

DEUT. 30:11-20 & MT. 5:38-48

GOD'S CALL TO PERFECTION THROUGH OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW, TIED WITH JESUS' DECLARATION TO BE PERFECT LIKE OUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS PERFECT, IS A REAL CHALLENGE.

INDEED THE CALL FOR PERFECTION IN BOTH OF TODAY'S READINGS IS, EVEN FOR THE MOST DEVOUT AMONG US, AN IMPOSSIBLE DREAM.

THOSE WHO CLAIM, SILENTLY OR PUBLICALLY TO HAVE REACHED PERFECTION IN ANY ACT, THOUGHT, OR THEIR WORDS, ARE IN THEIR HEARTS, DECEIVING THEMSELVES, ALONG WITH OTHERS.

SCRIPTURE REMINDS US THAT WE ALL FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD, WE ALL ARE SINNERS.

IN TRUTH, MOST OF US ARE MORE LIKE THE PEOPLE IN AN OLD COMIC ABOUT MOSES AND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. IT SHOWED MOSES HOLDING THE TABLETS IN THE MIDST OF A CROWD OF PEOPLE AROUND HIM.

A SPOKESMAN FOR THE PEOPLE TOLD MOSES: "THE DOS ARE OKAY, BUT WE ARE NOT SURE ABOUT THE DON'TS."

THEN THERE IS THE STATEMENT MARK TWAIN IS REPORTED TO HAVE MADE WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE BIBLE.

HE SAID THAT HE WAS NOT DISTURBED BY THE PASSAGES HE DID NOT UNDERSTAND. INSTEAD IT WAS THE PARTS OF THE BIBLE HE UNDERSTOOD THAT BOTHERED HIM.

BOTH THE COMIC AND MARK TWAIN'S WORDS TOUCH UPON THE ASSUMPTION THAT- THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS ARE BEYOND OUR GRASP.

HOWEVER, THE READING FROM DEUTERONOMY POINTS OUT THIS IS ACTUALLY NOT THE CASE. GOD SPELLED OUT IN THE COMMANDMENTS AND ORDINANCES A CLEAR MESSAGE ABOUT HIS WILL.

THE REASON FOR MOSES' WORDS WERE THAT THE PEOPLE WERE ABOUT TO ENTER THE PROMISED LAND. MOSES WILL NOT BE GOING WITH THEM, SO HE REMINDS THE CHILDREN OF THOSE WHO WANDERED FOR 40 YEARS, THEY

DO NOT HAVE TO REPEAT THE SIN OF THEIR PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS.

ABIDING BY GOD'S COMMANDMENTS ARE WITHIN THEIR GRASP IF- THEY COMMIT TO THE LORD IN HEART, MIND, AND SOUL.

GOD'S WILL IS NOT BEYOND UNDERSTANDING BECAUSE IT IS RECORDED IN PLAIN WORDS IN THE COMMANDMENTS AND ORDINANCES.

NOW, MOSES IS NOT SAYING NO ONE WILL EVER SIN, BUT THAT IF THEY STUDY AND LEARN GOD'S LAW, FOLLOWING IT WILL BECOME A PART OF WHO THEY ARE.

THEY CAN BECOME A PEOPLE WHO STRIVE TO FOLLOW GOD'S WAY, RATHER THAN BEING REBELLIOUS. AND MOSES ASSURES THEM THIS IS NOT BEYOND THEIR REACH.

IN A SIMILAR WAY JESUS' WORDS ON THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT ENCOURAGE THIS ATTITUDE.

TODAY'S SECTION IS A CONTINUATION OF THE SAVIOR'S MESSAGE ABOUT HOW TO FOLLOW GOD'S LAW WHEN IT COMES TO JUSTICE AND OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH ENEMIES.

THE OLD TESTAMENT'S COMMAND: "AN EYE FOR AN EYE AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH", SET THE RULES AND LIMITS FOR A FAIR ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE.

IT WAS NOT MEANT HOWEVER TO JUSTIFY REVENGE, BUT TO TEACH HOW TO RESPOND TO A WRONG DOING WITHIN THE CONFINES OF GOD'S WILL.

BUT JESUS TAUGHT SOMETHING DIFFERENT. HOWEVER, HE WAS NOT SAYING FOLLOWING THE OLD WAY WAS WRONG.

INSTEAD HE PROVIDED AN OPTION THAT DRAWS US CLOSER TO LOVING GOD AND OTHERS. HE WAS TEACHING US HOW TO LIVE AS MEMBERS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD RATHER THAN CITIZENS OF THE WORLD.

