvious. Children are obligated to obey their parents, even if they are not Christians. Husbands are required to love their wives, even if they are not Christians. Wives are required to submit to and respect their husbands, even if they are not Christians. It is easy to justify being stubborn and unloving and disobedient with this verse. However, it is equally easy to appeal to my responsibility as a child, parent, husband or wife in order to avoid the hard choices this verse calls us to make.

Jesus presents himself as a greater treasure than harmonious human relationships

How are vv. 40-42 an encouragement to the apostles and us after all the warnings about the animosity and rejection of people for being Christians?

These verses clearly indicate that Jesus expects lots of people to welcome the apostles and us. Not all men will hate us. Not every family member will be our enemy. As we acknowledge Christ before men and as we live in a way that corresponds to the value of Christ, some will gladly welcome us because we represent Jesus. This is a great promise after all the warnings.

What is true of those who receive the apostles (v. 40)? Why is this true? How do people receive the apostles today?

Those who receive the apostles also receive Jesus and his Father. The apostles are Christ's ambassadors and so people reveal how they feel about Jesus by how they respond to his representatives. People receive the apostles today by receiving their word about Jesus. In other words,

To deny Jesus is not simply ignoring him. Rather it is to both verbally and by my lifestyle to declare my independence from him. It is to assert my right to live as I please and to depend upon myself to get to heaven. It is to not treat Jesus as supremely valuable and necessary for life. We deny Christ both by our words and our actions when we demonstrate that he is not what we love and trust and worship.

How does Matthew 7: 21-23 and Titus 1: 16 contribute to our understanding of acknowledging and denying Jesus?

It is clear that this is not acknowledge and deny Christ merely with our words. Our actions are equally a part of what these words mean. There will be many people in hell who verbally acknowledged Jesus but who denied him by their disobedient lives.

Read Matthew 26: 69-75 and John 21: 15-19. Peter denies Christ three times and yet he is warmly accepted by Jesus and instrumental in leading the early church. What does Peter's experience tell us about denying Christ?

It is possible to be restored to Christ even after I have denied him by word or deed. I must do as Peter did. I must grieve my sin. Confess it to Christ and then depend upon him for forgiveness and power to live a life that acknowledges him before men.

In Matt. 10:22 Jesus tells the apostles and us that we will be hated by all men because of him. What can we expect to happen when we freely acknowledge Jesus before men?

We can expect to be persecuted and to suffer at the hands of others.

Why do Christians surrender their right to be safe in order to acknowledge Jesus before men?

We surrender our right to be safe because to be warmly welcomed by Jesus into the Father's presence is a far greater treasure and more certain to make us happy than living a safe and secure life on planet earth.

Jesus presents himself as a greater prize than personal safety.

Read Isaiah 9:6, Luke 2:14, Rom. 5:1, Eph. 2: 14 & 17. These passages teach that Jesus came to bring peace. What does he mean by telling us to not think that he came to bring peace in vv. 34-36?

He came to make peace between God and man and among people who believe in him. He did not come to make peace between his people and the unbelieving world. Rather he came to make a clear and sharp distinction between those who belong to him and those who do not. He came to divide people from their earthly loyalties and bring them into an exclusive relationship with himself.

When a person makes peace with God and God's people in and through Christ, how do those who are closest to him respond according to these verses?

When a person who was an enemy of God surrenders and makes peace through Christ (i.e., becomes a Christian) then those who remain enemies of God view such a person as a traitor. They consider him or her an enemy because they have joined the enemy. The members of ones family will feel more animosity because the "betrayal" of the one who follows Christ feels more personal. (See the illustration in the sermon.)

In v. 37 Jesus tells us how those who follow him are to respond to the animosity of our family. What does he say?

He says that if the fear of losing your relationship with people, even your own family, keeps you from following him you will not be worthy of him. If you love your family more than him than you are not "fit" to be his disciple.

What does it mean to not be "worthy" of Jesus (vv. 37-38)?

This word is used over 39 times in the NT. It would be good to show that no one is "worthy" of a relationship with God by their own virtue or goodness. (See Luke 7: 6-7, Luke 15: 19, 21 & John 1:27). It is the grace of God in Christ that makes people worthy of the kingdom. However, those who have been made worthy act in a manner that corresponds to the value of Christ. People who have been rescued from their sins by Christ delight to show forth the value of Christ by loving

JESUS IS MORE SATISFYING THAN EVERYTHING YOU LONG FOR

Matthew 10:32-42

INTRODUCTION

From the viewpoint of humans living on planet earth, apart from divine revelation, what are the things that are generally considered necessary for an enjoyable life?

At the very least, most humans would agree that life is more enjoyable when you are personally safe, experiencing harmonious relationships and living in at least moderate comfort (i.e., have sufficient food, clothing and shelter with minimum hassle). Desiring these things is not in and of itself evil. However, Jesus makes the amazing claim in this passage that he and his salvation are a far better treasure than a life that is secure, full of loving relationships and abundantly blessed with comfort. In fact, what Jesus says here either makes him the worst megalomaniac the world has ever known and someone we should condemn and flee from, or the greatest and best of all beings. Jesus spoke these words to leave us no room for compromise. You must either pursue him as the source of all goodness and happiness no matter what it costs you or by your refusal to abandon safety, family and comfort show that you really love the world and not him.

STUDY

These verses, (32-42) are the conclusion to Jesus' instructions to his 12 apostles before he sends them into Galilee to preach the good news of the kingdom. How does the first word of v. 32 let us know that what Jesus is saying here is not just for them?

The "whoever" lets us know that what Jesus is saying here is for everyone who calls himself a Christian.

What does Jesus expect to be the motivation of people who acknowledge him before men and refuse to deny him before men?

The reason a person will acknowledge Jesus before men and refuse to deny him is so that Jesus will acknowledge him before the Father and not deny him before the Father. In other words, the person who acknowledges and does not deny Jesus loves above all things the thought of being warmly welcomed into the company of God forever in heaven. She is so delighted with the greatness and mercy of God that she will suffer anything in order to be with him forever.

The big question for each of us is what does it mean to acknowledge Jesus before men and what does it mean to deny Jesus before men? How do I know if I'm doing one or the other? The best way to answer those questions is to consider what it would mean to have Jesus acknowledge us before the Father and deny/disown us before the Father?

Jesus acknowledging a person before the Father cannot simply mean that he informs his Father of the existence of a particular person. Rather, Jesus acknowledging a person before his Father means that he is warmly welcoming that person into his Father's presence and enthusiastically endorsing his right to be there. He is asserting to the Father that here is a person who should be allowed to live forever in his holy presence. Then Jesus disowning a person before his Father means that he is doing far more than just ignoring him. Rather he is denouncing him and asking God to join him in rejecting and treating him with contempt. (NOTE: You may want to read the illustrations on in my sermon on our website.)

Therefore, acknowledging Jesus before men is not simply assenting to his existence. Rather it is so delighting in him and his salvation that you delight to live in a manner that shows you are delighted with him. You are eager for others to delight in Jesus just like you do and so you unashamedly talk about him whenever you are given the opportunity. Just like people freely talk about their favorite movies and books and video games and hobbies and children and grandchildren we freely talk about our great Savior. Just like people order their lives in order to watch their favorite movies, read their favorite books, play their favorite videos, spend time with their children and grandchildren, so we order our lives so that we get more of Jesus.