

5:30- see on 7:19.

Right hand- Not just 'your hand'. The right hand was a Hebrew idiom for the power, the thinking, the dominant desire of a man. If it's all taking us the wrong way, we must cut it off- and cast it from us, with no regrets about what we have given up.

Cut it off- Even though Jesus never sinned, He reveals a remarkable insight into the process of human sin, temptation and subsequent moral need. This was learnt not only from reflection on Old Testament teaching, but surely also by a sensitive seeking to enter into the feelings and processes of the sinner. This is why no sinner, ourselves included, need ever feel that this perfect Man is somehow unable to be touched by the feeling of our infirmities. Consider how He spoke of looking upon a woman to lust after her; and how He used the chilling figure of cutting out the eye or hand that offended (Mt. 5:29)- the very punishments meted out in Palestine at the time for sexual misbehaviour. He had surely observed men with eyes on stalks, looking at women.

Although He never sinned, yet He had thought Himself into their likelihood of failure, He knew all about the affairs going on in the village, the gutter talk of the guys at work... yet He knew and reflected upon those peoples' moral need, they were questions to Him that demanded answers, rather than a thanking God that He was not like other men were. Reflect on the characters of the Lord's parables. They cover the whole gamut of first century Palestinian life- labourers and elder sons and officials and mums and dads. They were snapshots of typical human behaviour, and as such they are essays in the way Jesus diagnosed the human condition; how much He had reflected upon people and society, and perceived our tragic need as nobody else has. He invites the zealous saint to cut off the various limbs of the body (for they *all* cause offence at some time!), so that he might enter the Kingdom. To the Jewish mind, imagining such a scene would have created the impression of priestly action. The sensitive reader is invited to see himself as "the offering and the priest".

5:32 *Whosoever*- The Lord has in view the guilty Pharisees of the Hillel school who were twisting Dt. 24:1-4 to mean that one could divorce for any reason so long as a divorce paper was written. Jesus at this point is not addressing the Pharisees but His potential followers. He is probably citing this well-known controversy in order to demonstrate how motives behind an action are what are culpable. He is inviting His hearers to consider the motive for divorce and perceive that as all important, rather than the fact of divorce. This is why I suggest the key word in this verse is *logos*, translated "cause". It is the *logos* of fornication which is the reason for divorce (see on 5:37). The thinking, reasoning, idea of fornication is what leads to divorce. This interpretation makes the Lord's reasoning here flow seamlessly and directly on from His teaching in preceding verses about the root of sexual sin being in the mind. So the Lord is indeed saying that the Hillel school of thought- that divorce was possible for any trivial reason- was wrong. But as always, He moves the focus to a higher and more demanding level. He implies that "fornication" is the Biblical justification for divorce, but He says that actually it is the *logos*, the

thought, of fornication which is the problem. And this is in line with what He has just been teaching about the thought and action of fornication being so closely connected.

Causes her- There is no doubt that we can be counted responsible for making another brother sin, even though he too bears responsibility for that sin. The man who commits adultery causes his ex-wife to commit adultery too, the Lord observed (Mt. 5:32). Her sin remains her sin, but he too is guilty. Prov. 5:15,16 (NIV) teach likewise: that a man should drink the waters of his own well, i.e. take sexual fulfilment from his own wife, otherwise his waters (i.e. the sexuality of his wife) will overflow into the streets for all and sundry. She will turn to other men due to his unfaithfulness. Sin thus has so many aspects.

Whosoever shall marry her.... - The 'whosoever' earlier in this verse seems to refer to men who thought they could divorce their wife for any reason and go off with another woman. This view led women into sinful relationships with those men. But perhaps what is in view in this part of the verse is the women who divorced their husbands for any reason- for women in some circles did have the power to divorce in the first century. The man who married such a woman was also committing adultery. The 'whosoever' refers to people who were getting divorced for any reason apart from fornication, and thereby leading both themselves and their new partners into sin.

