



## A MATTER OF FAITH

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On the television show "The Simpsons", there is a character named Ned Flanders. Ned is the stereotypical Christian. He is a complete nerd. He wears a turtle-neck sweater, bottle glasses and corduroy pants. He is always cheerful to the point of being annoying. He allows Homer Simpson to walk all over him and take advantage of him without ever standing up for himself. Homer "borrows" his stuff with no intention of ever returning it and Ned keeps "loaning" things to him. He never swears but uses silly words as expletives. He is always in church. He is an overly nice guy.

He is everything that the term "Friend Of Jesus" would bring to mind of most people.

This is far from the real picture of the people Jesus was close to. Jesus befriended the friendless. He

### Friends of Jesus

chose to spend his time with a rough group of blue-collar fishermen. These would be the factory workers of their day. They were hard working, low skilled, lower class folks. They probably smelled really bad most of the time. Their language was rough. They were course men. Their man-

ners were non-existent. Not the type of people that most would want to spend a lot of time with.

He also had a relationship with a group of people that were tax collectors. These people were the lowest of the lows. They were the social rejects. The Romans were an occupying force that were hated for good reason by the Jews. The Romans were brutal to the Jews. They used intimidation and torture to rule with an iron fist. Tax collectors were hired by the Romans. Their job was to take the hard earned money from their fellow countrymen and give it to the hated enemy the Romans. The Romans did not care how much taxes were taken as long as their demanded amount was paid so tax collectors would over-charge and keep the extra for them-

selves. They were hated for this. They were traitors. They robbed their own people at the edge of Roman swords. These were friends of Jesus.

The "good church going folks," hated Jesus. They were threatened by him because he did not play by their rules. He did not respect their man granted authority. Jesus called them out on their abusive practices of manipulation. These people used the threat of hell to accomplish their twisted agenda. They took the words of God and manipulated them to fit their purposes. They were not followers of God as they claimed to be. God was a tool to be used for their own selfish gains. Many who call themselves religious have far too much in common with these people of Jesus' day. They claim to be representing God when their

hearts are far from Him. Their motivation is opposite of what God wants it to be. Their mission is power and control for their own satisfaction. The Ned Flanders character means well. Some who wrap themselves in the religious and Christian label are only out for their own selfish gain at the expense of everyone else.

Jesus came to serve and not be served. Jesus came to give his life so that others may live. He stripped himself of his deity and took on humanity to live among us and die to pay the penalty of our sins.

Jesus sees past appear-

ances and social standing. He sees the heart of us. He values and loves us just as we are. He does not put people on the scales that society does to weigh who is important and who is not. There is nothing we can do to make him love us any more than he already does. His love is not dependent upon our actions. There is nothing we can do to make him love us any less. His love is complete and not based on our performance.

No matter who you are, no matter what you have done, Jesus loves you and seeks a relationship with you. You can be a friend of Jesus.

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