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TRUE LOVE TO ONE'S NEIGHBOR.

– MARCH 8. – Luke 10:25-37. –

Golden Text – "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." – Luke 10:27.

THE insincerity and evil disposition toward Jesus on the part of the Jewish teachers (doctors of the law, scribes and Pharisees) was very manifest in the questions they publicly propounded to him, for the evident purpose of entrapping him in his words and thus hindering his influence among the people. It was for this purpose that they mingled with the multitudes who witnessed his miracles and attended his preaching. But Jesus was more than a match for their cunning craftiness; and we admire the adroitness with which he ever thwarted their purposes. [R1939 : page 35]

The question on this occasion was, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The questioner probably thought he would say, You must believe that I am the Son of God, the promised Messiah. Then they would have said, "He repudiates the law. The law says that the man that doeth the things contained therein shall live by them." This, to the people, would have seemed a strong argument against Jesus, before they had become sufficiently acquainted with him and his teachings. While such a claim on the part of Jesus would have been the truth, the people were not yet prepared to understand and receive it. They [R1940 : page 35] needed continued and repeated evidences, not assertions, to convince them; and the Lord modestly and wisely gave them what they needed, and with great tact and skill avoided the interference with his purpose on the part of his enemies.

Jesus' answer referred the questioner to the law, saying, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" They gave the answer from the law – Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy heart, etc., and thy neighbor

as thyself, – and Jesus said they had answered correctly, and that if they would do that, they should have eternal life.

But the answer was not satisfactory to any one, not even to the questioner, who was doubtless anxious to make a show of his zeal for the law; but the thoughts now revolving in every mind must have been the disconsolate remembrance of the fact that, though thousands had endeavored to merit life through the keeping of the law, not one had ever yet succeeded in retaining life beyond the usual allotment. And so they understood the Lord's words to imply that *if* they could keep the law perfectly, then they should receive the life; but that "*if*" was insurmountable: they could not keep it, and there seemed to be no hope of life unless this great teacher might have something else to suggest.

Even the questioner betrayed some anxiety in the matter, as though he felt that his own conduct toward God and his fellow-men might not stand the scrutiny of the law, even as judged by those about him. Possibly some were present, who, by their incredulous faces, indicated that they did not think this man always acted as if he loved his neighbor as himself, and God supremely. So, to justify himself in the estimation of such, this doctor of the law endeavored to give the impression that the word "neighbor" had some restricted meaning which permitted the exercise of a good deal of selfishness.

The illustration which followed forced from the questioner himself the admission of the truth that every man is neighbor to every other man; that our common humanity is the neighborly bond, and that only those who recognize the bond of human brotherhood, and act accordingly, are worthy of the name "neighbor." To ignore the claims of human brotherhood is meanly selfish and inhuman. Yet that was just what the proud, boastful, hypocritical teachers of that day were doing (Matt. 23:14,23): they were scrupulously tithing their mint and anise and cummin, and omitting the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith.

The truth thus wisely put, and by logical argument forced home to the hearts of all, exposed the hypocrisy of the caviling questioner, and drew from himself the admission of the truth. "Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise." Thus the evil designs of the unbeliever were frustrated and the truth was triumphant.