5:33 *Forswear-* To commit perjury, i.e. lying about something in court. Perjury has a motive- e.g. simply lying about your age to a causal enquirer is not perjury, but it is perjury if you lie about your age in order to get old age retirement benefits. So we see the theme of *motive* being continued. But the Lord takes the matter further. He not only forbids false swearing but swearing at all- as if He foresaw that any oath is likely to end up a false oath, such is the weakness of humanity and our tendency not to be truthful. James 5:12 quotes this and says that "Above all" we should not swear falsely, lest we fall into condemnation. This is strong language. The implication is that if we lie in a human court, that is one thing- but that lie will be tried in the court of Heaven and will lead to condemnation.

5:34 The Lord taught that His people were to be unconditionally truthful, because every untruthful word would be judged at the last day (Mt. 12:36). When He taught us 'swear not at all' (Mt. 5:33-37), He spoke specifically about not swearing by the judgment throne of God at Jerusalem. Jews and indeed all Semitic peoples were in the habit of swearing by the last day judgment, to prove that they were truthful (cp. Mt. 23:16-22). The Lord is saying that His people have no need to use those invocations and oaths- because they are to live *always* as if they are before the final judgment seat of God in Jerusalem. And therefore, our words will be true- because we live as men and women who stand constantly before His judgment presence.

5:36 *One hair*- Starting with the greatest thing- the throne of God- down to the apparently most insignificant (one hair), the Lord shows that absolutely nothing (great or small) can give any more meaning to human words than the words themselves.

5:37 *Communication*- Gk. *logos*. The contrast is between 'swearing' in words, and having an internal *logos*, a thought behind the words, which is clear and honest. This continues the theme of 5:32 about the *logos* of fornication. We are to pay attention to our *logos* rather than merely the external word and action.

Yes, yes- People had the idea that there was normal language, and then oaths, which ensured that what you were saying was really true. The Lord is teaching that we should operate on only one level of language- absolute truth. We should not think that some areas of our language use can be less honest than others. The demand is for a total influence of God's truth into every aspect of human life and thinking.

Evil- Or, 'the evil one'. Wrong words come *ek*, 'out of', the evil one. Yet the thrust of the Lord's teaching so far in the Sermon has been that wrong words and behaviour come *ek*, out of, the human heart and motivations. This, then, is 'the evil', personified as 'the evil one'. In using this term the Lord was radically redefining the popular conceptions of an external 'evil one' as an external being, teaching that it is the evil *logos* within the human heart which is the real 'evil one'. We note how deeply the Lord's teaching is concerned with internal thought processes. Whatever is more than a simple yes-no way of speaking involves something from 'the evil one'; and we weasel our way with words and meanings only when we are under temptation to be sinful. But that is a deeply internal, psychological situation, deep, deep within the human heart.

5:38 When the Lord Jesus gave His commandments as an elaboration of Moses' Law, that Law was still in force. He didn't say 'When I'm dead, this is how you should behave...'. He was showing us a higher level; but in the interim period until the Law was taken out of the way, He was opening up the *choice* of taking that higher level, even though making use of the concessions which Moses offered would not have been a sin during that period. Thus He spoke of not insisting on "an eye for an eye"; even though in certain rare cases the Law did allow for this. He was saying: 'You can keep Moses' Law, and take an eye for an eye. But there is a higher level: to simply forgive'.

5:39 *Resist not evil*- The Greek term for resisting evil occurs only in Eph. 6:13. We are in this life to arm ourselves spiritually, so that we may be able to resist in the evil day. If Paul is alluding to this part of the Sermon, the point would be that we are not to resist evil in this life,

because our time to ultimately resist it will be in the last day. Then, along with the Lord Himself, we will resist and overcome evil through the establishment of the Kingdom on earth. Rom. 13:2 is likely another allusion to "resist not evil"- if we "resist" [s.w.] Governments whom God has put in power, then we are resisting God. This means that Paul fully understood that the 'powers that be' are indeed "evil", but they are not to be proactively 'resisted' by those in Christ. The time for that will come, but is not now. We are, however, to "resist the devil" (James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9). Surely "resist not evil" is in view. We are to resist sin within us, but not evil in its political form around us. Again, as so often in the Bible, we see that the focus for our spiritual struggle is within rather than without. As always in the Sermon, the example of Jesus was the making of the word into flesh. James 5:6 seems to make this point, by pointing out that Jesus did not and in a sense does not resist evil done against Him: "You have condemned, you have murdered the righteous one. He doesn't resist you". And yet He will judge this behaviour- not now, but at the last day.

