

# Challenging Chapters of the Bible

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# Blessed are the persecuted.

- Matt 5:10 God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.
- If God has done such a mighty work in you that the world persecutes you for righteousness, then you are already participating in the kingdom.

# Blessed are the persecuted.

- Important note: *because they are righteous.*
- 1 Peter 2:20 But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. NIV
- If you are enough like Jesus to be treated like him, this is a commendable position in God's eyes.

# Perspective, perspective, perspective.

- Matt 5:11-12 "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. 12 Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.
- I should be happy about being mistreated?

# Who are the good people?

**Matt 5:17-20 "Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. 18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved. 19 So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God's laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. 20 "But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!**

# Who are the good people?

- **There is a misconception in some circles of Christianity about obedience and grace.**
- **Some will shout loudly that we are not under the law anymore, but under grace and they would be correct.**
- **However, let us be clear .... God requires his children to be obedient and the law, whether we like or not, expresses his standard for human behavior.**

# Who are the good people?

- Our obedience is a serious matter to God and Jesus was quite clear .... Ignore his commandments at your own peril.
- In the mind of God, obedience is a superior offering to any sacrifice we could bring. (1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 15:22)
- We know from the entirety of scripture that we are not saved by our obedience, but there are legitimate questions to be raised about one who says they believe, but has no interest in obeying the one who died for them.

# Question

We rightly teach that we are saved by grace alone, so when we know someone who claims to be a Christian, but shows no evidence of a changed life, what are we to do?



# Who are the good people?

- **Jesus warns his audience that unless they are more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees that they would not enter the kingdom of God.**
- **So now we have some clarification of the standard; you had to be more obedient than the Pharisees in order to enter heaven.**
- **By their own standards the Pharisees were considered righteous; the problem was that they were measuring themselves against their own standard.**

# Who are the good people?

- **The fundamental problem of the Pharisees was that they had made obedience a process, and not an attitude.**
- **They had incredibly detailed specifications for how to obey this rule or that rule, but had failed to see that keeping the rules was not changing their hearts.**
- **Legalistic churches of our day have the same shortcoming; they focus on keeping rules and fool themselves into thinking they are righteous.**

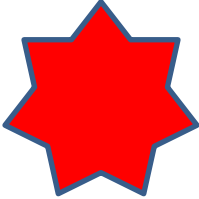
**Matt 5:21-22 "You have heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' 22 But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.**

- **Jesus raises the standard for committing murder. He makes it clear that you can remove the life from a person without killing their body.**
- **Treating people with contempt, or in an injurious way, are ways we 'murder' them without violence.**
- **In our day and culture we call this bullying.**

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- **If I treat you with contempt I tell you that you are not important enough for me to go to the bother of murdering .... You are less than nothing; it does matter to me whether you live or die.**
- **The love of God demands that we love our neighbor as ourselves so Jesus is saying that his standard for 'thou shalt not kill' includes bullying.**

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- **Given Jesus' insight into this command, how many of us can still say we have not broken it?**
- **So how do I know if I love others?** 
- **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13:4 Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. <sup>6</sup> It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. <sup>7</sup> Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.**

**Matt 5:27-29 "You have heard the commandment that says, 'You must not commit adultery.' 28 But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**

- **Again the standard is raised by clarification of how Jesus sees conformity to this commandment.**
- **Just as it is possible to take the life out of a person without killing their body, it is possible to have a wrong sexual relationship with someone without ever touching them.**
- **It is not necessarily wrong for a man to admire a woman; it becomes wrong when he admires her for the purposes of sexual fantasy.**

**Matt 5:27-29 "You have heard the commandment that says, 'You must not commit adultery.' 28 But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**

- **It is one thing to admire the physical attributes of another person; that can be done without sinning, but beware – it is a thin line.**
- **If I stare at a woman for the purpose of imagining what it would be like to touch her, then I am guilty of having a sinful sexual relationship with her.**

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- **Some have tried to argue that if thinking about having sex with someone other than your spouse is as bad as adultery, then you might as well go ahead and do the act.**
- **That is absolutely false; that would be like saying that thinking about robbing a bank is as bad as robbing it.**
- **You cannot make a reasonable argument that sexual fantasy is as bad as the actual act.**



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- **Again, the issue here is the attitude of the heart.**
- **Whether it's murder or adultery, the attitude of the heart is critical to obedience.**
- **If we cultivate love for others in our hearts it would be difficult to murder them or commit adultery with them.**
- **Love just does not behave in those ways.**

