

Jesus often encountered criticism and hostility from the scribes and Pharisees. As Jesus is preparing to leave the apostles and rejoin the heavenly hosts, he needs to prepare them for their own trials and tribulations. Jesus warns his followers. "If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first... If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (Jn 15:18, 20).

We live in trying times and it should come as no surprise that there is still great criticism and hostility for the followers of Jesus. God calls us to holiness. Secular society often finds fault with the dictates of our faith and calls us in the opposite direction. To illustrate my point, let us review some of God's commandments contrasted against the demands of the times we live in.

1. I am the Lord your God: you shalt not have strange gods before me. In our secular world, we often put many things before God. Money and its pursuit have become new gods in the materialistic world we live in.
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Freedom of speech allows one to denigrate the name of God.
3. Keep the sabbath holy. Blue Laws which allowed for a day of rest have largely been dismissed and many businesses remain open 7 days a week.
4. Honor your father and mother. Increasingly parental rights have been infringed upon. Some parents are even afraid to discipline their children for fear of being arrested.
5. You shalt not kill. Laws encourage abortion and euthanasia.
6. You shalt not commit adultery. With the loss of respect for the sacredness of marriage, society often encourages whatever consenting adults choose to do.
7. You shall not steal. As nations increase their debt, the current generation steals from future generation.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. We have lost a sense of truth. Much of what passes for news is now opinion. If you don't agree with my point of view, then obviously something must be wrong with you.
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. With the proliferation of pornography there is a tremendous sexual exploitation of others.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods. Popular culture teaches us that greed is good and that we should be able to obtain anything we desire.

Like every age, our times are filled with a mixture of good and bad. God is the just judge who will separate the wheat from the chaff. We are accountable to God for our lives and that includes taking the good news from the front steps of the church out into the community. The world hungers for truth, beauty, and goodness. It often settles for far less being deceived into thinking that which God commands limits our freedom. It is just the opposite. The truth of Christ sets us free. Eternal truth does not change, nor does the deceptiveness of the devil who wants us to buy into a false vision of humanity.

Jesus was willing to die on the cross to set us free from sin. Despite criticism and hostility, we should be prepared to pick up our own cross and to follow Jesus. Christ has conquered sin and death. We need not fear criticism for truly following the teachings of Christ. Rather, criticism is often a sign that we are on the right path. In humility, we must always walk with the Lord allowing him to guide us.

At various points in his ministry, some disciples found the teachings of Jesus to difficult to follow. Many "returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter answered him, 'Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life'" (John 6:66-68).