

Perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect

Matt 5: 46-48.

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It is God, not man, whom the Lord makes the criterion; the heavenly Father, not the dread moral governor as made known to Israel, but our Father. What are His affections, what His will about us? Nothing is more foreign here than the delusion of our being freed now from the indwelling evil of our nature.

"For if ye love those that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the tax-gatherers the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye much more? do not even the Gentiles the same? Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Herein was manifested the love of God in our case, because God hath sent His only-begotten Son, that we might live through Him. For we were dead Godward, and in Him only was the life that could serve God, which we wholly lacked. The love of God has met this, otherwise insuperable lack, and this by sending His only-begotten Son who is that life to impart it to those that believe. They, have life eternal for their souls now, as they await it for their bodies when He comes again for us. But even this possession of life in Him suffices not to satisfy His love, any more than it fits us to enjoy, serve, and worship Him. There is a burden which nothing on our part could remove. Therefore it follows, Herein is love, not because we loved God, but because *He* loved us, and sent His Son as propitiation for our sins (1 John 4: 9, 10). But there is also, flowing hence, the Spirit, His Spirit, dwelling in us, as of love no less than of power and sobriety, so that we love one another after a divine sort.

This, no doubt, is Christianity in its full privileges, going far beyond the state of the disciples before redemption and the gift of the Spirit. But the divine nature was already there, which would be active when all obstacles were gone through the work of Christ. Hence, even in the time that preceded the cross, the Lord insisted on a love wholly above mere human nature with its likes and its dislikes. The detested tax-gatherers had natural affection, and loved those that loved them. The Gentiles saluted tenderly those bound up with themselves in mere ties of flesh and blood. The disciples were enjoined to love far beyond Jew or Greek. The family were to love as their heavenly Father did. Though this could not be in degree, it was the kind of love, which must be in God's children by divine grace, rising above all question of desert or ulterior aim.

"Ye therefore shall be perfect," says the Lord, as your heavenly Father is perfect." His is love, because He is love; it is the energy of His nature going out in goodness where there is need, and above all reference to merit, or congruity with what He loves and is. And this in all its perfection He was then showing in the Lord Jesus, image of the invisible God. What did He ever seek for Himself, as He went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people; lunatics, demon-possessed, paralytics, dead men or women? It was love irrespective of self, in compassion to the most wretched of men; it was love rising above all the unworthiness, ingratitude, or hostility on the part of its objects. He was doing not His own will in any case, but the will of God, and for His Father's glory. What is the altruism of men's talk, or of any man's performance, in comparison?

This love we too share as His children. So the Lord taught then; so the Holy Spirit confirmed afterward, Be ye therefore imitators of God, as children beloved; and walk in love, even as Christ also

loved us and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. The blessings of Christianity and of the church of God ought only to accentuate the duty and increase its spring and power.

As the heavenly Father's love is shown in absolute superiority to good or evil, right or wrong, whom He blesses from grace in Himself, so is the Christian now called to walk as made partaker of a divine nature (not merely of Adam's), and in the place of sons. If *noblesse oblige*, as men say, how much more divine grace and such a relationship?

But, my fellow-sinner, what ignorance, and madness for you, ungodly, enemy, and spiritually powerless as you are, to imagine you can so walk, or so win your way to God! Not so: as lost ones cast yourselves in repentance and faith on the Saviour and His redemption. If you look away to Him from your guilty selves, He will give you life everlasting in Him, and the remission of sins through His blood. Then, and thus only, can you follow Him in the path, His path, which He points out to His own.