

"The Law of Love"

Matthew 5:43-48

INTRODUCTION —

- I. This is the last and the climax in a series of five illustrations Jesus gives in Matthew 5, showing the difference between the righteousness practiced by the scribes and Pharisees under the law, and the righteousness he requires under the New Testament.
- II. The command to love all men, whether friend or enemy, is the climax of this theme, and of the command to love as Jesus loved. (John 13:34).
 - A. To love one's friend and hate one's enemy is the natural thing to do.
 - B. In calling upon his disciples to "love your enemies," Jesus commands us to do the unnatural: It is the call of God to the holy, the high, the upward way.
 - C. "The most sublime piece of morality ever given to man." —A. Clarke.
 - D. But this call is not to the impossible—merely to the best way.

DISCUSSION -

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT LAW OF LOVE. (5:43)

- A. Love thy neighbor: "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy." (43)
 1. The law of Moses plainly set forth the precept, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self." (Lev. 19:17-19; cf. Ex. 23:4,5; Prov. 24:17, 29; 20:22; 25:21, 22).
 2. Hate for an enemy was not a precept of the law, but an unwarranted conclusion drawn by the Jews, including some of their most pious men. (Ps.137:8, 9; 139:21, 22; 2 Kings 13:19; 1 Chron. 20:3).
 3. The law of Moses prohibited holding a grudge against or hating one's neighbor or brother. But the Jews as a nation answered the question, "Who is thy neighbor?" selfishly by saying, "Fellow Jews." They regarded all other nations as enemies.
 4. To prevent idolatry, upon entering Canaan, God forbade the making of peace with the Canaanite

requires more of its citizens for divine acceptance than the publicans and Gentiles.

2. Having the advantages of (a) a greater Father, (b) a better family, (c) a better Teacher and Guide, (d) a greater Comforter, (e) more wholesome food, (f) greater light, and (g) a brighter hope than others, our opportunities and abilities for doing are greater than the heathen.
3. Only a reprobate will withhold brotherly love. (1 John 2:11).

III. THE PERFECT LIFE. (5:48)

(Christ in us means a new heart, power, life).

- A. Be Perfect: "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (48)
 1. God himself is the source, and our pattern, of perfection.
 2. In this sense, it is impossible for man to attain the standard except through the grace of God which makes eternal redemption a reality.
 3. But the context here indicates that the completeness, maturity, or perfection Jesus requires of us is the perfection of love in us through the keeping of God's word here taught in helping our enemies. (cf. 1 John 2:5; 4:16-18). It is God's nature and will to help his enemies by showing them mercy. A love therefore which reaches out only to one's friends and neighbors is not the perfection taught here.
- B. Embodied in Christ is the perfect pattern of God—let's follow him that we may become children of God in truth and in deed.
- C. If we decide to perfect our love toward those we have formerly feared would get ahead of us, be preferred over us, criticize us, or take what we have (jealousy), then we no longer have to live in fear (1 John 2:5; 4:18)
- D. While we may never reach so high an ideal as is here set before us, let us make it our aim throughout life (Phil. 3:7-14).
- E. "With malice toward none; with charity toward all." --A. Lincoln.

-- Charles Crouch

nations (Ex. 34:11-16; Deut. 23:6.) From this and the wars they waged against wicked nations under God's direction, there easily and naturally developed, under the operation of the law, the wrong sentiment of hating enemies.

- B. How the scribes and Pharisees perverted the law.
 - 1. Though the law nowhere said, "hate thine enemy", this is what they said and did. (cf. Matt. 15:6.)
 - 2. The "neighbors" they felt obligated to love were people of their own race and nation; the enemies they felt free to hate were all others.
- C. NOTE: It would be well to remember that to "hate" sometimes means simply to love less (Luke 14:26), without necessarily holding any bitterness of feeling. It may be some Jews hated only in this way.

II. THE NEW TESTAMENT LAW OF LOVE. (5:44-47)

- A. Love your enemies: "But I say unto, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you." (44)
 - 1. This appears to many to be an impossible attitude "because they understand the word love as here expressing the same feeling in all respects which we entertain toward a friend or an near kinsman. But love has many shades and degrees. The exact phase of it which is here enjoined is best understood in the light of the scriptures. The parable of the good Samaritan is given by Jesus for the express purpose of exemplifying it (Luke 10:25-37); his own example in praying on the cross for those who crucified him serves the same purpose (Luke 23:34); and so does the conduct of David when he spared the life of king Saul (1 Sam. 24,26). The feeling which enables us to deal with an enemy as the good Samaritan did, as Jesus did, and as David did, is the love for our enemies which is here enjoined. It is by no means an impossible feeling." --McGarvey, Commentary on Matthew-Mark, p. 60.
 - 2. However, it is possible only when Christ comes into our heart and soul, making us new, like him.
 - 3. It is an attitude of sustained and unbreakable good will toward them: To treat your enemies as God treats his--wish them good and do them good.

- 4. "Hating every false way" is the teaching of God (Ps. 119:104; Prov. 6:16-19; Rom. 12:9; Heb. 1:9), but "desiring the good of sinners and praying for persecutors is equally so. Jesus is our best example (Luke 23:34). Doing this, we again imitate the Father who sends material blessings on both evil and good--we are worthy children."--Annual Lesson Commentary, 1/28/34, p. 37.

- B. "Pray for them that persecute you." (44b)
 - 1. Jesus Christ is our example in this. (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60)
 - 2. Jesus teaches that love is universal--if we do not fulfil the law in loving our enemies (Rom 13:8-10), "we are sinners without reward."
 - 3. If we fulfil the law by loving and praying for our enemies, we are like God (Luke 6:27,28).
- C. To be sons: "That ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and unjust." (45)
 - 1. He does not say that by this alone one will become a child of God.
 - 2. The meaning is that in this manner one is transformed into the likeness of his Father and thus reflects his nature.
 - 3. The attitude of God himself, expressed here, is our best interpretation of God's law of love, and it is sufficient motivation for the action Jesus herein teaches.
- D. What reward? "For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?" (46)
 - 1. Our example is Christ, not the world.
 - 2. If we do not follow Him in this, we are sinners without reward, no matter what we profess.
 - 3. No praise or reward is due him who loves only those who love him; such selfish love is practiced not only by the hated publicans, but by nearly all sinners.
- E. More than others: "And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the Gentiles the same?" (47)
 - 1. The nature of Christ's kingdom is such that the New Testament law of righteousness is higher and