

## Blockhead

**Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus,**

I'm going to tell you a story. This is from Matthew 15:21-28, and you should read it there to make sure you know what the Bible really says. I'm paraphrasing it a little to make it easier to visualize.



*After teaching for a while near the Sea of Galilee, Jesus and His disciples left there and went north, to the region of Tyre and Sidon, which were*

*gentile towns—most of the people who lived there were not Jews; they were mainly descendants of the Canaanites.*

*As they walked along, a Canaanite woman approached them and cried out to Jesus, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, for my daughter is possessed by a demon, and she suffers terribly!" But Jesus didn't answer her, not a word. The disciples complained, "Send her away, Lord. She's a pain-in-the-neck with all her begging."*

*Turning to the woman, Jesus said, "I was sent to minister to the lost sheep among the people of Israel, not to the gentiles." The woman knelt down before Jesus and pleaded with Him, "Lord, please help me!" But He said to her, "It's not right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Then she replied, "That's true, Lord, yet even the dogs get to eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table."*

*Jesus smiled and said gently, "Woman, your faith is very great. I give you what you are asking for." And the woman's daughter was healed at that moment.*

There are a couple of things about this story that stand out for me. The first is that Jesus acted in a way that was not what I would expect from Him. In most of the Bible stories He is very compassionate, always willing to help those who are hurting. Yet here He not only refuses to help this woman, He insults her! He bluntly tells her



that, compared to His own people, the Jews, she and her people are no better than dogs. But—this is important—notice that He didn't send her away. Instead, He gave her a verbal challenge, and waited to see what she would say. (I believe He knew her heart, and He knew what she would say and what He would do. What do you think?)

The second surprising thing is that the woman took it. She didn't get her back up at being "dissed." She kept her focus on the main thing, which was to get Jesus to agree to heal her daughter. There is such a lesson in this for us, about not letting pride rear its ugly head and get in the way of the things that are important to us—the things that really matter.

This month I want to discuss a very common condition that we all have to some degree, sometimes more, sometimes less. The Bible has a lot to teach us about this condition, but the main lesson is that we ought not to be that way. And, by God's grace, we don't have to be. The condition is called various things—touchiness, oversensitivity, and having a chip on your shoulder all come to mind. I tend to think of it as being hard-headed—in other words, being a blockhead.

Let me give you a scenario. You're standing in a line, waiting your turn. It doesn't matter what the line is for—maybe it's a food serving line or a line to get tickets for a show. Someone else comes along, sees his good friend a couple of places in front of you, and goes and gets in the line with his friend. How do you feel about it, and what do you do about it?



Most of us would say immediately that it's "not fair" for a person to get in line ahead of others who are already waiting in the line. And that's obviously true. It's not fair at all. So how does it make you feel? Do you feel injured? Do you feel angry? Of course you do, but why?

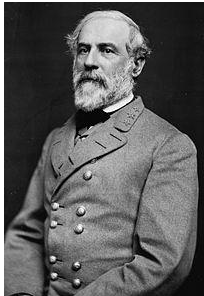
Let me ask it another way—who has been injured by that person "butting in" ahead of you? The answer is, everyone in line behind that person. Each one will have to wait an extra

amount of time because that person did something unfair. But, watch this—are you angry because his actions made everyone in the line wait longer, or are you angry because he made you wait longer? Would you be just as angry if he butted into the line two positions behind you, instead of two positions in front of you? Maybe you would, but I doubt it. I doubt if I would, either.

Let's face it—we are all born selfish. We just naturally think of things in terms of how they affect us. And when someone causes us pain, whether physically or emotionally, we tend to resent it. We tend to get angry about it. In fact, we tend to want to get even. Quite often we are willing to “go to war” with a neighbor, or even a family member, in order to even the score—and maybe get a little bit ahead while we're at it.

Of course “the world”—the society we live in—is urging us to react that way to every injury. I worked with a man who used to say, “I don't get mad, I get even.” He said it as if that were the logical way to behave. Too many people in this world think that it's important to “get even” for everything that is done to them..

Let me tell you another story. *“When Robert E. Lee was a cadet at West Point, a classmate took a violent and irrational dislike to him. This animosity persisted into later life. For many years this fellow officer made malicious attacks on Lee. One day a mutual acquaintance asked Lee what he thought of this individual. To the questioner's surprise, Lee spoke in the highest terms of him. Then his questioner said slyly, ‘I guess you don't know what he's been saying about you for years.’ Lee replied, ‘You have not asked me for his opinion of me. You have asked me for my opinion of him.’”*



Here again we see an example of someone who was able to stay focused on what was truly important. Lee did not let the other man's actions govern his own. Instead, he did what he knew was the right thing to do.

