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PERFECT AS YOUR FATHER IS PERFECT

- MATTHEW 5:19-36,38-48. - JANUARY 30. -

Golden Text: – "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." – V. 48.

SINCE the Lord's followers have fallen flesh it is not possible for them to be perfect as God is perfect – except in heart, in intention. But this good heart intention is not sufficient to prove us worthy of a share with Christ as his "elect" to the glories of his Kingdom. Our profession of pure heart and God-likeness must be tested. It must be demonstrated and developed to the point of fixity of character. It must stand tests of temptation. It must endure faithfulness under stress. Hence those accepted as disciples of Christ are required to be faithful under very trying circumstances.

The Jews had gradually lost sight of the Divine Law and had filled their minds with certain traditions which were more or less contrary to the Law. The Great Teacher, ignoring the Rabbis, might have been thought by some to be setting aside the Law, but he assured them, to the contrary, that he was merely setting aside human traditions and seeking to establish the Law and make it the more manifest. The people regarded the Scribes and Pharisees as very religious and holy. But Jesus assured them that they must have greater holiness or they would never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Tradition quoted the Law, "Thou shalt not kill," and then added, "Whosoever shall kill will be in danger of the judgment" – in danger of trial and punishment by the appointed judges. But Jesus taught a still more rigid application, namely, that anger against a brother (in the heart, unexpressed) would mean a murderous condition of mind, which would be reprehensible in

God's sight, even though the murder might never be actually committed. More than this, he reprehended unkind remarks, as, *rakah*, signifying "blockhead," and "*thou fool*," as meaning still worse, a moral degenerate. Our Lord declared that such expressions indicated wrong conditions of heart, which might ultimately bring the individual before the Sanhedrin, or, possibly, eventually lead him on into the Second Death, symbolized by *Gehenna*.

Hell fire in this study is literally *Gehenna fire*. It refers [R4559 : page 57] to fires kept burning in the Valley of Hinnom (*Gehenna*) for the destruction of offal and the prevention of contagion. Into this fire the carcasses of malicious evil-doers might be thrown for destruction. It thus symbolized the Second Death. – Rev. 20:14.

According to the Galilean Prophet it would be useless for anyone to approach God's altar with a sacrificial gift while his heart contained any enmity against another. Hence any of Christ's disciples before offering a gift to the Lord should search their hearts and purge them from enmity, knowing that otherwise their sacrifices and praises would be vain.

The advice of verses 25,26 is sound. If there is an obligation against us we should settle and discharge it as quickly as possible. It was an important lesson for all Jews to learn that their Law Covenant, which they supposed was their friend and assistant, was really their Adversary and *condemned* them all. Because of imperfection of flesh, they were unable to keep the Law and could not have its approval, and hence had its condemnation. The proper course for all who recognized this was to seek as good a settlement with the Law as possible, confessing their imperfection.

Those who heeded our Lord's advice, realized their imperfect condition and cried for help and found forgiveness in

Jesus through his sacrifice. Thus, by faith, these were permitted to come into God's favor and blessing at Pentecost. But the Pharisees, hypocritically claiming to keep the Law perfectly, did not come to terms with it and confess their sins repentantly, and did not accept Jesus, and did not obtain the Pentecostal blessing. On the contrary all of that Jewish nation who rejected Jesus stumbled into prison nationally, and wrath came upon that people to the uttermost. And until all things written in the Law and the prophets concerning them shall be fulfilled, they shall not come out of that prison-house. They said, "His blood be upon us and upon our children," and they are held condemned of their Law. It will require all of the Millennial Age for them to profit by the opportunities of the Millennium, to rise up out of sin and death conditions. By the end of the Millennium through the Lord's grace they will have "paid the uttermost farthing" and then the willing and obedient shall get free. Every Jew who would get free from that Law obligation could have done so only by confessing his shortcomings and inability and by accepting a share in the sacrifice of Christ. Only the few agreed with the Law-adversary. – John 1:12.

"EYE FOR EYE – TOOTH FOR TOOTH"

The Mosaic Law laid down the Divine principle which the Judges of Israel were to follow, "*an eye for an eye*," the exaction of strict justice. The people had applied this to their individual relationships unwarrantedly, with the result that it cultivated hardness of heart, an exacting disposition, pitiless, merciless. Our Lord's teachings showed the error of this and pointed to the more excellent way – love. Although the Heavenly Father had made the Law, he had also prepared to show mercy and did show it in sending his Son into the world to be the Redeemer of sinners, that they might not perish, but have eternal life through obedience to the Savior. How much more proper was it that fellow-sufferers, both imperfect, should be lenient, tender-

hearted toward each other. Mark the Lord's words, I say unto you that by requiring an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth, in exacting justice of your imperfect fellows, you are encouraging an improper spirit in your own hearts.

(1) If your enemy smite you on the cheek turn to him the other one – not literally, but in your heart, mentally. Do not retaliate in kind. That our Lord did not mean this literally, is demonstrated by the fact that when on trial he was smitten but did not ask to be smitten again. Figuratively he turned the other cheek, but not literally.

(2) If any man sue us at the Law and *legally* get possession of our property we are to feel no grudge against him, but are to render up willingly all that the Court might decree, more rather than less. We are to be law-abiding to the extreme.

(3) If conscripted for Government service after the manner of ancient times and compelled to carry a burden for a mile, the Lord's followers were not to be too close or exacting, but evidence their good will by doing a little more, rendering help for another mile if necessary or expedient, rather than grumble and shirk legal exactions.

(4) The Lord's followers are to cultivate generosity. As the Heavenly Father is always giving and never asking, so all his children should have this character-likeness, and be ready to give something to anyone in need. This need not necessarily mean extravagant gifts, nor all that the petitioner would desire. Judgment, discretion, is to be used. But the desire to give, to help, should by all means be *cultivated* in his own heart by every follower of Jesus. And from him who would borrow of them they should not turn away. They should, on the contrary, do good and lend, hoping for no similar favor in return. The Lord's people might not thus amass as much money as others, but they would be pleasing and honoring their Heavenly Father, and laying up

treasure in heaven, and getting their own hearts into that condition which God could approve and bless in the Kingdom.

"BLESS THEM THAT CURSE YOU"

Tradition taught that neighbors should be loved and enemies be hated; but the Great Teacher said that enemies also should be loved and blessed, even though they returned persecution and injury. It was this new and high order of teaching which marked our Redeemer's utterances as different from all others.

The cultivation of this spirit of love for enemies, as well as for friends, would mark the followers of Jesus as children of God, as having the Heavenly Father's Spirit – disposition. He sends the sunshine on sinners and on saints. And the rain comes down for the just and for the unjust. It is difficult to estimate the amount of harm done to our minds by the traditions of the "Dark Ages" respecting God's intention to torment eternally his enemies – all except the elect. Thank God **[R4559 : page 58]** that we find that these teachings are not from his Book! They made our forefathers heretic-burners.

Admittedly love is a glorious quality and God-like quality. But if it extend only to those who love in return, how would it be worthy of any special reward? Do not the heathen, yea, all men, love after this fashion? And if we are courteous merely to those who are courteous to us, wherein are we superior to Gentiles and sinners?

The followers of Jesus, the pupils in his school, are to take the highest standard of excellence for their pattern, – their loving Creator. They are to strive for perfection such as his. They are to attain it in their hearts, and, so far as possible, outwork it in every thought and word and deed of their fallen flesh.

