

There are so many things that are going on around us. The war in Israel/Gaza; the ICC naming the Israeli leaders and the members of Hamas, **both** as war criminals; the war between the Ukraine and Russia; the presidential race happening in this country; the death of an Iranian leader and who will be the next leader of Iran; the “ethnic cleansing” happening in Sudan and other areas of the world; China is wielding its technical power in the business and computer realm...and the list goes on. Everyone is caught up in these events in one way or another.

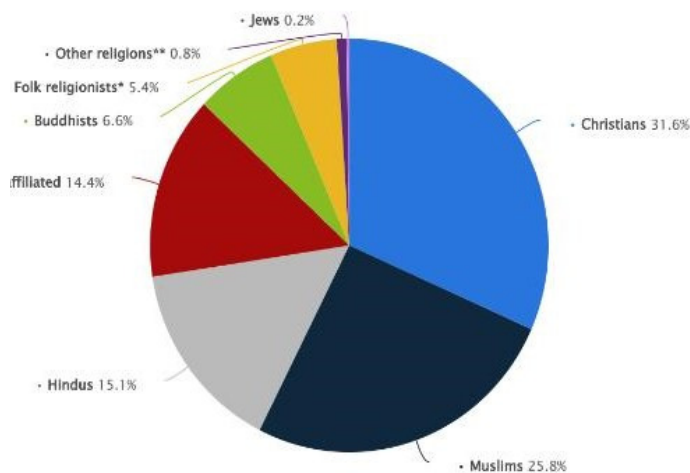
However, as I look around, I notice that most of my neighbors and most of the people that are living around me in my neighborhood are just looking to make ends meet and to take care of their families and themselves. Yes, they may be aware of these things I had mentioned, however, they are just wanting desiring to just live there lives with their families. Maybe I am living in a fantasy world. I know that there are areas where drugs and crime are running rampant. It seems as if there are many, many different “worlds” that we are living in.

Then you have the “world of Christianity.” That gets even more crazier. There are so many different factions and denominations of the “Christian” world that it is hard to keep tack. At last count, as I had mentioned in a recent essay, we were up to over 40,000 different sects, cults and denominations that call themselves “Christian.”

It isn't just in the Christian world. In every religion throughout the world, there are many different “denominations” and “sects” of that particular religion. In the realm of Islam there are 73 different denominations or “firqaqs” as they are called in the Muslim world – there could be more. Of course, just as in Christianity, each one of those “denominations” or “sects” believes they are the correct one and the others, in their own thinking, are false or greatly mistaken.

There are many other “Major Religions” in the world. In each one there are different “sects” of people who say that they are of that particular religion and belief system but yet they are much different from each other. Below is a brief picture on the all “major religions” (not the different denominations or sects of each) and the percentage of people of the world who “they say” follow after them. Of course these are just estimations. This information is from the website entitled www.statista.com.

It may seem that Christianity is still holding firm as the “world leader.” However, we are all very much aware that in today’s world, many who may say they are “Christian” really do not follow after its precepts nor do most of them even attend a church today. And, as stated previously, there are many, many differing denominations and sects.



Actually, from information based on just American households, they have a statistic that states that there are 26.8% of the people, just in the USA, who do not even have a belief in God. That is overwhelmingly the largest faction of those living in America today. Over one quarter of the people in America do not believe in any god. They just exist. Here today, gone tomorrow. Wow!!!

What all this tells us is that the devil is doing his job. What Lucifer desires is that man would simply either worship him, worship a false god or simply worship themselves – anything but the real God. We see this from the very first temptation of man in the Garden. The devil simply tempted Adam and Eve to listen to him, believe that he was telling them the truth and then choose and follow after what he was telling them.

That is the purest form of “worship” – simply believe and choose to follow. That is what we as believers in the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are to do – simply believe and follow God and **all His ways**. That is true worship. Unfortunately, the devil has perverted that truth.

It has been said that the world tells us, “*Conform to what the world wants;*” the flesh says to us, “*Satisfy yourself;*” but the devil says to us, “***Worship me!***” There is Biblical evidence to support each of these three thoughts. However, in respect to the last one, we see that in the devil’s tempting of Jesus in the wilderness, it climaxes with this very “invitation.” We read in Matthew 4:8–9, “*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and **worship me.**”*” This is the devil’s ultimate goal. He desires to be worshiped by God’s highest form of creation – mankind; you and !!!!

The devil has one main goal: to turn us away from God. In doing this, he desires to make us his “slaves” and his “puppets.” Lucifer, the other fallen angels and all the demonic hosts, will do everything they possibly can to achieve this goal. This is why the Bible commands us to “*Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes,*” or as the King Version tells us, “...*the wiles of the devil.*” (Ephesians 6:11) As children of God, we must always be on guard and on alert for the attacks and tactics of the devil.

Yes, temptation is certainly one of the devil’s main weapons and it takes many different forms. He will try to tempt us with sins of the flesh — immorality, pleasure-seeking, destructive habits, etc. He will try to tempt man with sins of the heart or mind — evil thoughts, wrong motives, anger, jealousy, and so forth. However, his greatest strategy is to attack people in the “spirit realm.” He does this by causing people to see or find God “in other places,” in other ideologies and in other false religions. He does this so that their spirit remains “dead to God.”

How can we combat the devil’s schemes? We must first, as true believers in Jesus, be sure that we truly are walking in His **perfect love**. That “perfect love” includes loving all those who do not believe in the true God. They may actually be speaking against the Living God. I am not saying that we need to agree with them, but we must truly love them – as Jesus loved, even those who rose up against Him and His Father. It is an attitude of the heart – your heart.