Smite thee- You singular. Time and again the Sermon on the Mount / Plain seems to take a broad sweep in its record of the Lord's teaching to us all; and then He suddenly focuses in on the individual. The AV brings this out well through the use of "you" (plural) and "thee" (singular): "Blessed are you poor... love your enemies... to him who strikes thee on the cheek...". Note how many times there is this change of pronoun in Luke 6. Clearly the Lord wants us to see our collective standing before Him, and yet not to overlook the purely personal nature of His appeal to us individually.

Turn to him the other- The Lord was smitten on the cheek but enquired why He was being smitten, rather than literally turning the other cheek. But to do this would be so humiliating for the aggressor that it would be a far more effective resistance of evil than anything else. The power in the confrontation is now with the one who turns the other cheek. S/he is calling the shots, not the beater. The idea of not resisting evil and offering the other cheek (Mt. 5:39) we normally apply to suffering loss from the world without fighting for our rights. Yet Paul took this as referring to the need to not retaliate to the harmful things done to us by members of the ecclesia (Rom. 12:16,17; 1 Cor. 6:7; 1 Thess. 5:15). When struck on the right cheek- which was a Semitic insult to a heretic- they were to not respond and open themselves up for further insult [surely a lesson for those brethren who are falsely accused of wrong beliefs]. And yet the compassion of Jesus shines through both His parables and the records of His words; as does His acceptance of people for who they were. People were relaxed with Him because they could see He had no hidden agenda. He wasn't going to use them for His own power trip.

5:40 *Sue at law-* A rather liberal translation of the single Greek word *krino*. The idea is quite simply of judging. We can be wrongly judged by others without them taking us to court. The simple principle 'Do not resist wrong judgment of you' is a very large ask. Even in this life, truth often comes out. And if we believe in the ultimate justice of the final judgment, we will not for

ever be going around correcting others' misjudgments and wrong impressions of us. That is something I have had to deeply learn in my own life.

Your cloak- It was forbidden by the Law to keep a man's outer garment overnight (Ex. 22:26,27). But the Lord taught *whilst the law was still in operation* that we should be willing to give it up, and even offer it (Mt. 5:40). The threatened man could have quoted the Law and kept his clothing. But the Lord bids us go to a higher level, beyond using God's law to uphold our own rights. And in this He raises a vital if difficult principle: Don't always enforce what Biblical rights you have against your brother. Don't rush to your own defence and justification even if Scripture is on your side. Live on the level of true love and non-resistance to evil. In this case the idea would be that even if someone amongst God's people does something unBiblical to us, clearly breaking God's laws, we are still to not resist evil but rather by our grace to them, shame them into repentance.

5:41 Go with him two- The Lord's high value of persons is reflected in how He taught His followers to not resist evil. A poor man had only two garments- an outer one, and an inner one (Dt. 24:10-13). Underneath that, he was naked. Yet the Lord taught that if you had your outer garment unjustly taken from you, then offer your abuser your undercloth. Offer him, in all seriousness, to take it off you, and leave you standing next to him arrystarkus. This would have turned the table. The abuser would be the one left ashamed, as he surely wouldn't do this. And thus the *dignity of the abused person was left intact at the end*. This was the Lord's desire. Likewise, Roman soldiers were allowed to impress a Jew to carry their pack for a mile, but they were liable to punishment if they made him carry it two miles. To offer to carry it the second mile would almost always be turned down by the abusive soldier. And again, at the end of the exchange, he would be the one humiliated, and the Lord's follower, even though abused, would remain with head up and dignity intact.