ACCORDING TO THE PRINCIPLES OF KINGDOM OF GOD, INSTEAD OF RESPONDING TO WRONG "TIT FOR TAT", WE CAN SHOW GOD'S LOVE BY RESISTING WRONG DOERS IN AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT WAY.

THIS NEW WAY RESISTS THE EVIL THAT IS BEHIND THE BAD DEEDS BY SHOWING THE SINNER A DIFFERENT WAY OF LIVING.

A GOOD WAY TO SUMMARIZE THIS CALL OF CHRIST IS TO SAY HE INSTRUCTS US HERE HOW TO BE “OVERCOMERS” RATHER THAN VICTIMS.

HE IS NOT COMMANDING US HERE, SAYING WE MUST RESPOND ACCORDING TO HIS WORDS, BUT RATHER HE IS OFFERING A BETTER WAY TO DEAL WITH WRONG DOING.

JESUS’ TEACHINGS SOUND, WONDERFUL, BUT ALSO IMPOSSIBLE TO FOLLOW MUCH OF THE TIME.

HOWEVER, AT THE HEART OF THE DIFFICULTY PEOPLE HAVE WITH HIS WORDS IS A LACK OF THEIR OWN UNDERSTANDING.

WHEN JESUS SAID, IN VS. 39 “DO NOT RESIST...BUT TURN THE OTHER CHEEK”, HE WAS SPEAKING ABOUT AN ACT THAT WAS AN INSULT- NOT A PHYSICAL ASSAULT.

YOU SEE, IN THAT CULTURE TO SLAP A PERSON ON THE CHEEK WAS TO INSULT SOMEONE AND CHALLENGE THEM TO RESPOND.

IN WESTERN CULTURE SOMETHING SIMILAR HAPPENED WHEN A MAN CHALLENGED ANOTHER MAN TO A DUEL. HE WOULD DO SO BY HITTING HIM WITH A GLOVE.

SO WHAT JESUS IS SAYING HERE IS NOT THAT WE SHOULD ALLOW OURSELVES TO BE PHYSICALLY HARMED, BUT RATHER IT IS BETTER TO BE INSULTED TWICE THAN RETALIATE.

SIMILARLY JESUS TAUGHT THAT IF YOU OWE A DEBT AND SOMEONE GOES TO COURT AND TAKES YOUR COAT, MEANING YOUR TUNIC-GIVE THEM ALSO YOUR CLOAK.

THIS IS INTERESTING BECAUSE THE CLOAK, WHICH WAS ALSO USED TO SLEEP IN, COULD NOT BE LEGALLY TAKEN FROM ANYONE, FOR MORE THAN A FEW HOURS.

THE CLOAK, ACCORDING TO BIBLICAL LAW, HAD TO BE RETURNED BEFORE SUNSET, SINCE MOST PEOPLE HAD ONLY ONE AND NEEDED IT AT NIGHT. (EXODUS 22:26)

BUT JESUS SAYS TO WILLING GIVE UP YOUR CLOAK AS A PROMISE OF REPAYMENT.

THEN WHEN IT COMES TO THE ROMANS, WHO COULD, UNDER ROMAN LAW, REQUIRE A PERSON TO CARRY THINGS FOR UP TO A FOR 1000 PACES = A ROMAN MILE; JESUS SAID CARRY THE THINGS ONE EXTRA MILE.

BUT NOTICE, JESUS SAID -ONE MORE MILE, WHICH MEANS HE WAS NOT SAYING TAKE IT THE WHOLE WAY OR UNTIL YOU CAN’T GO ANY MORE, BUT RATHER GO AN EXTRA MILE.

THIS SECOND MILE HAS BEEN CALLED BY SOME THE “MILE OF GRACE”.

IN OTHER WORDS IT IS A FREE GIFT YOU GIVE, ONE WHICH THE OTHER PERSON DOES NOT DESERVE, BUT YOU GIVE IT ANYWAY, JUST LIKE GOD HAS GIVEN YOU GRACE.

SOMETHING SIMILAR TO THIS IS INDICATED IN THE CHARGE TO GIVE TO THOSE WHO BEG, AS WELL AS MAKING A LOAN.

JESUS IS NOT SAYING GIVE AWAY ALL YOU HAVE. HIS CHALLENGE IS TO GIVE OR /LOAN WHAT YOU CAN AFFORD WITHOUT EXPECTING REPAYMENT.

