

America is becoming less Christian and less religious. The “Don’ts” and the “Nones” are increasing. The “Don’ts” are those who identify as “Don’t believe in God”, “Don’t know if God is real”, “Don’t care if God is real.”

The “Nones” are those who identify themselves as spiritual or religious but not a part of any organized religious group or denomination. Some of the “nones” claim to be Christian, but have left church life behind.

This is according to the American Worldview Inventory, an annual survey that estimates how many adults have a biblical worldview. This survey is written by George Barna and conducted by The Cultural Research Center under the auspices of Arizona Christian University. The survey was conducted with only 2000 individuals. That isn’t much out of a US population of 330 million. But the results are consistent with other surveys conducted over the last thirty years.

The survey reveals that many people believe that most people are good and good people go to heaven. So, we can hope that these people are all trying to be good. That would benefit us all.

But, Christians should not settle for being good. Christians should be striving to be more than good. Jesus said his followers are the salt and light of the world. To be effective as salt and light we must be more than good. To have an impact on our world for the kingdom of God we must be more than good.

Let me suggest four significant ways that Christians should be more than good.

1. Christians are to care for and be generous to each other.

This fulfills Jesus’ command that his disciples love each other. Jesus pointed out that unbelievers love family. Our love must extend beyond our families to other Christians. We have examples of this in Acts in the story of the first church. The apostle Peter, led by the Holy Spirit, proclaimed the good news to the crowd.

Acts 2:41-41 (NIV) Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

They devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching. I believe that the apostle’s teaching included Jesus’ command to love each other. And the following verses reveal that they did love each other.

Acts 2:44-45 (NIV) All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

The apostles taught Jesus' command to love each other. I don't believe that included a command to go and sell all their stuff. Instead, individuals were led by the Holy Spirit to sell some of their possessions. There is more evidence in chapter 4. Note the timing in the following passage.

Acts 4:34-35 (NIV) There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Notice that all the people who had houses and land did not sell them at first, when the apostles first started their teaching. If the apostles had taught them to sell all their possessions the houses and land would have been sold at the beginning. Instead, it says they did so, "from time to time." As the need arose and the Holy Spirit led individuals to do so, they sold houses and property and donated the money. It wasn't expected that everyone sell everything they had. I don't believe we are to read these passages that way.

They were taught to love each other and the Spirit led them to do so in practical ways. And it had such an impact on the non-Christians that many of them were attracted to the gospel.

As such love becomes a habit, becomes part of our character, we will extend such expressions of love to those outside of the church, even to enemies.

Good non-Christian people love those who love them. Christian loving is to go further.

2. Christians are to forgive those who sin against them.

God forgiving our sins is the motivator for us forgiving other's sins against us. Jesus taught us this principle in the Lord's prayer. It is echoed by the apostles, as in Paul's letter to the Christians in Colossae.

Colossians 3:13 (NIV) Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

This, too, became a mark of Christians. And while the focus here is on life in the church, such a habit will extend to those outside of the church too, even to our enemies. Jesus commands us to love our enemies. That would include forgiving them.

One example of forgiveness outside of the church took place after the October 2, 2006, shooting at the West Nickel Mines School, an Amish one-room schoolhouse in the Old Order

Amish community of Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania. Gunman Charles Roberts took hostages and shot eight girls, aged 6–13, killing five and then taking his own life.

The father and mother of the gunman felt great shame because of what their son had done. Mr. Roberts told his wife that he would never face his Amish neighbors again. They had a private funeral for their son.

At the gravesite they witnessed a great act of compassion. About 40 Amish showed up to the graveside and formed a half circle around the bereaved couple. Mrs. Roberts shared that, “Love just emanated from them.” The Amish assured the couple of their forgiveness towards their son.

Many in the world were shocked. Many did not understand. Many thought them foolish. And that is to be expected. We should not expect to be understood by non-Christians.

Forgiving is a more-than-good quality that is to mark the lives of Christians.

3. Christians are to seek reconciliation with others

I spoke last week about reconciliation.

The sermon centered on Jewish Christians and non-Jewish Christians coming together as one local church. Before their conversion they had animosity towards each other. In Christ they became brothers and sisters learning to live reconciled to each other.

Just as God has reconciled us to himself, we are to reconcile to each other. This maintains the right spirit in our church. We must not allow believers in the church to stay at odds with each other. The sins of bitterness, resentment, and gossip must be confronted. We are called to a ministry of reconciliation.

4. Christians are to choose humility.

Because of the mercy and grace we have received from God, we choose humility.

We don’t deserve the blessings God has provided, whether material, social, emotional, physical, or spiritual blessings. They are all gifts of God’s grace. We have not earned them and don’t deserve them. We must push aside any pride in these things. We must not elevate ourselves above others based on such things.

We must learn from the example of Jesus and choose humility. It is this choice of humility in which Jesus faced the incarnation and the cross, revealed in the following passage.

Philippians 2:3-8 (NIV) Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

It is this attitude of humility within which we approach God. It is this attitude of humility within which we live with each other as a church family.

Humility in us will be required for loving each other, forgiving each other, and being reconciled to each other. Humility is also required for us to live out gentleness, patience, compassion, mercy, kindness, and generosity.

Don't settle for being good. Being good is not good enough for a Christian. We are to set our sights on being more than good.