5:42 Give- Luke says that the Lord taught that we should "give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom. For with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again" (Lk. 6:38). We might have expected Him to say: 'Give generously, with a good, running over measure, and this is what you will receive in return'. But He doesn't. He says simply "Give"; and then we will be given to in a generous measure, because with what measure we use in our giving, we will receive. Thinking it through, He means surely that "giving", by His definition, means a generous, well packed, abundant giving; for that *is* Christian giving. And note that the context of Lk. 6:38 is the Lord talking about not being critical and judgmental of others, but rather forgiving and accepting them. It is our 'giving' in this sense which is to be so full and generous. Only God's grace / giving can inspire this attitude within us, as we live hemmed in by the people of a materialistic,

mean world, where nobody takes up a cross for anyone else. This is why Paul makes a play on the word ‘grace’ when writing to the Corinthians about giving; for *charis*, “grace”, means ‘giving’. He urges them to not receive God’s grace in vain, but rather, motivated by it, to give grace to others (2 Cor. 6:1; 8:6,7,19).

Borrow- The Greek strictly means to borrow for interest. Seeing this was illegal under the Law of Moses, the Lord is saying that we should just lend- but not for interest. We would all soon bankrupt if we read this as it stands in many English translations. Or it could be that the Lord was aware that He was talking to extremely poor people who had so little to lend that it was not as hard for them to take Him seriously on this point as it is for those who have so much more.

According to Luke’s record here, the Lord taught that we must love our enemies “and lend [in whatever way] never despairing” (Lk. 6:35 RV). The Lord sought to inculcate in His followers His same positive spirit. To never give up with people, for all the losses, the casualties, the hurt... never despairing of humanity. This was and is the spirit of Jesus.

5:43 The Lord's attitude to the Essenes is a case study in bridge building- developing what we have in common with our target audience, and yet through that commonality addressing the issues over which we differ. The Dead Sea scrolls reveal that the terms ""poor in spirit" and "poor" are technical terms used only by the Essenes to describe themselves". So when the Lord encouraged us to be "poor in spirit" (Mt. 5:3), He was commanding the Essene position. Likewise when He praised those who were eunuchs for God's Kingdom (Mt. 19:10-12), He was alluding to the Essenes, who were the only celibate group in 1st century Israel. And yet lepers were anathema to the Essenes, and the Lord's staying in the home of Simon the leper (Mk. 14:3) was a purposeful affront to Essene thinking. The parable of the Good Samaritan has been seen as another purposeful attack upon them; likewise the Lord's teaching: "You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy" (Mt. 5:43). It was the Essenes in their *Rule Of The Community* who taught that Essenes must yearly chant curses upon their enemies. So the Lord even within Matthew 5, and certainly within His teaching as a whole, both commended and challenged the Essenes; His bridge building didn't involve just accepting their position.

5:44 *Love... do good... bless... pray-* Praying for our enemies and abusers, not wishing a curse upon them but rather a blessing, sounds like Job (Mt. 5:44 = Job 31:30). 'Blessing' has Biblical connection with the ideas of forgiveness and salvation. There would be no point in praying for forgiveness for the obviously impenitent unless God might actually grant it. This opens huge possibilities and potentials to us. God is willing to forgive people for the sake of the prayers and efforts of others (Mk. 2:5). Jesus isn't simply telling us to vaguely pray for our enemies because it is psychologically good for us and eases our pain a bit. Genuine prayer for abusers really has

the possibility of being heard- for God is willing to save people for the sake of our prayers. Otherwise, this exhortation to do good to abusers through praying for their blessing would be rather meaningless. 'Cursing' likewise tended to carry the sense of 'May you be condemned at the day of judgment'. Those who condemn others will be condemned (Mt. 7:1 etc.)- and yet we can pray for their blessing. It is perhaps only our prayers and desire for their salvation which can over-ride the otherwise certain connection between condemning others and being condemned. This gives those condemned and abused by others so much work to do. In fact, so amazing are the possibilities that that alone is therapeutic. Moses' praying for Pharaoh in Ex. 9:28,29 is perhaps the Old Testament source of Christ's words. Let's not read those records as implying that Moses simply uttered a few words to God, and then each of the plagues was lifted. There was an element of real fervency in Moses' prayers- which may well be lacking in ours. This is surely an example of genuinely praying for our enemies.

