

Sermon on the Mount 3 - Inductive Study Guide

SERMON ON THE MOUNT SERIES

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Mt 5:17-26 THE NEW FORM OF THE OLD LAW

Alexander Maclaren

THIS passage falls naturally into two parts — the former extending from verse 17 to 20 inclusive; the latter, from verse 21 to the end. In the former, the King of the true kingdom lays down the general principles of the relation between its laws and the earlier revelation of the divine will; in the latter, He exemplifies this relation in one case, which is followed, in the remainder of the chapter, by three other illustrative examples.

I. The King laying down the law of His kingdom in its relation to the older law of God.

The four verses included in this section give a regular sequence of thought: verse 17 declaring our Lord's personal relation to the former revelation as fulfilling it; verse 18 basing that statement of the purpose of His coming on the essential permanence of the old law; verses 19 and 20 deducing thence the relation of His disciples to that law, and that in such a way that verse 19 corresponds to verse 18, and affirms that this permanent law is binding in its minutest details on His subjects, while verse 20 corresponds to verse 17, and requires their deepened righteousness as answering to His fulfilment of the law.

The first thing that strikes one in looking at these verses is their authoritative tone. There may, even thus early in Christ's career, have been some murmurs that He was taking up a position of antagonism to Mosaism, which may account for the 'think not' which introduces the section. But however that may be, the swift transition from the Beatitudes to speak of Himself and of the meaning of His work is all of a piece with His whole manner; for certainly never did religious teacher open his mouth, who spoke so perpetually about Himself as did the meek Jesus. 'I came' declares that He is 'the coming One,' and is really a claim to have voluntarily appeared among men, as well as to be the long-expected Messiah. With absolute decisiveness He states the purpose of His coming. He knows the meaning of His own work, which so few of us do, and it is safe to take His own account of what He intends, as it so seldom is. His opening declaration is singularly composed of blended humility and majesty. Its humility lies in His placing Himself, as it were, in line with previous messengers, and representing Himself as carrying on the sequence of divine revelation. It would not have been humble for anybody but Him to say that, but it was so for Him. Its majesty lies in His claim to 'fulfil' all former utterances from God. His fulfilment of the law properly so called is twofold: first, in His own proper person and life, He completes obedience to it, realises its ideal; second, in His exposition of it, both by lip and life, He deepens and intensifies its meaning, changing it from a letter which regulates the actions, to a spirit which moves the inward man.

So these first words point to the peculiarity of His coming as being His own act, and make two daring assertions, as to His character, which He claims to be sinless, and as to His teaching, which he claims to be an advance upon all the former divine revelation. As to the former, He speaks here as He did to John, 'thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.' No trace of consciousness of sin or defect appears in any words or acts of His. The calmest conviction that He was perfectly righteous is always manifest. How comes it that we are not repelled by such a tone? We do not usually admire self-complacent religious

teachers. Why has nobody ever given Christ the lie, or pointed to His unconsciousness of faults as itself the gravest fault? Strange inaugural discourse for a humble sage and saint to assert his own immaculate perfection, stranger still that a listening world has said, 'Amen!' Note, too, the royal style here. In this part of the

'Sermon' our Lord twice uses the phrase, 'I say unto you,' which He once introduces with His characteristic 'verily.' Once He employs it to give solemnity to the asseveration which stretches forward to the end of this solid-seeming world, and once He introduces by it the stringent demand for His followers' loftier righteousness. His unsupported word is given us as our surest light in the dark future, His bare command as the most imperative authority. This style goes kingly; it calls for absolute credence and unhesitating submission. When He speaks, even if we have nothing but His word, it is ours neither 'to make reply' nor to reason why; but simply to believe, and swiftly to do. Rabbis might split hairs and quote other rabbis by the hour; philosophers may argue and base their teachings on elaborate demonstrations; moralists may seek to sway the conscience through reason; legislators to appeal to fear and hope. He speaks, and it is done; He commands, and it stands fast. There is nothing else in the world the least like the superb and mysterious authority with which He fronts the world, and, as Fountain of knowledge and Source of obligation, summons us all to submit and believe, by that 'Verily, I say unto you.'

