

A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS

XLV. The Sermon On The Mount: False And True Righteousness

I. Christ's Righteousness Regarding The Issue Of Love

(Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-30, 32-36)

I. Introduction

- A. Christ's great Sermon on the Mount provided valuable insight on God's true righteousness, what Israel's religious leaders greatly lacked as seen in their dead traditionalism.
- B. To illustrate the contrast between the false righteousness of Israel's leaders and God's true righteousness, Jesus gave six illustrations, with the sixth illustration regarding the issue of love in Matthew 5:43-48 and Luke 6:27-30, 32-36. We study these passages for insight, application and edification (as follows):

II. Christ's Righteousness Regarding The Issue Of Love, Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-30, 32-36.

- A. Jesus revealed that true, divine righteousness is marked by a selfless love in contrast to the self-centered love of Israel's Pharisees, Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-30, 32-36:
 - 1. The Mosaic Law at Leviticus 19:18 taught that the Hebrew people were not to avenge or bear a grudge against other Hebrews, but to love their neighbors as themselves.
 - 2. However, the "Pharisees taught that one should love those near and dear to him . . . but that Israel's enemies should be hated" as "God's means of judging their enemies," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 31.
 - 3. Conversely, Jesus taught that "true righteousness causes" one "to love enemies," that "(i)f the believer loves only those who return love, the believer is selfish and is not fulfilling the demands of the holiness of God" (J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, 1991, p. 181); Matthew 5:43-44a.
 - 4. Thus, truly righteous believers love their enemies by blessing those who curse them, by doing good to those who hate them and by praying for those who persecute them, for then they reflect the righteous love of God their Father in heaven Who makes His sun to rise on evil as well as good people, and Who sends His rain on the just and the unjust, Matthew 5:44b-45.
 - 5. Jesus added that if one loved only his close associates like the Pharisees did, he would have no reward from God, for even the wicked tax collectors selfishly loved their close associates, Matthew 5:46. If one gave a friendly greeting only to his close associates, he would be no more righteous than the tax collectors who selfishly gave friendly greetings to their close associates, Matthew 5:47. "The Pharisees entertained in order to receive hospitality in return. They loved the elaborate greetings in the marketplace in which one sought to outdo the other in heaping accolades on the one being greeted. But this did not fulfill the demands of the holiness of God" because of the selfish motives that were behind such practices. (Ibid.)
 - 6. In summary, Jesus urged His disciples to be "perfect," the Greek term being *teleioi*, "mature . . . or holy" in righteous love as God the Father is, to be **selfless** like God, Matthew 5:48 (Ibid., B. K. C., N. T., p. 32):
 - a. "The perfection of God is the standard for entrance into Messiah's kingdom. Pharisaic precepts, concerned as they were with the externals of the law, could not make the individual perfect and acceptable to God" (Ibid., Pentecost)
 - b. Christ "did not lower His standard to accommodate humans; instead He set forth His absolute holiness as the standard," Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T.
- B. Though "this standard" of God's perfect righteousness "can never be perfectly met by man himself, a person who by faith trusts in God enjoys His righteousness being reproduced in his life" if he is justified by faith in Christ and he walks by means of the Holy Spirit (Ibid.):
 - 1. The Mosaic Law could not make one righteous, for it set the standard of God's righteousness that exposed man's inability to be righteous in his own efforts due to the sin that was in him, Romans 3:20; 7:13-14.
 - 2. Nevertheless, what the Mosaic Law could not achieve in terms of righteousness for man due to man's sin, God in sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful men and for sin condemned sin in His body on the cross that the righteousness of the Mosaic Law might be fulfilled in believers in Christ who live not by the power of the sinful nature, but by relying on the indwelling Holy Spirit, Romans 8:3-4 with Galatians 5:16.

Lesson: *The Pharisees taught a selfish love that was no better than the love of the despised, wicked tax collectors of Jesus' day where Christ taught a selfless love that led one to love even his foes. This selfless love is available only to those who trust in Christ as their Savior from sin and who live in reliance on the Holy Spirit's power.*

Application: *To love as God loves, may we receive Christ as our Savior from sin and rely on the Holy Spirit.*