Curse [condemn]... hate... despitefully use [slander]... persecute [chase out- excommunicate]- The Sermon was given to the disciples (5:1,2). The terms used here are very applicable to attitudes from some members of God's people to others- first century Israel, in the first context, and the Christian church in the longer term context. The language is not to applicable to persecution at the hands of the unbelieving world. Likewise the commands to pray for spiritual blessing and acceptance of our abusers is surely more appropriate to prayers for those who are bitter misbelievers than for complete unbelievers who profess no desire to please God.

5:45 See on 6:26.

Children of your Father- Jesus juxtaposed ideas in a radical way. He spoke of drinking His blood; and of a Samaritan who was good, a spiritual hero. It was impossible for Jews to associate the term 'Samaritan' and the concept of being spiritually an example. And so the stark, radical challenge of the Lord's words must be allowed to come down into the 21st century too. Lk. 6:35 has Jesus speaking of "children of the Most High" and yet Mt. 5:45 has "children of your father". What did Jesus actually say? Perhaps: "Children of *abba*, daddy, the Most High". He juxtaposed His shocking idea of *abba* with the exalted title "the Most High". The Most High was in fact as close as *abba*, daddy, father.

Makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust- God consciously makes the sun rise each day- it isn't part of a kind of perpetual motion machine. Hence the force of His promises in the prophets that in the same way as He consciously maintains the solar system, so He will maintain His Israel. Ps. 104 is full of such examples: "He waters the hills... causes the grass to grow... makes darkness (consciously, each night)... the young lions... seek their meat from God... send forth Your Spirit (Angel), they are created" (not just by the reproductive system). There are important implications following from these ideas with regard to our faith in prayer. It seems to me that our belief that the world is going on

inevitably by clockwork is one of the things which militates against faith. To give a simple example: we may need to catch a certain train which is to leave at 9 a.m. We wake up late at 8:30 a.m. and find it hard to have faith in our (all too hasty) prayer that we will get it, because we are accustomed to trains leaving on time. But if we have the necessary faith to believe that each individual action in life is the work of God, then it is not so hard to believe that God will make the action of that train leaving occur at 9:30 a.m. rather than at 9 a.m. when He normally makes it leave. The whole of creation keeps on going as a result of God having a heart that bleeds for people. "If he causes his heart to return unto himself", the whole of creation would simply cease (Job 34:14 RVmg.). His spirit is His heart and mind, as well as physical power. Creation is kept going not by clockwork, but by the conscious outpouring of His Spirit toward us. In times of depression we need to remember this; that the very fact the world is still going, the planet still moves, atoms stay in their place and all matter still exists... is proof that the God who has a heart that bleeds for us is still there, with His heart going out to us His creation. And the spirit of the Father must be in us His children.

Just because the Father gives His sun and rain to all without discrimination, we likewise should love our enemies (Mt. 5:43-45). This is the imperative of creation. We noted on 5:44 that our prayer and goodness to our enemies is in order to lead them to repentance and salvation. This is surely one motive behind the way God sends rain and sunshine upon the evil as well as the good. His goodness to them is intended to lead them to repentance. Only at the day of judgment will He execute judgment against them, and that is to be our perspective too. See on 5:39 *resist not evil.*

5:46 Love them which love you- We tend to love in response to others' love. But the love which the Lord has in mind is the love which is an act of the will, consciously effected towards the unloving.

Reward- The idea is of wages. Whilst salvation itself is a free gift, in contrast to the wages paid by sin, this is not to say that there will not be some element of reward / wages / eternal recognition of our spiritual achievements in this life. The preceding verses have spoken of prayer and blessing for our abusers. This kind of attitude will be eternally rewarded. Not least if we see those we prayed for, those we blessed and forgave without their repentance, eternally with us in God's Kingdom. The final judgment will be of our works, not because works justify us, but because our use of the freedom we have had and exercised in our lives is the basis of the future reward we will be given. Salvation itself is not on the basis of our works (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 2:16; Tit. 3:5); indeed, the *free gift* of salvation by pure grace is contrasted with the *wages* paid by sin (Rom. 4:4; 6:23). And yet at the judgment, the preacher receives *wages* for what he did (Jn. 4:36), the labourers receive *hire* (s.w. wages) for their work in the vineyard (Mt. 20:8; 1 Cor. 3:8). There is a *reward* (s.w. wages) for those who rise to the level of loving the totally unresponsive (Mt. 5:46), or preaching in situations quite against their natural inclination (1 Cor.