Mt 5:18.

Next we have to notice the exuberant testimony to the permanence of the law. Not the smallest of its letters, not even the little marks which distinguished some of them, or the flourishes at the top of some of them, should pass, — as we might say, not even the stroke across a written 't,' which shows that it is not 'l.' The law shall last as long as the world. It shall last till it be accomplished. And what then? The righteousness which it requires can never be so realised that we shall not need to realise it any more, and in the new heavens righteousness dwelleth. But in a very real sense law shall cease when fulfilled. There is no law to him who can say, 'Thy law is within my heart.' When law has become both 'law and impulse,' it has ceased to be law, in so far as it no longer stands over against the doer as an external constraint.

Mt 5:19

On this permanence of the law Christ builds its imperative authority in His kingdom. Obviously, the 'kingdom of heaven' in verse 19 means the earthly form of that kingdom. The King republishes, as it were, the old code, and adopts it as the basis of His law. He thus assumes the absolute right of determining precedence and dignity in that kingdom. The sovereign is the 'fountain of honour,' whose word ennobles. Observe the merciful accuracy of the language. The breach of the commandments either in theory or in practice does not exclude from the kingdom, for it is, while realised on earth, a kingdom of sinful men aiming after holiness; but the

smallest deflection from the law of right, in theory or in practice, does lower a man's standing therein, inasmuch as it makes him less capable of that conformity to the King, and consequent nearness to Him, which determines greatness and smallness there. Dignity in the kingdom depends on Christ-likeness, and Christ-likeness depends on fulfilling, as He did, all righteousness. Small flaws are most dangerous because least noticeable. More Christian men lose their chance of promotion in the kingdom by a multitude of little sins than by single great ones.

Mt 5:20.

As the King has Himself by His perfect obedience fulfilled the law, His subjects likewise must, in their obedience, transcend the righteousness of those who best knew and most punctiliously kept it. The scribes and Pharisees are not here regarded as hypocrites, but taken as types of the highest conformity with the law which the old dispensation afforded. The new kingdom demands a higher, namely a more spiritual and inward righteousness, one corresponding to the profounder meaning which the King gives to the old commandment. And this loftier fulfilment is not merely the condition of dignity in, but of entrance at all into, the kingdom. Inward holiness is the essence of the character of all its subjects. How that holiness is to be ours is not here told, except in so far as it is hinted by the fact that it is regarded as the issue of the King's fulfilling the law. These last words would have been terrible and excluding if they had stood alone. When they follow 'I am come to fulfil,' they are a veiled gospel, implying that by His fulfilment the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us.

II. We have an illustrative example in the case of the old commandment against murder.

This part of the passage falls into three divisions — each occupying two verses. First we have the deepening and expansion of the commandment, This part begins with the royal style again. 'What was said to them of old' is left in its full authority. 'But I say unto you' represents Jesus as possessing co-ordinate authority with that law, of which the speaker is unnamed, perhaps because the same Word of God which now spoke in Him had spoken it. We need but refer here to the Jewish courts and Sanhedrim, and to that valley of Hinnom, where the offal of Jerusalem and the corpses of criminals were burned, nor need we discuss the precise force of 'Raca' and 'thou fool.' The main points to be observed are, the distinct extension of the conception of 'killing' to embrace malevolent anger, whether it find vent or is kept close in the heart; the clear recognition that, whilst the emotion which is the source of the overt

act is of the same nature as the act, and that therefore he who 'hateth his brother is a murderer,' there are degrees in criminality, according as the anger remains unexpressed, or finds utterance in more or less bitter and contemptuous language; that consequently there are degrees in the severity of the punishment which is administered by no earthly tribunal; and that, finally, this stern sentence has hidden in it the possibility of forgiveness, inasmuch as the consequence of the sin is liability to punishment, but not necessarily suffering of it. The old law had no such mitigation of its sentence.