How often do we do something we know is wrong, simply because “everyone does it”? How often do we let a friend's expectations govern how we act, rather than being guided by what we know is right? How often do we fail to do what's right, because we might be embarrassed or made fun of? I can think of many of those occasions, and I suspect you can, too.

When we let others' expectation, or a desire for revenge, or anything else that is not of God, control how we act, we lose in two ways. First, we disappoint God, who has given us His word and His Spirit to guide us. Secondly, we miss out on the blessings that always result from obeying God. Jesus said in John 13:17, “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.” There He was talking specifically about being a servant to others, but His words apply to everything that God teaches us about how to act.

When it comes right down to it, what each of us wants is to be in control of everything in our lives. We want to be boss. In other words, we want to be God.

This was Satan's sin, that got him thrown out of Heaven. This was Adam's and Eve's sin, that not only got them banished from Eden, but brought death into the world. And this is your sin and my sin, that causes us to be selfish, sinful creatures even before we're born and for our entire lives.

God's message to us is really very simple. He is saying to us, **“Look. You can't be God. That job is mine, and I'm infinitely better at it than you could ever be. So forget about being in control of everything, and concentrate on obeying me. If you do that, I'll give you more blessings than you can possibly imagine.”**

One last story, and it's one I've used before. A man I know was in jail, then in prison, then in the maximum security prison. Rather than getting out early, he had his sentence extended a few times. The reason was that he kept getting into new trouble. He would fight with the guards or other prisoners who he thought had offended him, and he did a few other stupid things. One day I saw him and he said, “I've figured out what my problem is. It's me.” He was right. When he started exhibiting good behavior instead of bad behavior, he made progress and was finally released.



The bottom line is, if we can train ourselves to focus on what is important, and control those impulses that cause us to seek revenge or otherwise act like a blockhead, we will not only please God, we will also gain the blessings of obedience. I pray God will give each of us the wisdom and guidance we need to do this.

Peace and Joy, in Christ.

*Brother Roland*

## The Choice

Max Lucado

It's quiet. It's early. My coffee is hot. The sky is still black. The world is still asleep. The day is coming. In a few moments the day will arrive. It will roar down the track with the rising of the sun. The stillness of the dawn will be exchanged for the noise of the day. The calm of solitude will be replaced by the pounding pace of the human race. The refuge of the early morning will be invaded by decisions to be made and deadlines to be met.

For the next twelve hours I will be exposed to the day's demands. It is now that I must make a choice. Because of Calvary, I'm free to choose. And so I choose.

**I choose love.** No occasion justifies hatred; No injustice warrants bitterness. I choose love. Today I will love God and what God loves.

**I choose joy.** I will invite my God to be the God of circumstance. I will refuse the temptation to be cynical ... the tool of the lazy thinker. I will refuse to see people as anything less than human beings, created by God. I will refuse to see any problems anything less than an opportunity to see God.

**I choose peace.** I will live forgiven. I will forgive so that I may live.

**I choose patience.** I will overlook the inconveniences of the world. Instead of cursing the one who takes my place, I'll invite him to do so. Rather than complain that the wait is too long, I will thank God for a moment to pray. Instead of

clenching my fist at new assignments, I will face them with joy and courage.

**I choose kindness.** I will be kind to the poor, for they are alone. Kind to the rich, for they are afraid. And kind to the unkind, for such is how God has treated me.

**I choose goodness.** I will go without before I take dishonest gain. I will be overlooked before I will boast. I will confess before I will accuse. I choose goodness.

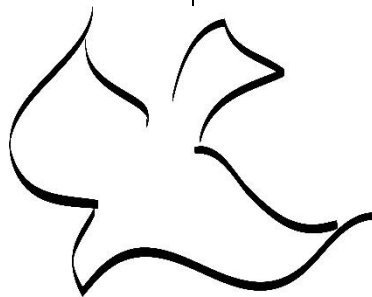
**I choose faithfulness.** Today I will keep my promises. My debtors will not regret their trust. My associates will not question my word. My wife will not question my love. And my children will never fear that father will not come home.

**I choose gentleness.** Nothing is won by force. I choose to be gentle. If I raise my voice may it be only in praise. If I clench my fist, may it be only in prayer. If I make a demand, may it be only of myself.

**I choose self-control.** I am a spiritual being. After this body is dead, my spirit will soar. I refuse to let what will rot, rule the eternal. I choose self-control. I will be drunk only by joy. I will be impassioned only by my faith. I will be influenced only by God. I will be taught only by Christ. I choose self-control.

**Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.** [The fruit of the Spirit, listed in Galatians 5:22-23]

To these I commit my day. If I succeed, I will give thanks. If I fail, I will seek His grace. And then, when this day is done, I will place my head on my pillow and rest.