9:18). *Salvation* itself isn't given on this basis of works; but the nature of our eternal existence in the Kingdom will be a reflection of our use of the gift of freedom in this life. In that sense the judgment will be of our works.

Lk. 6:32 speaks of us having "thanks". The Greek for "thank" in Lk. 6:32 is 'charis', normally translated "grace", and often connected with the help of the Spirit which is given to us in response to our own efforts. Taking responsibility for others is often thankless. Our human dysfunction cries out for recognition and affirmation, and we tend not to do those things for which we are not thanked. This is one of the most radical aspects of our calling as followers of Christ- to serve without being thanked. Belief in God's judgment helps us with this. For all our works will be rewarded in some sense by Him at the last day. If we love those that love us, we have no "thank"- but we will have "thank", or "praise of God" ultimately. And this is what ultimately matters.

Publicans- As demonstrated by the account of Zacchaeus, these were the most friendless people in society. Rejected by family, they were unloved by about everyone. The only person who would salute / greet them was a fellow publican (:47). The implication is that publicans [tax collectors] were loved only by themselves. Loving those who love us is little better than the selfish self-love of the lonely publican. Matthew was a publican and he surely had himself very much in view as he recounted this teaching of the Lord.

5:47 *Salute-* See on *publicans* in 5:46.

More- Gk. 'to super-abound'. This is a word characteristic of the new life in Christ. As God makes His grace *abound* to us, we are to *abound* to every good work (2 Cor. 9:8). We are to 'abound' in love to each other, as God abounds to us (1 Thess. 3:12). This is why there will never be a grudging spirit in those who serve properly motivated by God's abundance to us. This super-abounding quality in our kindness, generosity, forgiveness etc. is a feature lacking in the unbelievers around us. If we salute our brethren only, then we do not super-abound (Mt. 5:47); if we love as the world loves its own, then we have missed the special quality of love which the Father and Son speak of and exemplify. This radical generosity of spirit to others is something which will mark us apart from this world.

5:48 See on 5:7.

Be... perfect- We are either seen as absolutely perfect, or totally wicked, due to God's imputation of righteousness or evil to us (Ps. 37:37). There is no third way. The pure in heart see God, their righteousness (to God) exceeds that of the Pharisees, no part of their body offends them or they

pluck it out; they are perfect as their Father is (Mt. 5:8,20,29,48). Every one of the faithful will have a body even now completely full of light, with no part dark (Lk. 11:36); we will walk, even as the Lord walked (1 Jn. 2:6). These impossible standards were surely designed by the Lord to force us towards a real faith in the imputed righteousness which we can glory in; that the Father really does see us as this righteous. Men have risen up to this. David at the end of his life could say that he was upright and had kept himself from his iniquity (2 Sam. 22:21-24). He could only say this by a clear understanding of the concept of imputed righteousness. Paul's claim to have always lived in a pure conscience must be seen in the same way.

God makes concessions to human weakness; He sets an ideal standard, but will accept us achieving a lower level. "Be ye therefore perfect, *as* your Father in heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48) is proof enough of this. The standard is clear: absolute perfection. But our lower attainment is accepted, by grace. If God accepts our obvious failure to attain an ideal standard, we should be inspired to accept this in others. Daily Israel were taught this; for they were to offer totally unblemished animals. And yet there was no totally unblemished animal. We need to recognize that God sets an ultimately high standard, but is prepared to accept our achievement of a lower standard- i.e. God makes concessions. We all disobey the same commandments of Christ day by day and hour by hour. Yet we have a firm hope in salvation. Therefore obedience to commandments is not the only necessity for salvation. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48) goes unfulfilled by each of us- as far as our own obedience is concerned. It is possible to disobey Christ's commandments every day and be saved. If this statement is false, then salvation is only possible if we attain God's moral perfection, which is impossible. If disobedience to Christ's commands is tolerable by God (on account of our faith in the atonement), how can we decide *which* of those commandments we will tolerate being broken by our brethren, and which of them we will disfellowship for? If we cannot recognize degrees of sin, it is difficult to pronounce some commands to be more important than others.

