



Jesus was a master teacher of the Jewish Scriptures. He knew the above stories very well and taught their lessons to his followers. Below is two of his best lessons on *equality* and *the importance of doing TOV* (Matthew 22:15-40).

*A scribe, who was also a Pharisee, asked Jesus this question: “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Torah?”*

*“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ These two commandments are the foundation of all of the Torah and the Prophets.”*

The Hebrew word for “love” is אהבה (ahavah) and it means something very different from our American meaning. The word is made up of three basic Hebrew letters, אהב. They are broken down into two parts: a two letter base or root, הב (hey & bet) and the first letter, א (aleph), which is a modifier. The meaning of the two letter base הב is "to give." The letter א which precedes the two letter root modifies the meaning of the root word, "give." The meaning of אהבה is "I give."<sup>1</sup> Below is what the Jewish audience heard Jesus say:

*You shall give to Yahweh your God with all your heart,  
with all your soul, and with all your strength.*

*And you can only give to Yahweh by giving to your neighbor as you give to yourself.*

Jesus used the word **TZEDAQAH** instead of **TOV**; it is translated “**righteousness**.” It is **the Standard God uses to judge human actions** in Matthew 25:31-46:

*Then the **righteous** will answer him, saying, ‘Master, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or naked and clothe you? Or when did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Amen! When you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me!’ . . . and the **righteous** shall enter into eternal life.*

*The acts of righteousness above protected and preserved lives, made lives more functional and/or increased the quality of life. They are also acts of loving God.*

## How Changing One Bible Story Changed Christian Realities

A thousand years after the scribes first copied the *Story of the Garden of Eden* in Jewish Scriptures, and four-hundred years after Jesus taught, a Roman Catholic Bishop named **Augustine** of Hippo **changed the story**. In Augustine's new story the snake becomes Satan instead of a *wild animal*. The contest became a cosmic battle between God and Satan over the souls of mankind. The man eating the forbidden fruit also became the "Original Sin" -- and instead of being part of God's image every person is born arrived as a condemned sinner! The new story divided the population of the world between the *City of Man* and the *City of God*. These cities are entirely metaphorical, describing states of mind, not actual city-states. Those who live in the *City of God* are members of the *Catholic Church* and devote themselves to love of God by being good members. Those who live in the *City of Man* devote themselves to their self-interests. Augustine divided the world into "**believers**" and "**non-believers**." How nobles treated peasants and slaves or how the accumulation of wealth and power by rich created poor and oppressed people aren't important to God.<sup>1</sup> *All God wants to know about people is are they "saved" or "condemned non-believers."* Augustine added to the Scriptures like the man in the garden, but he destroyed foundational beliefs and values of the Jewish Scriptures and the teachings of Jesus – he split the image of God in half.

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<sup>1</sup> *Suicide of the West*; pp. 334.