WE COME NOW TO THE FINAL SECTION ABOUT LOVING ENEMIES AND BEING PERFECT.

THERE ARE MANY EXAMPLES OF THIS KIND RADICAL LOVE THAT CAN BE NAMED.

ONE FROM PENNSYLVANIA WAS THE AMISH COMMUNITY’S REACTION WHEN A MAN KILLED AND WOUNDED A NUMBER OF SCHOOL GIRLS.

THE AMISH ELDERS WENT TO THE HOME OF THE WIDOW OF THE KILLER, AND OFFERED HER CONDOLENCES.

THE COMMUNITY ALSO INSISTED THAT SOME OF THE FUNDS GIVEN TO HELP THE VICTIM’S FAMILIES BE SET ASIDE TO HELP THE WIDOW AND HER CHILDREN.

THIS IS THE KIND OF THING JESUS WAS SPEAKING ABOUT, WHEN HE SAID TO SHOW LOVE TO THOSE WHOM WE MIGHT NOT WANT TO.

THE BIBLE, BY THE WAY, DOES NOT ACTUALLY SAY TO HATE OUR ENEMIES.

BUT THE JEWISH PEOPLE CAME TO THINK THAT THE CALL TO LOVE YOUR KIN, I.E. FELLOW JEWS, MEANT IT WAS OKAY TO HATE OTHERS.

JESUS, IN THIS SERMON AND ELSEWHERE SPOKE ABOUT LOVE AS GOD ENVISIONS IT. HE SAID LOVE IS NOT EXCLUSIVE BUT IS ALL INCLUSIVE.

TRULY, THIS INSTRUCTION MAY WELL BE THE HARDEST OF ALL FOR US TO SINCERELY FULFILL, ESPECIALLY WHILE LIVING IN THE REAL WORLD.

HOWEVER, WHAT WE MAY FORGET IS THAT THE CALL TO LOVE EVEN ENEMIES, AND TO FORGIVE OTHERS IS-AS MUCH FOR OUR WELL BEING AS IT IS FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS, AND OUR WITNESS TO THE GOSPEL.

FOR EXAMPLE- THE LATE NELSON MANDELA EXPLAINED WHY HE DID NOT HARBOR RESENTMENT AGAINST THOSE WHO SUPPORTED APARTHEID, AND IMPRISONED HIM.

WHEN ASKED WHY, HE SAID SOMETHING PROFOUND THAT CAN BE APPLIED TO OUR OWN LIVES, AND IT WAS THIS:

“AS I WALKED OUT OF THE DOOR TOWARDS THE GATE THAT WOULD LEAD TO MY FREEDOM, I KNEW THAT IF I DIDN’T LEAVE MY BITTERNESS AND HATRED BEHIND, I’D STILL BE IN PRISON.”

WE CAN INDEED BE TRAPPED BY HATE. THIS REASONING IS UNDERSTANDABLE, IN THE CONTEXT OF JESUS TEACHING.

AND YET, WHILE HIS INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT LOVING ENEMIES SOUND NICE, THEY ALSO SOUND IDYLIC.

ONE DESCRIPTION OF THEM IS LIKE A PICTURE OF A LAKE, WITH WATER SO CLEAR YOU CAN SEE IN IT A REFLECTION OF THE TREES, SKY, AND OTHER THINGS.

BUT OF COURSE THE REFLECTION REMAINS PERFECT FOR ONLY AS LONG AS NOTHING LIKE THE WIND, OR A FISH, OR BIRD, OR ANYTHING ELSE DOES NOT DISTURB THE WATER.

A SMALL RIPPLE, IN FACT, DESTROYS THE REFLECTION. AND A STORMY SKY TURNS THE WATER GRAY, OR OTHERWISE RENDERS IT UNABLE TO REFLECT THE BEAUTY AROUND IT.

MUCH LIKE THE BEAUTIFUL REFLECTION OF THE SKY, AND TREES AND MOUNTAINS CAN BE SEEN IN CALM AND CLEAR WATER, SO ALSO WE ARE SUPPOSED TO REFLECT GOD’S LOVE.

THE PROBLEM IS- WE LIKE, THE WATER, CAN BE EASILY DISTURBED, AND SO THE REFLECTION OF LOVE IS DISTORTED.

FOR EXAMPLE, THE READERS DIGEST-ONCE PRINTED A POEM EXPRESSING HOW CHALLENGING LOVE CAN BE.

