

LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS

– MAY 12. – LUKE 6:27-38; ROM. 13:8-10. –

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." – Romans 13:9.

TODAY'S STUDY is from Saint Luke's account of the Sermon on the Mount. It does not profess to be a regulation for the world, but merely applies to saints – to those who have consecrated their lives fully to follow in the footsteps of Jesus – to suffer with Him that they may also reign with Him. Even these may not be able to live up to every feature of the Master's instructions, because of weakness in their fallen flesh. We must take the Master's words here and elsewhere addressed to the faithful as representing the full, complete, perfect standard. It is for each disciple to recognize this supreme standard and to measure and gauge his thoughts and words and doings thereby, and to as closely as possible attain this standard.

We are to remember, however, that as no Jew could keep the Law in its spirit, perfectly, neither could any of any other nationality keep it. The Jew's failure to keep the Law meant his failure to gain everlasting life, but we (the followers of Jesus) are not under the Law Covenant, but under Grace. We are to keep the Divine Law as nearly as we possibly can and to accept by faith God's arrangement for us in Jesus – that "by His stripes we are healed," our shortcomings are made good.

Thus doing our very best, yet surely coming short, the Apostle's words apply to us: "The righteousness of the Law is fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." We walk after the spirit, and would walk up to it if we could, but, being unable to do so, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." This is the happy state of all who through faith and consecration become children of God during this Gospel Age. Their faith and good intentions and good efforts, by the grace of God, make good their deficiencies.

As for others than God's people, He does not speak to them at all, except to tell them that they are sinners under the sentence of death, but that He has made provision for their reconciliation through the blood of the cross, and that whether they become disciples of Christ or not under the call to Brideship, nevertheless their words and conduct in the present life will all advantage or disadvantage them in the life to come. In this secondary way the world – all mankind aside from the Church, the consecrated – may be measurably enlightened by the Master's teachings in this lesson, even while it is not addressed to them. They may see its high standards and appreciate them to some extent, but not fully, unless they realize that the Church Class, called in this Gospel Age, is required to undergo special trial, testing, proving, as to loyalty to God, meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, brotherly kindness, love.

"BUT I SAY UNTO YOU"

The two tables of the Law given to Israel were a requirement of Justice, but Jesus and His followers take a still higher plane and, waiving their own rights, they become sacrificers of their own comforts, preferences, desires, to the doing of the Divine will, to the serving of the brethren and mankind in general. Justice never requires sacrifice. Thus discipleship and attainment with Jesus of a share in the sufferings of this present time and in the glory that shall follow mean something more than merely rendering to every man his due, for no one has a right to render to another less than his due, nor to do injury to another. Jesus not only did no injury, but, additionally, He sacrificed His own rights on behalf of mankind, and He set His disciples an example that they should walk in His steps. – I Pet. 2:21.

The path of love is, therefore, as Jesus describes it, under present conditions, a "narrow way"; narrow is the gate, difficult the way of life now open. Only the saintly few will be willing to walk therein, and only these will gain the great Prize, "the pearl of great price," joint-heirship in Messiah's Kingdom. Hearken! Do not merely observe the

Golden Rule toward your enemies, but love them, and "do good to them that hate you, and bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you."

The Master's expression, "Unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other," is to be taken as signifying simply, Do not render evil for evil, even though he smite thee on the other cheek also. Our Lord Himself, when smitten, according to the report, did not invite the smiting of the other cheek, but rather He defended Himself to the extent of criticising the evil deed. But if He had been smitten on the other cheek also, let us not for a moment think that He would have resisted, in the sense of rendering blow for blow.

The next statement is more comprehensively given by Saint Matthew. "If any man sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, withhold not thy cloak also." The follower of Jesus may flee from an adversary, or he may resist him [R5005 : page 117] to the extent of proper expostulation, but he is to be thoroughly responsive to all government; if the court decides that his coat and his cloak shall both be taken from him, he shall uncomplainingly submit, even though he realize that such a procedure would be unjust and quite at variance with the Divine regulation. Saint Paul as well as Jesus used argument in his own defence, not only with the mobs, but also before judges; but they resisted the law – never.