Mt 5:23, 24.

The second part of this illustrative example intensifies the command by putting obedience to it before acts of external worship. The language is vividly picturesque. We see a worshipper standing at the very altar while the priest is offering his sacrifice. In that sacred moment, while he is confessing his sins, a flash across his memory shows him a brother offended, — rightly or wrongly it matters not. The solemn sacrifice is to pause while he seeks the offended one, and, whatever the other man's reception of his advances may be, he cleanses his own bosom of its perilous stuff; then he may come back and go on with the interrupted worship. Nothing could put in a clearer light the prime importance of the command than this setting aside of sacred religious acts for its sake. 'Obedience is better than sacrifice.' And the little word 'therefore,' at the beginning of verse 23, points to the terrible penalties as the reason for this urgency. If such destruction may light on the angry man, nothing should come between him and the conquest of his anger. Such self-conquest, which will often seem like degradation, is more acceptable service to the King, and truer worship, than all words or ceremonial acts. Deep truths as to the relations between worship, strictly so called, and life, lie in these words, which may well be taken to heart by those whose altar is Calvary, and their gift the thank-offering of themselves.

Mt 5:25, 26.

The third part is a further exhortation to the same swiftness in casting out anger from the heart, thrown into a parabolic form. When you quarrel with a man, says Christ in effect, prudence enjoins to make it up as soon as possible, before he sets the law in motion. If once he, as plaintiff, has brought you before the judge, the law will go on mechanically through the stages of trial, condemnation, surrender to the prison authorities, and confinement till the last farthing has been paid. So, if you are conscious that you have an adversary, — and any man that you hate is your adversary, for he will appear against you at that solemn judgment to come, — agree with him, put away the anger out of your heart at once. In

the special case in hand, the 'adversary' is the man with whom we are angry. In the general application of the precept to the whole series of offences against the law, the adversary may be regarded as the law itself. In either interpretation, the stages of appearing before the judge and so on up till the shutting up in prison are the stages of the judgment before the tribunal, not of earth, but of the kingdom of heaven. They point to the same dread realities as are presented in the previous verses under the imagery of the Jewish courts and the foul fires of the valley of Hinnom. Christ closes the grave parable with His solemn 'Verily I say unto thee' — as looking on the future judgment, and telling us what His eyes saw. The words have no bearing on the question of the duration of the imprisonment, for He does not tell us whether the last farthing could ever be paid or not; but they do teach this lesson, that, if once we fall under the punishments of the kingdom, there is no end to them until the last tittle of the consequences of our breach of its law has been paid. To delay obedience, and still more to delay abandoning disobedience, is madness, in view of the storm that may at any moment burst on the heads of the rebels.

Thus He deepens and fulfils one precept of the old law by extending the sweep of its prohibition from acts to thoughts, by setting obedience to it above sacrifice and worship, and by picturing in solemn tones of parabolic warning the consequences of having the disobeyed precept as our unreconciled adversary. In this one case we have a specimen of His mode of dealing with the whole law, every jot of which He expanded in His teaching, and perfectly observed in His life.

A gospel is hidden even in these warnings, for it is distinctly taught that the offended law may cease to be our adversary, and that we may be reconciled with it, ere yet it has accused us to the judge. It was not yet time to proclaim that the King 'fulfilled' the law, not only by life, but by death, and that therefore all His believing subjects 'are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law,' as well as endowed with the righteousness by which they fulfil that law in deeper reality, and fairer completeness, than did those 'of old time,' who loved it most.

Mt 5:33-37 SWEAR NOT AT ALL

Alexander Maclaren

Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: 34. But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: 35. Nor by the earth; for it is His footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. 36. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. 37. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.' — Matthew 5:33-37.

