

DO GOOD OR BE BAD?

Many people want to reduce Christianity to great moral teachings, like the beatitudes or sermon on the mount (Luke 6, Matt 5-7). "Yet the focus of Jesus' teachings is not moral maxims or ethical principles, but devotion to Christ Himself," points out theologian RC Sproul.

"The eternal destiny of people is determined by how they respond to Christ." Disciples follow Him to learn to be like Him as they trust and obey His Word. Jesus gives many examples, which separate those devoted to the world's darkness from those devoted to the light of Christ.

BLESS YOUR ENEMIES - In Luke 6:27-28 Jesus says, if you can hear this, it's for you: "*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.*" These words are contrary to our natural response. We love friends, not enemies.

How can you love people hostile toward you? That word love is "agape" self-giving love. It's not a feeling, but a choice. It's an action verb, not an emotion. It means do what is right for the other person even when it costs you. "Agape love supercedes natural inclinations and often exists in spite of them," observes RK Hughes. "It is a deliberate love, rooted in the will. It is a love by choice." For Christians, it is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

LOVE IS A CHOICE - "*God is love, and we know love because God loved us and sent His Son to pay for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another*" (1John 4:8-10). Do we deserve God's love? Absolutely not. "*While we were still sinners, Christ died for us; while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through Christ*" (Romans 5:8-10).

Jesus is agape love incarnate. He gave His law of love "*love one another as I have loved you*" (John 13:34). Hughes notes, "He dramatized it when He hung on the cross with His arms outstretched wide as if to embrace the world, as He died for ungodly sinners, His enemies."

DO GOOD TO OTHERS - Jesus' disciples are to show love to even those who hate the gospel and curse us for following Him. The apostle Paul echoes this in Romans 12, "*bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as depends on you, live peaceably with all.*"

Likewise 1Peter 3:9, "*do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, to obtain a blessing.*" God will make everything right, even if you have to wait for heaven. Meantime, the world treats Jesus' followers like they treated Him.

Peter says, "*do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you, but rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of Christ rests upon you. Entrust your souls to Him.*"

EXPECT PERSECUTION - In verse 29 Jesus says, "*to the one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either*" (See also Matt 5:39-42). Many theologians note this passage refers to personal insults and suffering for the gospel, without taking revenge, but it does not address nor preclude acting in self-defense if your life is threatened. Yet, persecution can lead to loss of life.

Vindication is not vengeance, notes Sproul. Jesus tells His followers to expect persecution, and prayed for His enemies, that their hearts would be changed, that they would be redeemed, and spared the final confrontation of the wrath of God, says Sproul.

JESUS PAID IT ALL - This isn't just about cheeks and cloaks. You belong to Christ. Jesus says don't let personal insults escalate to violence or revenge. Look how Jesus lived His life.

Jesus gave both His inner and outer garments to those who crucified Him. "*I gave my back to whoe who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard. I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting*" (Isaiah 50:6). "*He was wounded for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities. With His stripes we are healed.*" As 2Peter 2:24 says, this is so we can die to sin and live for righteousness. By His power, living out the righteousness of Christ that He gives us.

Did Jesus do this for you? Paying the price in your place? Christ is Himself the ultimate example of agape love. Not words. Actions. Giving His life so that you live. Do you love HIM? Then live out His love through your life, by His power within! ☐