IT SAID: “PEOPLE ARE UNREASONABLE, ILLOGICAL, AND SELF-CENTERED, LOVE THEM ANYWAY.

IF YOU DO GOOD, PEOPLE WILL ACCUSE YOU OF SELFISH ULTERIOR MOTIVES- DO GOOD ANYWAY...

HONESTY AND FRANKNESS MAKE YOU VULNERABLE, BE HONEST AND FRANK ANYWAY.

THE GOOD YOU DO TODAY WILL BE FORGOTTEN TOMORROW, DO GOOD ANYWAY...

PEOPLE FAVOR UNDERDOGS, BUT FOLLOW ONLY THE TOP DOGS, FIGHT FOR SOME UNDERDOGS ANYWAY....”

THESE WORDS TOUCH UPON THE MESSAGE JESUS PRESENTED IN HIS MOST FAMOUS SERMON.

AND IF THOSE THINGS ARE NOT CHALLENGING ENOUGH JESUS ALSO SAID WE SHOULD BE PERFECT, LIKE OUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS PERFECT.

NOW THAT CERTAINLY IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO DO NO MATTER HOW HARD WE MAY TRY.

THIS IS TRUE-EVEN WHEN WE UNDERSTAND THE GREEK WORD USUALLY TRANSLATED AS PERFECT –DOES NOT MEAN SINLESS, BUT MORE ACCURATELY MEANS- TO BE COMPLETE OR MATURE.

TRULY, JESUS’ CALL FOR US TO NOT LIVE ON THE SAME LEVEL AS THE WORLD, TO BE **IN** BUT NOT **OF** THE WORLD IS EASY TO SAY BUT NOT TO DO.

INDEED HOW CAN WE, EVEN LOVE PERFECTLY WHEN WE STILL HAVE SO FAR TO GROW IN SPIRITUAL MATURITY, AND CONTINUE TO SUFFER FROM HUMAN WEAKNESS?

THE FIRST ANSWER IS TO REMEMBER, JESUS DIED, AND ROSE AGAIN SO THAT WE ARE SAVED BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH.

IN OTHER WORDS IT IS GOD’S DOING NOT OUR OWN ACHIEVEMENTS. AND THE SAME IS TRUE WITH LOVING ENEMIES AND BEING PERFECT.

THE BIBLE TELLS US HOW WE CAN DO THE IMPOSSIBLE BY ALLOWING GOD TO BE OUR STRENGTH.

FOR EXAMPLE **IN- EXODUS 15:2** IT SAYS –“THE LORD IS MY STRENGTH AND MY MIGHT, HE HAS BECOME MY SALVATION.”

ALSO, **PSALM 28:7** SAYS- “THE LORD IS MY STRENGTH AND MY SHIELD; IN HIM MY HEART TRUSTS....”

SO THEN JESUS' POINT IS THAT HIS FOLLOWERS MUST LIVE BY THE POWER OF GOD-AND HE PROMISES US HIS HELP THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

TRULY, JESUS KNOWS WE ARE AN IMPERFECT REFLECTION OF GOD, WHILE HE IS A PERFECT ONE. BUT HE CHALLENGES US TO MATURE FAITH SO MAY GROW MORE LIKE HIM.

LET US PRAY:

GRACIOUS GOD, HEAVENLY FATHER, SEND YOUR SPIRIT UPON US AND LIGHT OUR PATH THAT WE MAY TRAVEL THE ROAD YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR US.

HAVING HEARD YOUR SCRIPTURES PROCLAIMED AND YOUR WORD REVEALED, ENABLE OUR HEARTS AND MINDS TO MORE FULLY RESPOND TO YOUR GOODNESS AND YOUR GRACE.

YOU HAVE SHOWN US THE WAYS THAT LEAD TO LIFE. YOU HAVE CHALLENGED US TO MOVE BEYOND EASY ANSWERS, TO EMBRACE THE HARD CHOICES THAT COME WITH CARING DEEPLY FOR OTHERS.

CHALLENGE US TO FORSAKE PATHS THAT ASK LITTLE OF US. AND HELP US RESIST THE EVILS AND TEMPTATIONS OF THIS WORLD, THAT WE MAY TRULY FOLLOW THE WAY OF KINGDOM LIVING.

IN JESUS NAME, WE TURN TO YOU AND SEEK THE SPIRIT'S HELP TO LIVE AS YOUR FAITHFUL CHILDREN. AMEN

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