"THIS IS A HARD SAYING"

"Give to everyone that asketh of thee, and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again." The broadest interpretation we could consistently give to this would be – Be generous, tender-hearted, err on the side of too great generosity rather than to be hard-hearted, selfish. The Lord could not have meant us to take His words with absolute literalness; as for instance, Give a child a razor if it cries for it; or, Give money to the dissipated, that they may injure themselves still more. The spirit of a sound mind forbids that we should understand the Master to teach that we should do anything for another

or assist him in any manner that would be really to his injury. This is expressed in the next statement: "As ye would that men should do unto you, do ye also to them likewise." We would surely not wish men to grant a request of ours if they sincerely believed they would be injuring us. Our Master's words inculcate love, beneficence, and must not be construed to the contrary.

Very evidently our Lord was setting up His teachings in contrast with the maxims of the Pharisees, the holiness people of that day. He wished His disciples to see His teachings in their ultra light. To love another because he loved us, or to give to another in the hope that he would equally befriend us, or to do any good act with a hope to have as good or better return, would have nothing specially creditable in itself. It would be doing from a selfish motive.

Jesus' disciples, on the contrary, are to do good for principle's sake and for goodness' sake – to be in full accord with the Heavenly Father, to have His smile and approval. They are to take Him as their Example and to remember that in proportion as they are godlike they [R5006 : page 117] show forth the spirit of sonship. As, therefore, God is kind to the unthankful and to evil-doers, so we should be who have His spirit and who are seeking to walk in His way, in the footsteps of Jesus. The Heavenly Father is the Example, and although we cannot come up to that Example, we can show our loyalty, our faithfulness, by copying Him to the extent of our ability.

MERCIFUL TO OBTAIN MERCY

The world during Messiah's Kingdom will be under instruction and lessons, which will include mercy, and an assurance to the willing and obedient of perfection by the close of the Kingdom. But the Church class, now called out, will have no such long period for their character development, and since they will not attain that perfection here but will require Divine mercy, through the imputation of Christ's merit to cover their blemishes, therefore the Lord has arranged that these must expect mercy only in proportion as they will show mercy

to others. In other words, all the followers of Jesus have many imperfections to be covered by Divine mercy, or else to be atoned for by stripes, punishments, before they die.

In order to develop His saints in generosity and forgiveness, mercy, the Lord has agreed that He will be merciful to them in proportion as they will be merciful to others. What a wondrous reward and what a wondrous incentive! Our Lord's prayer is in agreement with this: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." This does not relate to the Adamic guilt of the saints, but to their daily shortcomings; their share in original sin and condemnation was canceled through the merit of Christ before they were accepted as His disciples or became followers in His steps as sons of God. What an incentive to God's people to be generous, forgiving, large-hearted, thus cultivating the Heavenly Father's spirit and character, and to be in that condition of heart where they can receive richly of Divine bounty and mercy at the throne of grace!

"OWE NO MAN ANYTHING"

Love may go beyond the Law and do more than Justice could require – in self-sacrifice – but it cannot do less. He who loves his neighbor will be fulfilling the Law toward him to the best of his ability. Hence, as the Apostle explains, to those who are in Christ all the commandments are covered in their covenant of love. They would not injure their neighbor's interests, either by stealing from him, or by bearing false witness against him, or by coveting his things or interests, desiring to take possession of them, or by murder or adultery; nor in any other manner would they encroach upon their neighbor's rights and interests.

Although not under the Law of the Ten Commandments, the Christian is under the Law of the New Commandment, the Law of Love, which is so much higher that it includes every other law that could be given. Love works no kind of injury to its neighbor; love, therefore, is the fulfilling of that feature of the Divine Law which

applies to our duty toward our neighbor, to love him as ourself. But love can do more than this, and in the case of Jesus it did more, for in love He surrendered His rights, privileges, etc., and died, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. And He is our Example as surely as we are His disciples, followers, and prospectively His joint-heirs in His Kingdom.

