

### 380 Salt and light – do we attract or repel people?

OK, I'm in Matthew 5, which starts with lots of powerful stuff about our *attitudes* in the 'be-*attitudes*'; and then there's salt and light.<sup>13-16</sup> I get that: if we're followers of Jesus, people should be able to 'see your good deeds',<sup>16</sup> and think positively about God – we should be glowing examples of what 'good' looks like.

I get the fulfilment of the law bit:<sup>17-20</sup> Jesus isn't sweeping the law away, but showing us its *purpose*: to point to the Messiah. Clearly, he can't mean *literally* that every individual item of the law is forever sacrosanct, or Christians would still be stoning their disobedient sons.

Murder is fine,<sup>21-26</sup> (well, you know what I mean!) as Jesus is *extending* the law: even harbouring angry thoughts towards someone is not acceptable. Again with adultery,<sup>27-30</sup> Jesus is *extending* the law: sexual forces are powerful, so any sexual relations *must*, for Jesus' followers, be within a unique lifelong relationship.

I come a bit unstuck over divorce<sup>31-32</sup> – not personally, but on behalf of many, many other people. Mind you, Jesus' teaching about that law seems pretty clear, right?

My current concern is on behalf of a lovely Muslim lady in Pakistan, who agreed to help in my understanding of Islam. As we chatted, I asked how she came to (Muslim) faith, after being brought up a Christian. Firstly, she stumbled over the idea that one God could actually be three Gods – yes, I agreed, it is difficult to 'understand'!

Then she explained that she and her sister took the exam for the church secondary school and passed, but then they were told they couldn't take up their places: her grandparents had divorced, so the family was excommunicated. OK, that was about 40 years ago (does that still happen?!), but I totally understand her reaction.

Now think about the people you know and love who don't follow Jesus. What put(s) them off? A number of reasons, maybe, and it's probably different for different generations, but it could be divorce; or it could be the way (some) 'Bible-believing' Christians (still) say that women definitely shouldn't lead churches.

And I do understand people who say they 'can't believe' because of some of the terrible things that Christians have done, such as sexual abuse. Then again, could it be more of an excuse than a reason? True, the church has failed terribly, but we do affirm that such things are wrong, so maybe 'can't believers' are not reacting against Jesus' teaching, but against the church's failure? Then again, I *do* understand.

Now, because 'can't believers' are put off by some of our 'the Bible teaches', we do need to be *very* careful that we're not 'causing one of these little ones to stumble' by *over-*insisting on rights/wrongs. My point is: might it just be 'what we were taught'? (It has taken me seven years to decide that some 'definitely wrong' things are debatable biblical interpretations/applications.) We do need to beware of 'excommunicating' people!