

TITLE: BUT HE'S A GOOD PERSON!

TEXT: MATTHEW 16:21-23

INTRO: In the many religious conversations I've had with neighbors, friends, coworkers, & even members of the church, it never ceases to amaze me how many people subscribe to the general idea that "as long as my heart is right, I'm okay with God." It's always about feelings rather than facts, emotions rather than evidence. Truly emotion is an important part of Christianity, but not the *only* part. It's not enough to *think* you're okay. Let's look at some examples.

I. OLD TESTAMENT:

- A. Nadab & Abihu (**Lev. 10:1-2**) "*offered strange fire before the Lord.*" We aren't told their motive, but seeing that their offering was "before the Lord," what reason would we have to believe their motives were evil? But they disobeyed & were put to death.
- B. Job's "friends" – We have no reason to believe they had any personal ill will toward Job. They just incorrectly assumed that bad things always happened to people because of their sin, and therefore it was obvious to them that Job had sinned. But they were wrong, and God chastised them for it (**Job 42:7-9**).
- C. Uzzah (**2 Samuel 6:6-7**) was struck dead by God for touching the ark. We *know* his motives were good! He simply wanted to prevent the ark from falling. But he disobeyed God. "*And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error.*"

II. PAUL:

- A. Paul made it clear that he *always* acted on a pure conscience; he always did what he *believed* was right.
 1. **2 Tim 1:3** – "*I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience....*"
 2. **Acts 23:1** – On trial before the Jews, he said, "*I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.*" This included persecuting Christians, taking them to jail (the very act he was involved in when Jesus met him on the road to Damascus). He said that he did that "*in all good conscience before God*"! How? Because he *thought* it was the right thing to do!
 3. **Acts 26:9** (Before Festus & Agrippa)–"*I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.*" Paul legitimately thought that opposing Jesus and His followers was pleasing to God! Two years earlier he had said to Felix, "*And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men*" (**Acts 24:16**).
- B. The worst thing anyone can do is to cause God's people to stumble (**Mt 18:6**–"*Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea*"). And Paul did it "**before God**," and "in all good conscience." He was sincere, but he was sincerely wrong!

III. PETER:

- A. As early as I can remember, I've heard Peter referred to as the apostle who was always putting his foot in his mouth! And people can always identify with Peter because of this. It's easier to relate to someone who has the same struggles as you.
- B. But with all his problems, I've never heard anyone question his motives. His heart was always in the right place, in spite of his actions:
 1. **Mt 17:1-5** – Transfiguration – By offering to build three tabernacles (1 each for Jesus, Moses, & Elijah – i.e., putting all three on the same level), Peter missed the point God was making in elevating Jesus over even Moses & Elijah. But he didn't have bad motives! He simply didn't know what to say (**Mk 9:6**), and spoke up when he should've listened up!
 2. **Jn 18:10** – Gethsemane – When the mob came to take Jesus, Peter pulled his sword and defended Jesus heroically (cut off Malchus' ear). Who, in his right mind, would doubt Peter's heart? Yet Peter was wrong! AND, he should've known better. He had already been rebuked before for the "good motive" that led to this bad action!
 3. **Mt 16:21-23** – Jesus had explained to his apostles that He had to suffer and be murdered, but then be raised the third day. Peter didn't just disagree & say that he'd defend Jesus, but he *rebuked* Him, and swore that these things would not happen.
 - a. Peter's response was emotional and sincere, and showed dedication to what he *believed* to be the cause of Christ. And as we saw in **John 18:10**, Peter was ready and willing to back up his words. How many of Jesus' followers, then or now, do you think would be willing to fight for Him like this? Surely Peter is to be commended for this bravery.
 - b. But he is not commended by Jesus. Instead Jesus **1**) soundly rebukes him ("*Get thee behind me Satan*"), and **2**) corrected him, showing him the error in his improper **actions** that so heavily outweighed his good **motives**.
 - "*Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offense [stumblingblock] unto me.*" Was Jesus really calling Peter Satan? No, He was looking through Peter to see Satan, who was taking advantage of Peter's "good motives," but bad actions.
 - Remember Peter's "good motives," had they been carried out, would've cost the world its opportunity for redemption! What if he'd succeeded, and you & I then had no hope of Heaven? Would we still call Peter a good person?
- C. Sermon title: "But he's a good person!" Many, even in the church, have made this type of statement when presented with the fact that a loved one is lost. We don't like this fact (nor should we). And so sometimes we make excuses for this person, as if pleading his case to God, trying to show him worthy of eternal life. But if this good, even "religious" person has rejected God's plan of salvation by claiming to be saved in an alternate way, he is still lost. And none of his "goodness" will save him. Being "good" alone does not save; it still takes the blood of Christ. We HATE the idea that anyone we love could be lost. But our response shouldn't be denial, but action.

CONCLUSION: Many people claim to love Jesus. But Jesus defined *true* love in **Jn 14:15**–"*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*" Similarly, many people also claim to be "good." But Jesus also defined "good" in a Christian sense in **Mk 10:18**–"*Why do you call me good? There is none good but one, that is God.*" Jesus still accepted this address (being called "good") because He always did exactly as the "good" Father had told Him to do. So today, to have good motives is not enough; we must be good as *Christ* defined it – being like the Father, doing only what *He* said (**1 Pet 4:11**–"*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God*").