

I recall a class in either seminary or college where the professor's syllabus for the class listed what was required for each grade level. If you wanted an A you had to do this. If you wanted a B this was what you had to do. They even listed what you had to do to fail the class (nothing). There would be no debate; if you fulfilled the requirements for the grade you got the grade.

I thought this as I read Micah and Corinthians. Wouldn't it make life easier if we had such a syllabus for faith? Some would say we do: the Bible. But the problem is that we don't always agree on what the Bible means and, no matter what we do - we all get a failing grade. We can't even do enough to get a D-. But, because of Christ we pass. The Message, "**Human wisdom is so tinny, so impotent, next to the seeming absurdity of God.**" (I Cor. 1:25).

The absurdity of God = love. The question of Micah, "**What does the Lord require of you?**" Or, What do I have to do to get in? This was a question asked by the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17, "**What must I do to inherit eternal life?**" This seems like an almost ageless question. How can I be good enough to get in?

Now, wouldn't a check list be nice? But, lists were made and they were debated and debated and debated. Many are still being debated. What does it mean to respect the Sabbath? What is work? Pages and pages were written and debated about the answer to each of these. I recall one question I was asked, "Do I have to tithe on what I make before or after the taxes are taken out?" They had Micah to know - it will make a difference. Most think that there must be something I can do or something I can give. It you look at Micah 6:7 the numbers listed there are beyond comprehension. What if I give thousands of livestock? Or rivers filled with olive oil? But, we are fortunate if we have a sheep or two. Even Bill Gates giving away billions is not enough. Jesus was more impressed with a widow who gave away all she had, two pennies, than with all the riches put into the offering (Mark 12:42). Even though she gave all she had, it would still not be enough.

Micah concludes, "**Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love. And don't take yourself too seriously — take God seriously.**" (The Message). Paul writes the whole message of God and God's love is "foolishness" to most. To others it is a stumbling block. It doesn't make sense to the world.

We need that list. A list that we can check off for ourselves and for others. We need to make sure that they have followed the same list. How can one man redeem the whole world? The Message again uses the word, absurd. Who is my neighbor? How can we be just and love mercy? Forgiveness and grace - no way. We need people to pay for their sins.

We are working on how to make connections in Wings. Connections with what they are reading and their lives. It is hard. It is a problem that Christians still have with the Bible and faith. Peter asked, how many times he had to forgive someone (Matt. 18:22). He was not prepared for Christ's answer, 70 x 7. That was a number greater than he could comprehend. Live justly and seek mercy — a list is easier.

We have the gift of God - love. Maybe it is the weakness of God. It doesn't make sense. It is not something that we can boast about. It is not about what we have done or accomplished. Grace isn't justice. Mercy isn't punishment. Humility isn't a part of who we are. We want people to see what we have done. Remember the parable Jesus told of the man who decided to build bigger and better barns to store what he had harvested. He wanted the world to see how good he was, how comfortable he was. But God said, "**Fool, this night your soul is required of**

you” (Luke 12:18). It goes against the wisdom of the world - he who has the most toys wins. (Or, was I was reminded as one was leaving - who has the most sewing material!)

Let’s go back to the rich young man in Mark 10. He had kept the law, the list. He could boast about it. He had played by all the rules and won (according to the world). In his eyes, there is nothing left for him to do but to wait for the pat on the back from Jesus. However, Jesus says there was one more thing: Sell all that you have and take care of the poor and needy. See people as people and have compassion on them. Have compassion on others; think about someone more than yourself. **“At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth” (Mark 10:22). NRSV, “...shocked and went away grieving.”** He gets the list and he doesn’t like it. Isn’t getting rich a good thing? Isn’t it a blessing from God? It is what they had been taught. Jesus changes the list.

Paul is right, it doesn’t make sense. God’s love is foolishness. Yes, God loves us. Yes, God love me. Yes, God loves you. And, YES - God loves them also. When we begin to point out their faults, their misdeeds, their actions — God turns and points back at us — God reminds us that we don’t deserve love either. But, God reached out in Christ and said, “I love you.”

The question for every Christian today is **are we acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly** with our God? I must ask and answer that question from me - and you must ask and answer it for you — If I accept that Christ died for me then I must accept that Christ died for you and for them _____.

Then we must ask of the greater church, are we being the people of God? Max Lucado in Next Door Savior, tells this story:

A woman in a small Arkansas community was a single mom with a frail baby. Her neighbor would stop by every few days and keep the child so she could shop. After some weeks her neighbor shared more than time; she shared her faith, and the woman did what Matthew did. She followed Christ.

The friends of the young mother objected, “Do you know what those people teach?” they contested.

“Here is what I know,” she told them, “**They held my baby.**” (Emphasis mine)

I think Jesus likes that kind of answer, don’t you?

New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1988
Lucado, Max, Next Door Savior, W Publishing Group, Nashville, TN 37214 (2003)