

Identity Crisis: Perception is Reality.

WEEK TWO:

“Make people happy” – That’s the company motto of Best Chevrolet, one of the most successful GM dealerships in the entire country.

Their focus is entirely on making the customer and their employees happy. From the moment their customers walk onto their lot, they want them to feel at ease, comfortable, like the company cares about them. It takes happy employees to make that happen, so the company also invests in its staff to ensure they feel empowered and recognized.

In other words, the number one thing this top rated paradigm of a car dealership tries to do every day is NOT sell cars, it’s to make people happy.

As a Christian, what would you say is the number one thing we should try to do every day?

A lawyer asked Jesus that exact question: *“Teacher, what is the greatest commandment?”*

For the Jews there were 613 commandments, so asking which was the greatest was pretty snarky. But Jesus responds right away, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”* And THEN he adds to that immediately, saying, *“The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”*

The number one thing we should be doing as Christians every day is loving God and one another.

That’s what we should focus on getting right. Because when we do that, everything else falls into place. And it’s not enough to simply claim you love God, you’ve got to love people. Loving God and loving others go together.

In 1 John, the author reminds us, *“Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.”* (1 John 4:20-21) You can’t separate the two. As Christians, love of both God and others should be that thing we strive for every day.

Now, as Christians we are called to share the good news of Christ, to serve and care for others, and invite people into the community of faith. But all of those things are based on our love for people. We teach them the good

news that Christ loves them, we serve them and care for them in the name of Jesus, and we invite them to be part of a community that will love them and help them to love others. But if we don't love them first, then whatever we do afterward is meaningless.

As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13, *"If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing."*

However amazing, or faithful, or powerful, or selfless the acts we do are, if they don't come from a place of love, they mean nothing.

And it's not easy. It can be hardest to act loving to the people we are the closest to. How easy is it to be rude to your mom or your spouse because...well, they're your mom or your spouse! You see them every day, and it's easy to get in the habit of living with them, instead of loving them. Especially because love isn't a feeling. If we look at the totality of scripture and how it talks about love, it is clear that love is not just how we feel about someone at any given time. We might feel loving toward someone, but love is how we treat someone, even when we don't feel like it.

Again, 1 John says, we must love *"not in word or speech, but in truth and action."* (1 John 3:18) And 1 Corinthians 13 reminds us exactly what kind of action is loving: being patient, and kind, and rejoicing in truth, and not being envious or boastful or rude. Love is not irritable, or resentful, but bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

That's what it should look like to love others. If we're supposed to love, and love isn't warm fuzzy feelings we have towards someone, but is actually how we treat them, then that's not just something that happens. It's something we have to decide to do every single day.

And that's where we as Christians need to start. Identity crisis or not, that's what we need to return to every day. How am I loving God? How am I loving my neighbor? How am I loving my enemy? How am I loving the stranger, the mess up, the competition?

Perception is reality. Our identity as Christians means that everything we do points back to Christ. How people perceive us is how people will understand who Christ is. And love is essential to who Christ is.

In the Gospel of John, as he is preparing to go to the cross, and spending his last few days with his disciples, Jesus gives them some final instructions and reminders. In John 13:34-35 he says these words, *"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

In other words, the one thing that you have to do so that people will know you are connected to Jesus, is love. And love is the one thing Jesus wants to make sure people know is connected to him.

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you think it's fair to sum up all the commandments into love God and love one another?
- Does that make being a Christ follower hard or easy?
- What makes you feel like someone loves you? What do you do to show someone else that you love them?
- Do you express love more easily through words or actions?
- Who are the people in your life that are hard to love? What makes you hard to love?
- Do you believe Jesus loves you?