Is His treatment of the sixth and seventh commandments, Jesus deepened them by bringing the inner man of feeling and desire under their control. In His treatment of the old commandments as to oaths, He expands them by extending the prohibitions from one kind of oath to all kinds. The movement in the former case is downwards and inwards; in the latter it is outwards, the compass sweeping a wider circle. Perjury, a false oath, was all that had been forbidden. He forbids all. We may note that the forms of colloquial swearing, which our Lord specifies, are not to be taken as an exhaustive enumeration of what is forbidden. They are in the nature of a parenthesis, and the sentence runs on continuously without them — 'Swear not at all., but let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay.' The reason appended is equally universal, for it suggests the deep thought that 'what is more than these,' that is to say, any form of speech that seeks to strengthen a simple, grave asseveration by such oaths as He has just quoted, 'cometh of evil,' inasmuch as it springs from, and reveals, the melancholy fact that his bare word is not felt binding by a man, and is not accepted as conclusive by others. If lies were not so common, oaths would be needless. And oaths increase the evil from which they come, by confirming the notion that there is no sin in a lie unless it is sworn to.

The oaths specified are all colloquial, which were and are continually and offensively mingled with common speech in the East. Nowhere are there such habitual liars, and nowhere are there so many oaths. Every traveller there knows that, and sees how true is Christ's filiation of the custom of swearing from the custom of falsehood. But these poisonous weeds of speech not only tended to degrade plain veracity in the popular mind, but were themselves parents of immoral evasions, for it was the teaching of some Rabbis, at all events, that an oath 'by heaven' or 'by earth' or 'by Jerusalem' or 'by my head' did not bind. That further relaxation of the

obligation of truthfulness was grounded on the words quoted in verse 33, for, said the immoral quibblers, 'it is "thine oaths to the Lord" that thou "shalt perform," and for these others you may do as you like.' Therefore our Lord insists that every oath, even these mutilated, colloquial ones which avoid His name, is in essence an appeal to God, and has no sense unless it is. To swear such a truncated oath, then, has the still further condemnation that it is certainly an irreverence, and probably a quibble, and meant to be broken. It must be fully admitted that there is little in common between such pieces of senseless profanity as these oaths, or the modern equivalents which pollute so many lips to-day, and the oath administered in a court of justice, and it may further be allowed weight that Jesus does not specifically prohibit the oath 'by the Lord,' but it is difficult to see how the principles on which He condemns are to be kept from touching even judicial oaths. For they, too, are administered on the ground of the false idea that they add to the obligation of veracity, and give a guarantee of truthfulness which a simple affirmation does not give. Nor can any one, who knows the perfunctory formality and indifference with which such oaths are administered and taken, and what a farce 'kissing the book' has become, doubt that even judicial oaths tend to weaken the popular conception of the sin of a lie and the reliance to be placed upon the simple 'Yea, yea; Nay, nay.'

Mt 5:38-42 NON-RESISTANCE

Alexander Maclaren

'Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: 39. But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40, And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. 41. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. 42. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.'

Matthew 5:38-42. —

THE old law directed judges to inflict penalties precisely equivalent to offences — 'an eye for an eye, and a, tooth for a tooth' (Exodus 21:24), but that direction was not for the guidance of individuals. It was suited for the stage of civilisation in which it was given, and probably was then a restriction, rather than a sanction, of the wild law of retaliation. Jesus sweeps it away entirely, and goes much further than even its abrogation. For He forbids not only retaliation but even resistance. It is unfortunate that in this, as in so many instances, controversy as to the range of Christ's words has so largely hustled obedience to them out of the field, that the first thought suggested to a modern reader by the command 'Resist not evil' (or, an evil man) is apt to be, Is the Quaker doctrine of uniform non-resistance right or wrong, instead of, Do I obey this precept? If we first try to understand its meaning, we shall be in a position to consider whether it has limits, springing from its own deepest significance, or not. What, then, is it not to resist? Our Lord gives three concrete illustrations of what He enjoins, the first of which refers to insults such as contumelious blows on the cheek, which are perhaps the hardest not to meet with a flash of anger and a returning stroke; the second of which refers to assaults on property, such as an attempt at legal robbery of a man's undergarment; the third of which refers to forced labour, such

