



December, 2005

Merry Christmas !

Who would have thought that this simple greeting would become such a hotbed of controversy? Our country's self-imposed conflict regarding what to do with Christmas (e.g., should we resort to "Happy Holidays," avoiding any "offensive" mention of *Christmas*?) is a microcosm of the dilemma that the church faces on a daily basis: that is, whether to hold fast to the unchanging Truth, or to capitulate to the latest politically correct philosophy. The world and our flesh will forever attempt to diminish and distort the true God, His Son Jesus Christ, and the ageless Word He has given us.

Jesus, the Bible, and all that they stand for will always be offensive to an unbelieving world. Yet, let us not be afraid to speak God's truth in love. While it should never be our intention to carelessly hurt or offend others, if some people are not offended, if some are not angry, if we are not persecuted *for the sake of Christ*, then something is wrong. The apostle Paul promised us that, **"in fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life will be persecuted"** (2 Tim 3:12).

Pastor and author Ray Stedman wrote that no one ever came into contact with Jesus who didn't walk away a different person. Each individual, by encountering Jesus, was either pushed toward Him and heaven or was pulled away, in the opposite direction. To emphasize this, Stedman referenced these words in Corinthians, words that apply to each of us today: **"For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life"** (2 Cor 2:15-16).

The exact same scent results in polar opposite reactions. If we love God and live by His perfect Word, we *will be* the **"smell of death"** to many. But, what a blessing to know that we are the **"aroma of Christ"** and the **"fragrance of life"** to a multitude of others.

Let's hope and strive for the same impact that Jesus had. We must remember that we cannot measure "success" by the response of another person (what is "seen"), but by our faithful and loving obedience to God and His Word. Our victories are always in heaven and are eternal, no matter what temporary things may happen on earth.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt 5:1-12).

Prayer Requests

Here are a few things that we would really appreciate your prayers for:

FINANCES

Please pray for the finances of the counseling ministry. That God would continue to show Himself faithful in providing the resources needed to be able to make counseling available at no charge.

HEALTH INSURANCE

Please pray that the Lord would provide what our family needs in the way of new health insurance. Our current coverage expires early next year, and because we only have one salaried employee, the ministry doesn't qualify for a group plan.

ONGOING CLASSES

Please pray for the weekly classes that Mark is currently teaching on *Anger Resolution* and *Forgiveness*. Pray for each of those in attendance, that they would allow God to transform them as they apply His truth to their lives.

COUNSELING SEMINAR

Please pray for an upcoming seminar that Mark will be teaching in January and February at Campus Bible Church. The 8-week course will focus on how to counsel the Word in everyday situations - equipping any believer, not just "professionals," to apply the life-giving hope that God has made available to each of us. Pray for preparation and logistics to go smoothly, for the Lord to bless the teaching of His Word, and for Mark's health to hold up throughout!

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