**Be ready to make someone's day.** Did you ever think about the fact that you can brighten someone's day, lift their spirits, maybe even bring forth a smile or a chuckle? You can do that. Start by actually seeing the other people around you. Notice if they are "up" or "down" or simply preoccupied. Be polite to everyone—say "please" and "thank you" with a smile, even for very small things. If you hear of a need, be supportive and encouraging, probably not by quickly offering advice, but perhaps by saying, "I hope that turns out okay" or "I'll pray for you." Ask God for the Holy Spirit's guidance and help so that you can be a blessing to those around you. You'll like it so much that you'll want to do it all the time.

If you have Bible questions, write to me. Maybe your question is one others are also asking. Maybe you and I will both learn something from it. I'll write my thoughts about it here.

**Brother Roland, P O Box 14, Fayetteville PA 17222-0014.**

## The Beatitudes

The "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5, 6, and 7) is Jesus' teaching about how to behave, and how to be blessed by God. It's good to go to those chapters and review His words now and then. Several key phrases have been incorporated into this puzzle. Enjoy!

### Puzzle:

B E F A I T H F U L I N P R A Y E R F A K S F M C B L E D Y Z E  
P F L U A F I M W W X Z O K B E F R X O I F R A D K E R A U T K  
Y S B U U U U R F B Q A N I P Q U Y I H W A L I O V K E E J B Q  
Y M U I F T S R I H T O H W E S O H T Y F L K A O T O C X X K K  
B C D O M I A Y R P E P V L N N T V E S E S R N G D P N A W E U  
V T E Z R D C I C B S O V L K H O B D D U E A P H Y K I C E F W  
D E T U C E S R E P D N A D E T L U S N I L B L T T N S M E N D  
S O R N G S N Q E L Z Y I P T E M O N N Q Y C Y I H Q E X L B H  
S E O O R Y P E E M D F U R S Q N J E K F A T U W A H B Y E L T  
E G F X E D H E G R E R X S O S F V F T B C S Y L T Y T F B O P  
N D M C A V J E C E E H O Q O O A Z S O E C X G I T L S B Q K G  
S J O D T V J M F I B T T F Z E P V I U L U T Z V F I U E G M L  
U Y C G R T W U N P H S G Q H L S E Y S P S M N E Z V M F N L Q  
O T E L E M H H B E J O Y F U L I N H O P E K S E Q E E O P O T  
E H B F W E E E R Y D A O Y Y V V I W T T D E P M H I V X G V M  
T L L Q A A S S P H H M U Z O R O I N K S E I L O U N O O D E H  
H V L E R W T L X E O S U H E U L T A H K W V E C Z H L F O O Z  
G D I T D T Z O L D R Z R J Q L A B T T E K G L R B A P N A N N  
I M W G I P P C G I K S O E B X E N O W P R U Q E M R F G K E D  
R Z J I N M K N W Z W I E E K F A B D X I E I F V K M Q H V A F  
R R D H H H I W Z Z C L S C A A E H I I X L A T O B O P G Z N O  
O Z O A E K L J U E A H R I U R M J Q M U C L C T O N O K C O V  
F C Y R A V E L B U O R T N I T N E I T A P E B E H Y D Z I T X  
D X D N V R I E T W H H K G K M E M C P M V Y J E W E N R U H W  
O V A V E U G L N A F R H P T Z N D I A N B G R P F I E G K E F  
V C Y Y N L A M N U P T N R U O M O H W E S O H T A I T A T R F  
I P U R A X E K L A E H U E W U K K D N S P O L A E I L H R H A  
H C Q D C R E H T O N A E N O R O N O H U P E I H X D G L A T R  
Y N K N C I Y N U D O W H A T I S R I G H T K H H P H J C E L H

### Words

THE POOR IN SPIRIT  
KINGDOM OF HEAVEN  
THOSE WHO MOURN  
WILL BE COMFORTED  
THE MEEK  
INHERIT THE EARTH  
THOSE WHO HUNGER  
THOSE WHO THIRST  
FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS  
WILL BE FILLED  
THE MERCIFUL  
WILL BE SHOWN MERCY

THE PURE IN HEART  
WILL SEE GOD  
THE PEACEMAKERS  
CALLED SONS OF GOD  
THE PERSECUTED  
YOU AND I  
INSULTED AND PERSECUTED  
FALSELY ACCUSED  
REJOICE, BE GLAD  
GREAT REWARD IN HEAVEN  
BE GENEROUS  
BE FAITHFUL

LOVE ONE ANOTHER  
DO WHAT IS RIGHT  
SEEK TO BE RIGHTEOUS  
LIVE IN HARMONY  
AT PEACE WITH ALL  
OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD  
HONOR ONE ANOTHER  
LOVE MUST BE SINCERE  
BLESS OTHERS  
BE JOYFUL IN HOPE  
BE PATIENT IN TROUBLE  
BE FAITHFUL IN PRAYER