as impressing a peasant to carry military or official baggage or documents — a form of oppression only too well known under Roman rule in Christ's days. In regard to all three cases, He bids His disciples submit to the indignity, yield the coat, and go the mile. But such yielding without resistance is not to be all. The other cheek is to be given to the smiter; the more costly and ample outer garment is to be yielded up; the load is to be carried for two miles. The disciple is to meet evil with a manifestation, not of anger, hatred, or intent to inflict retribution, but of readiness to submit to more. It is a hard lesson, but clearly here, as always, the chief stress is to be laid, not on the outward action, but on the disposition, and on the action mainly as the outcome and exhibition of that. If the cheek is turned, or the cloak yielded, or the second mile trudged with a lowering brow, and hate or anger-boiling in the heart, the commandment is broken. If the inner man rises in hot indignation against the evil and its doer, he is resisting evil more harmfully to himself than is many a man who makes his adversary's cheeks tingle before his own have ceased to be reddened. We have to get down into the depths of the soul, before we understand the meaning of non-resistance. It would have been better if the eager controversy about the breadth of this commandment had oftener become a study of its depth, and if, instead of asking, 'Are we ever warranted in resisting?' men had asked, 'What in its full meaning is non-resistance?' The truest answer is that it is a form of Love, — love in the face of insults, wrongs, and domineering tyranny, such as are illustrated in Christ's examples. This article of Christ's New Law comes last but one in the series of instances in which His transfiguring touch is laid on the Old Law, and the last of the series is that to which He has been steadily advancing from the first — namely, the great Commandment of Love. This precept stands immediately before that, and prepares for it. It is, as suffused with the light of the sun that is all but risen, 'Resist not evil,' for 'Love beareth all things.'

It is but a shallow stream that is worried into foam and made angry and noisy by the stones in its bed; a deep river flows smooth and silent above them. Nothing will enable us to meet 'evil' with a patient yielding love which does not bring the faintest tinge of anger even into the cheek reddened by a rude hand, but the 'love of God shed abroad in the heart,' and when that love fills a man, 'out of him will flow a river of living water,' which will bury evil below its clear, gentle abundance, and, perchance, wash it of its foulness. The 'quality of' this non-resistance 'is twice blessed,' 'it blesseth him that gives and him that takes.' For the disciple who submits in love, there is the gain of freedom from the perturbations of passion, and of steadfast abiding in the peace of a great charity, the deliverance from the temptation of descending to the level of the wrong-doer, and of losing hold of God and all high visions. The tempest-ruffled sea mirrors no stars by night, nor is blued by day. If we are to have real communion with God, we must not flush with indignation at evil, nor pant with desire to shoot the arrow back to him that aimed it at us. And in regard to the evil-doer, the most effectual resistance is, in many cases, not to resist. There is something hid away somewhere in most men's hearts which makes them ashamed of smiting the offered left cheek, and then ashamed of having smitten the right one. 'It is a shame to hit him, since he does not defend himself,' comes into many a ruffian's mind. The safest way to travel in savage countries is to show oneself quite unarmed. He that meets evil with evil is 'overcome of evil'; he that meets it with patient love is likely in most cases to 'overcome evil with good.' And even if he fails, he has, at all events, used the only weapon that has any chance of beating down the evil, and it is better to be defeated when fighting hate with love than to be victorious when fighting it with itself, or demanding an eye for an eye.

But, if we take the right view of this precept, its limitations are in itself. Since it is love confronting, and seeking to transform evil into its own likeness, it may sometimes be obliged by its own self not to yield. If turning the other cheek would but make the assaulter more angry, or if yielding the cloak would but make the legal robber more greedy, so, if going the second mile would but make the press-gang more severe and exacting, resistance becomes a form of love and a duty for the sake of the wrongdoer. It may also become a duty for the sake of others, who are also objects of love, such as helpless persons who otherwise would be exposed to evil, or society as a whole. But while clearly that limit is prescribed by the very nature of the precept, the resistance which it permits must have love to the culprit or to others as its motive, and not be tainted by the least suspicion of passion or vengeance. Would that professing Christians would try more to purge their own hearts, and bring this solemn precept into their daily lives, instead of discussing whether there are cases in which it does not apply! There are great tracts in the lives of all of us to which it should apply and is not applied; and we had better seek to bring these under its dominion first, and then it will be time enough to debate as to whether any circumstances are outside its dominion or not.