**Matt 5:31-32 "You have heard the law that says, 'A man can divorce his wife by merely giving her a written notice of divorce.' 32 But I say that a man who divorces his wife, unless she has been unfaithful, causes her to commit adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman also commits adultery.**

- **There are few things in life as painful as divorce. In Old Testament times the Jews allowed a man to discard his wife at will.**
- **The effects of that were devastating to women and children; families were split up for something as simple as a burned roast!**
- **Jesus says that his standard for divorce is much higher than 'for any reason'.**

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- **A 'good' Jew could retain his righteous standing if he were kind enough to give his wife a certificate of divorce so that she could prove she was legally divorced.**
- **Women were mistreated in this matter because they would have a hard time finding a place to live if their husbands put them out, let alone finding a way to support themselves.**
- **Jesus said that frivolous divorce was wrong because of the hardship on the woman.**

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- **The old standard for a righteous divorce was 'for any reason' .... The new standard is unfaithfulness expressed in adultery.**
- **Does this mean that a woman is obligated to stay in a marriage if her husband beats her, but does not cheat on her? Of course not, at the very least she should get out of the house and work on the marriage from a safe place.**
- **Not divorcing is easy compared to being a loving husband or wife. Just staying married is not the same as showing the love of God to your closest neighbor.**

**Matt 5:33-34 "You have also heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not break your vows; you must carry out the vows you make to the LORD.' 34 But I say, do not make any vows!**

- **No vows? To the people Jesus was addressing there was a habit of invoking spiritual objects (the temple) to add credence to their word.**
- **Vows using a sacred reference were also used to gain leverage in a transaction. (if God is backing him he must be sincere)**
- **Jesus would have us keep our word and honor our contracts whether we invoked someone or something spiritual or not.**

**Matt 5:38-42 "You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. 40 If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. 41 If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. 42 Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow.**

- **The old testament 'eye for an eye' was to limit the extent of revenge. The concept that Jesus introduces goes to another level.**
- **Instead of retaliating, when possible, simply forgive your attacker on the spot.**
- **Love (turning the other cheek) is intended to diffuse the situation.**

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- Retaliating in kind often just exacerbates a violent situation. If we have our enemy's best at heart we try to lower the level of aggression.**
- Do I always need to turn the other cheek? Absolutely not!**
- We are also called to be good stewards of our bodies and possessions.**
- It would be wrong for you to stand by and watch someone hurt your family.**

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- **What if you have turned the other cheek and it got slapped too?**
- **Try to remove yourself from the situation, but if that is not possible you are not obligated to just take anything someone wants to do to you.**
- **Turning the cheek is first, leaving is second, and fighting back is the last resort.**



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- **In this world it is expected that you stand up for your rights and defend yourself.**
- **In the kingdom of God sometimes the right thing to do is to take the wrong in the interest of keeping your enemy from doing more violence.**
- **It's backwards by our standards, but these are new standards of behavior where we love first and fight only when love does not work.**

**Matt 5:40 If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. 41 If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. 42 Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow.**

- **If someone takes you to court and takes some of your possessions away, that does not preclude you from helping that person if they need your shirt more than you do.**
- **Love always operates to do good whether the person has been good to us or not.**
- **In fact, what a great statement of faith to the one who sued us that we would give more than the court ordered if they were in need.**

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- **What if someone took you to court and took away some things very dear to your heart, and then that same person also needed money for food?**
- **They won your possessions, but they have no legal claim on your money. Would we be able to give them additional money just because they need it?**
- **Their only claim is their need; what would you do? What would Jesus do?**

# **Matt 5:42 Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow.**

- **In our world, we are asked frequently for money by people who have no legal right to it.**
- **I have a responsibility to act wisely, but my motive has to be love and not stinginess.**
- **My first priority ought not to be the preservation of my property or wealth, but the glory of God and the welfare of my neighbor.**

**Matt 5:43 You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. 44 But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!**

- **Loving those who love us back is no indication at all that you have a changed heart. The mafia does as much.**
- **Loving those who can give us nothing in return is admirable.**
- **Loving our enemies is godly. Only a radically changed heart can do that.**

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- **Rom 12:21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. KJV**
- **Showing kindness to those who would laugh at our destruction is evidence of a changed heart.**
- **When we pray for our enemies we show our love for them as we seek good for those who seek no good for us.**

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- **Bertrand Russell, no friend of Christianity, once said, “There is nothing to be said against the Christian principle of loving your enemies, except that it is impossible to do”.**
- **To quote the apostle Paul, “love never fails”.**

# Questions