This is the highest level or form of “loving” - the way Jesus loved. Jesus tells us this in the start of His message known as His “Sermon on the Mount.” He tells us from the start how we are to be saved, by being “poor in spirit” – recognizing my need for God. He then takes us through the progression of a true believer’s life. He tells us the growth of the believer. He takes us up to, and then teaches His disciples, the highest level of the true believer’s life.

That is when He states in Matthew 5:10, “*Blessed are they which are **persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***” The reward is the same as the first step – recognizing your need for God, being “*poor in spirit.*” However, in verse 12 we see the ultimate reward for the person who lives in that realm of God’s love by loving others. He states in Matthew 5:12, “***Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.***”

We see our example of this in Jesus. As He walked on this earth, He was ridiculed, spoken against and many wanted Him killed. What did Jesus do? He continued to speak, show and demonstrate **God's love** to both – those who wanted to hear Him and even to those who constantly rejected Him and spoke out against Him. He may have spoken differently to each of them but we know that He desired “none to perish” and that all would come to the saving knowledge and love of Father God. Why? It was because He truly loved them all.

This is sometimes very difficult for us to grasp in this world that we are in. Today, we are taught from a very young age that if someone does not agree with you, they are against you. That may or may not be true, however, as a true believer in Jesus, we should not be thinking in that way. We are not to put up a wall and forget about those people. No. We must never lose the hope of and the possibility for someone getting saved and coming to the knowledge and understanding of the grace and mercy of the Father, through His Son, Jesus. That is what Jesus did. He never gave up!!! He never gave up on me, or you!!! Thank you, Jesus!!!

Jesus loved, and therefore went to all the people. He went to the Jewish people and their Jewish leaders – the priests, the elders, the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the scribes. He went to the Gentile people many times as we see in the Gospel accounts. He even preached and healed many of the Romans who had invaded their land. Jesus “**so loved the world**” that He would give of His life for every person who was, is and will come. (John 3:16)

As believers in Jesus, this **must** be our call. It must be our heart. Jesus loves every person. He loves the Jewish person, He loves the Arab, He loves the Muslim, He loves the Hindu. He loves the Buddhist. And... He loves even those that do not think that there is any god. The true and living God – the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, loves us all. That is who our God truly is!!!

And that should be our heart. We should also desire that none would perish but that all would come to the saving knowledge of Jesus. Unfortunately, true belief in Jesus has gotten lost in our “Christianity.” It has become all about ourselves. We must get back to the essence of what our faith really is. We must return to our “first love.” We read of this in Revelation 2:1-9.

Jesus is speaking to the church of Ephesus which is one of the seven churches that Jesus refers to in this section of Revelation. He tells them that they are doing well. He is very much aware of all their good works and their grasp of understanding the truth of God's Word even when the false teachers come with their lies and deceptions to pervert that truth. They have truly labored hard for God and for the name of Jesus. However... Jesus tells them that even though they have been doing the right things, they have been missing something that is vital.

They have lost their love for that One who should be their "**first love**." Jesus tells them that this is very dangerous. They were doing all the right things but they were waning in what truly mattered to Jesus and the Father. They were so consumed with their "love of the works of the Kingdom" that they were losing their love for Jesus!!! We must remember that having relationship with Jesus is His **first** priority...and it must be ours.

We can get caught up in the works for the Lord but we must never forget about our relationship with Him. This is, and must be, our primary concern and thought. We must understand that if we are truly in love with the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, then it is not what we do but it is **why** we are doing things. We do the things we do because we love God.

We are to truly be in love with our God. Why? It is because He **first loved us**. He loved us so much that He sent Jesus to die for us. That is why we want to tell others about Him. We want to tell others about His saving grace, His mercy and His peace. We want others to know His love for them. We should desire for others to be in love with God, not to just know about Him.

In Revelation 2:5, Jesus tells us, "*Remember therefore from whence **thou art fallen**, and **repent**, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, **except thou repent**.*" Many of us would say that this is not talking about me. But this is Jesus speaking. He is telling us that we must take a good hard look at our own heart. We must love the way Jesus showed us how we are to love. We are to love God first... **and also** love everyone else, no matter who they are or where they are from.

There is a difference between our love for doing the "works of the Kingdom" and actually **loving God**. If we truly love God we will truly be loving others; and if we truly love others (everyone) then we are truly loving our God. These two commandments are tied together.

Yes, we are to love the true believers in Christ. Yes, we are to love the Jewish people. But we are also to love **every** male and female, Jew or Gentile, even the Muslim, the Buddhist, the Hindu, the atheist; the one who doesn't know any better - anyone and everyone. We do not love their sin or their misplaced affections and/or their incorrect concepts on who to worship. However, we are to truly **love them, as a creation of God**. We must love as Jesus loved, even to the point of giving our life for them to hear the truth. Wow!!! That may be hard for many of us to truly grasp!!!

We must remember that this life is a fleeting moment in time. Our real life is an eternity with our loving God. We must totally believe and be totally sold out to the fact that our lives here on this earth are really not our own. I know that it is difficult to hear. However, the time is getting shorter and shorter. Jesus' return is not to far into the future.

We can see the tell tale signs of God's Word coming to pass. Israel is at war. Nations are coming against nations. Unspeakable atrocities are occurring throughout this earth. In our own country, our own state and in our own town, sin is abounding. Even the weather is causing havoc in our own country and throughout the world. These are all "signs of the times." The Word of God tells us that these and other things are the beginnings stages of the end of the ages.

We are not yet in that final "seven year period"...but we are getting closer and closer. What God truly desires in this hour is for all of His people to truly return to their "first love" – God, the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. When we return to our "first love" then we will automatically turn and love others. We love others by desiring them to come to know Jesus.

We should, or I dare say **we must**, desire to see as many people who would want to know the truth, accept Jesus as their Savior and their Lord, and be saved.