Mt 5:43-48 THE LAW OF LOVE

Alexander Maclaren

THE last of the five instances of our Lord's extending and deepening and spiritualising the old law is also the climax of them. We may either call it the highest or the deepest, according to our point of view. His transfiguring touch invests all the commandments with which He has been dealing with new inwardness, sweep, and spirituality, and finally He proclaims the supreme, all-including commandment of universal love. 'It

hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour' — that comes from Leviticus 19:18; but where does 'and hate thine enemy' come from?

Not from Scripture, but in the passage in Leviticus 'neighbour' is co-extensive with 'children of thy people,' and the hatred and contempt of all men outside Israel which grew upon the Jews found a foothold there. 'Who is my neighbor?' was apparently a well-discussed question in the schools of the Rabbis, and, whether any of these teachers ever committed themselves to plainly formulating the principle or not, practically the duty of love was restricted to a narrow circle, and the rest of the wide world left out in the cold. But not only was the circumference of love's circle drawn in, but to hate an enemy was elevated almost into a duty. It is the worst form of retaliation. 'An eye for an eye' is bad enough, but hate for hate plunges men far deeper in the devil's mire. To flash back from the mirror of the heart the hostile looks which are flung at us, is our natural impulse; but why should we always leave it to the other man to pitch the keynote of our relations with him? Why should we echo only his tones? Cannot we leave his discord to die into silence and reply to it by something more musical? Two thunder-clouds may east lightnings at each other, but they waste themselves in the process. Better to shine meekly and victoriously on as the moon does on piled masses of darkness till it silvers them with its quiet light. So Jesus bids us do. We are to suppress the natural inclination to pay back in the enemy's own coin, to 'give him as good as he gave us,' to 'show proper spirit,' and all the other fine phrases with which the world whitewashes hatred and revenge. We are not only to allow no stirring of malice in our feelings, but we are to let kindly emotions bear fruit in words blessing the cursers, and in deeds of goodness, and, highest of all, in prayers for those whose hate is bitterest, being founded on religion, and who are carrying it into action in persecution. We cannot hate a man if we pray for him; we cannot pray for him if we hate him. Our weakness often feels it so hard not to hate our enemies, that our only way to get strength to keep this highest, hardest commandment is to begin by trying to pray for the foe, and then we gradually feel the infernal fires dying down in our temper, and come to be able to meet his evil with good, and his curses with blessings. It is a difficult lesson that Jesus sets us. It is a blessed possibility that Jesus opens for us, that our kindly emotions towards men need not be at the mercy of theirs to us. It is a fair ideal that He paints, which, if Christians deliberately and continuously took it for their aim to realise, would revolutionise society, and make the fellowship of man with man a continual joy. Think of what any community, great or small, would be, if enmity were met by love only and always. Its fire would die for want of fuel. If the hater found no answering hate increasing his hate, he would often come to answer love with love. There is an old legend spread through many lands, which tells how a princess who had been changed by enchantment into a loathly serpent, was set free by being thrice kissed by a knight, who thereby won a fair bride with whom he lived in love and joy. The only way to change the serpent of hate into the fair form of a friend is to kiss it out of its enchantment.