There are times when Paul's inspired commentary opens up some of the Lord's more difficult sayings. On "Be you therefore perfect", Paul's comment is: "Be perfected" (2 Cor. 13:11). This is quite different to how many may take it- 'Let God perfect you' is the message. Relatively late in his career Paul could comment: "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect" (Phil. 3:12), alluding to the Lord's bidding to be perfect as our Father is (Mt. 5:48). Through this allusion to the Gospels, Paul is showing his own admission of failure to live up to the standard set. And yet we must compare "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect" with "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect..." (Phil. 3:12,15). In 1 Cor. 13:10, he considers he is 'perfect', and has put away the things of childhood. Thus he saw his spiritual maturity only on account of his being in Christ; for he himself was not "already perfect", he admitted.

Luke's account has "be merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). Quite simply, who God is should inspire us to be like Him; to copy His characteristics [the things of His Name] in

our personalities. We must be "perfect" as our Father is; "be ye holy", because He is holy (1 Pet. 1:14-16); "kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God forgave... be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children" (Eph. 4:32; 5:1); "merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). Prov. 19:11RV uses language frequently applied to Yahweh Himself and applies it to the wise man: "The discretion of a man maketh him slow to anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression". And thus Phinehas was commended for being "jealous with my jealousy" (Num. 25:11 RV)- his emotion at that time was a mirror of that of God Himself. Not only was language re-interpreted by the Christians. Whole concepts were reoriented. Holiness in the sense of separation from the unclean had been a major theme in the Mosaic Law, and it figured largely in the theology of the Pharisees. But the Lord quoted "Be holy because I, Yahweh your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2) as "Be ye therefore merciful, even as your father in heaven is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). To be merciful to those who sin is now the true holiness- not merely separation from them and condemnation of their ways. Note, too, how He invites us to interpret the Yahweh as "father", rather than transliterating the Name.

The Lord's manifesto as recorded in the Sermon on the Mount was structured and set up by Him in some ways as a 'new law' as opposed to the old law of Moses. And yet His law likewise proves impossible to keep. We cannot be perfect as our Father is. To a man and to a woman, we would admit that we cannot fully forgive our enemies from our hearts. And so, according to the Lord's law, we each stand unforgiven. We are to sell all that we have and give to the poor, or risk forfeiting the Kingdom because of our love of this world's goods (Mk. 10:17-22). An angry thought is murder, a passing lustful look becomes adultery- all mortal sins, which catch each of us within their net. Why was this? Surely yet again, the Lord wished to convict us of our guilt before Him, our inabilities, our desperation... so that we could come to appreciate the wonder of His character and His saving grace. For He was the one and only embodiment of His own teaching, to the point that the person who fulfilled all His teaching was in fact He Himself- and no other man. In knowing Him, we thus know our own desperation, and yet we likewise know- because we know Him- the certainty of our salvation by grace. Further, it becomes apparent that the Lord accepted with open arms those who were so very far from the ideals He laid down in the Sermon on the Mount. He convicted them of their guilt in such a way that with joy and peace they ran to His grace.

Notes

- (1) Samuel T. Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary of the New Testament* (Jersey City: Ktav, 1987) p. 75.
- (2) *Ibid.* p. 77
- (3) As quoted in Geza Vermes, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 2004) p. 314.

- (4) N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: S.P.C.K., 2001) p. 289.
- (5) Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: S.C.M., 2001 ed.) pp. 74-76.
- (6) John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount: Christian Counter-culture* (Leicester: I.V.P., 2003) p.84.