No doubt, partial anticipations of this precept may be found, buried under much ethical rubbish, elsewhere than in the Sermon on the Mount, and more plainly in Old Testament teaching, and in Rabbinical sayings; but Christ's 'originality' as a moral teacher lies not so much in the absolute novelty of His commandments, as in the perspective in which He sets them, and in the motives on which He bases them, and most of all in His being more than a teacher, namely, the Giver of power to fulfil what He enjoins. Christian ethics not merely recognises the duty of love to men, but sets it as the foundation of all other duties. It is root and trunk, all others are but the branches into which it ramifies. Christian ethics not merely recognises the duty, but takes a man by the hand, leads him up to his Father God, and says: There, that is your pattern, and a child who loves his

Father will try to copy his ways and be made like Him by his love. So Morality passes into Religion, and through the transition receives power beyond its own. The perfection of worship is imitation, and when men 'call Him Father' whom they adore, imitation becomes the natural action of a child who loves.

A dew-drop and a planet are both spheres, moulded by the same law of gravitation. The tiny round of our little drops of love may be not all unlike the colossal completeness of that Love, which owns the sun as 'His sun,' and rays down light and distils rain over the broad world. God loves all men apart altogether from any regard to character, therefore He gives to all men all the good gifts that they can receive apart from character, and if evil men do not get His best gifts, it is not because He withholds, but because they cannot take. There are human love-gifts which cannot be bestowed on enemies or evil persons. It is not possible, nor fit, that a Christian should feel to such as he does to those who share his faith and sympathies; but it is possible, and therefore incumbent, that he should not only negatively clear his heart of malice and hatred, but that he should positively exercise such active beneficence as they will receive. That is God's way, and it should be His children's.

The thought of the divine pattern naturally brings up the contrast between it and that which goes by the name of love among men. Just because Christians are to take God as their example of love, they must transcend human examples. Here again Jesus strikes the note with which He began His teaching of His disciples' 'righteousness'; but very significantly He does not now point to Pharisees, but to publicans, as those who were to be surpassed. The former, no doubt, were models of 'righteousness' after a rigid, whitewashed-sepulchre sort, but the latter had bigger hearts, and, bad as they were and were reputed to be, they loved better than the others. Jesus is glad to see and point to even imperfect sparks of goodness in a justly condemned class. No doubt, publicans in their own homes, with wife and children round them, let their hearts out, and could be tender and gentle, however gruff and harsh in public. When Jesus says 'even the publicans,' He is not speaking in contempt, but in recognition of the love that did find some soil to grow on, even in that rocky ground. But is not the bringing in of the 'reward' as a motive a woful downcome? and is love that loves for the sake of reward, love at all? The criticism and questions forget that the true motive has just been set forth, and that the

thought of 'reward' comes in, only as secondary encouragement to a duty which is based upon another ground. To love because we shall gain something, either in this world or in the next, is not love but long-sighted selfishness; but to be helped in our endeavours to widen our love so as to take in all men, by the vision of the reward, is not selfishness but a legitimate strengthening of our weakness. Especially is that so, in view of the fact that 'the reward' contemplated is nothing else than the growth of likeness to the Father in heaven, and the increase of filial consciousness, and the clearer, deeper cry, 'Abba, Father.' If longing for, and having regard to, that 'recompense of reward' is selfishness, and if the teaching which permits it is immoral, may God send the world more of such selfishness and of teachers of it!

But the reference to the shrunken love-streams that flow among men passes again swiftly to the former thought of likeness to God as the great pattern. Like a bird glancing downwards for a moment to earth, and then up again and away into the blue, our Lord's words re-soar, and settle at last by the throne of God. The command, 'Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,' may be intended to refer only to the immediately preceding section, but one is inclined to regard it rather as the summing up of the whole of the preceding series of commandments from verse 20 onwards. The sum of religion is to imitate the God whom we worship. The ideal which draws us to aim at its realisation must be absolutely perfect, however imperfect may be all our attempts to reproduce it. We sometimes hear it said that to set up perfection as our goal is to smite effort dead and to enthrone despair. But to set up an incomplete ideal is the surest way to take the heart out of effort after it. It is the Christian's prerogative to have ever gleaming before him an unattained aim, to which he is progressively approximating, and which, unreached, beckons, feeds hope of endless approach, and guarantees immortality.

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