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The Herald of His Grace

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Volume XVII
Issue 410

Does God Hold Himself to a Higher Standard?

by — James Flanders

In Matthew chapter 5, we find some very familiar words. Christ is talking to a large group of people in what is traditionally called the “Sermon on the Mount.” As He talks to them about the *kingdom of heaven* (the kingdom they had been looking for and anticipating, the kingdom that they, as Israel, had been promised would one day come), in the midst of His teaching, beginning in :43 He says to His followers,

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Have you ever noticed in that passage what Christ is proclaiming to His followers as the way they are to relate to one another and those around them – including enemies? They were to love their enemies and pray for those who spitefully used them. By living this out – loving in this way – they would be recognized as sons of God.

As He speaks of this most amazing way of dealing with those who hate them, He is saying that this is the way that Father deals with those who hate Him.

He says, “*be perfect as your Father is perfect.*” What is perfect? Loving in this way.

Father sends rain on the just and the unjust. Unlike a tax collector who loves only those who love him back, God loves those who don’t love Him, and does good to those who hate Him.

That’s what Christ is saying. Let that sink in.

So often, it seems, I’ve heard it preached that this is the standard that God is calling people to, yet at the same time, it doesn’t seem to be the standard that God ultimately has for Himself – which makes no sense to me. What do you think?

We’re to love our enemies, bless them, turn the cheek, and even forgive seventy times seven times for the same offense. Yet, is that the picture orthodoxy paints of God in the end? Is that how they say that God deals with those who don’t love Him back?

Let me ask you: Could a lot of what is traditionally taught actually be a sad misrepresentation of God?

(see *STANDARD*, page 3679)

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Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

ISSN: 1936-9360

Volume XVII, No. 410 – August 20, 2013

This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

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STANDARD (continued from front page)

After all, is it possible that God would hold people to a higher standard of love than He has for Himself? After all, isn't God called "Love"?

Listen to what the Apostle John wrote in 1 John 4:8-11.

He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

We're to seek to love in the way Jesus described, and here John tells us why: It's because God is love.

The amazing thing is not mankind's love for God, but God's love for mankind.

He tells us that,

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Now I want you to notice in this passage John tells us that God is love.

He doesn't tell us that love is one characteristic of God. Nope, he says that God is love, and He loved us so much that he sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Another Scripture tells us that Christ was the propitiation for our sins; but not for ours only, but also for the entire world (2:2).

Let this sink in. God loves us and sent His son to be the total payment, the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but for the entire world.

Now here's a big question: When did He do this, and

why? Was it in response to us loving Him? Was it because we first committed ourselves to Him?

Nope.

Listen to what the Apostle Paul says about Christ dying for us in Romans 5:6-11.

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Let's read those same verses from the Concordant Literal New Testament.

For Christ, while we are still infirm, still in accord with the era, for the sake of the irreverent, died. For hardly for the sake of a just man will anyone be dying: for, for the sake of a good man, perhaps someone may even be daring to die, yet God is commending this love of His to us, seeing that, while we are still sinners, Christ died for our sakes. Much rather, then, being now justified in His blood, we shall be saved from indignation, through Him.

We're not justified by our own effort, our own goodness or our own works. We are justified in His blood and saved from indignation through Him.

Then in :10 we read,

For if, being enemies, we were conciliated to God through the death of His Son.

When were we conciliated to God? When were we still enemies! ▶

Through what? Through the death of His Son.

Much rather, being conciliated, we shall be saved in His life. Yet not only so, but we are glorying also in God, through our Lord, Jesus Christ, through Whom we now obtained the conciliation.

OK, so God sent Christ to die for the ungodly, the irreverent, the unjust, for sinners.

If you claim that Christ died for you, then you are confessing that you have qualified as ungodly, irreverent and unjust, a sinner.

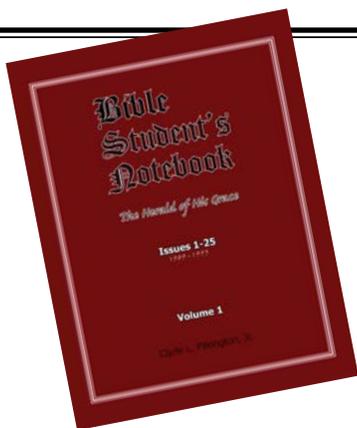
Good news my friend. Christ came to save sinners!

Now, back to the verses we started with. Christ speaks of loving our enemies, blessing those who

curse us, and doing good to those who hate us, and as a result being recognizable as sons of God by doing these things.

That lines up perfectly with the heart, nature and character of God that Paul described in Romans 5 which we just read – Christ dying for the ungodly, the irreverent, the unjust, for sinners. Why? Because it's an expression of God's love for the ungodly, the irreverent, the unjust, for sinners.

Because of the love of God, He demonstrated His love for humanity. Making the point that there is nothing we could do, no price we could pay, no sacrifice that we could make that could ever come close to what Christ has done for us. It's God loving you and me and the worst of humanity, proving it on the cross. We read that Christ is the propitiation for our sins, and not ours only, but for the whole world.



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To me, these things that I'm sharing, these things we see in the Word of God, make it sound like God is fully committed to loving in the way that Jesus was teaching His followers to love – not only to love their neighbors and those who love them, but to love even their enemies, because that's what God does.

“But James, what about the judgment of God that we read about in Scriptures? What about things like the Lake of Fire?”

“Isn't judgment about God torturing people because they didn't happen to love Him before dying?”

I don't think so.

Now let me tell you, I believe in the judgment of God. If you've been hoping that Hitler gets his day to stand before God, believe me: he will!

I believe, though, that God's judgment, including the Great White Throne judgment and even the Lake of Fire serve a purpose other than eternal torture.

Think about it: Does it seem to make sense that eternally torturing a person would fall into the category

of justice, love or good – especially when orthodoxy and traditionalists teach that people who simply were born on the wrong side of the planet and aren't reached before their death are tortured forever by God for simply not hearing and responding to the “good news”?

Think about this. In Romans 12 Paul speaks to us as the Body of Christ, as believers, offering ourselves as a living sacrifice in response to the great salvation we have been given. At the end of that chapter he talks about you and me not being overcome with evil, but overcoming evil with good!

Let me tell you, I believe ultimately that what God is going to do is overcome all of the evil and all of the sin with good.

Now think about this: Would you consider torturing and tormenting a person eternally, forever and ever, without end to be a good thing?

Maybe that person lived fifty years in unbelief, never knowing the love of God, maybe never hearing about it, never seeing it, never coming to an understanding of the truth. So, in response God is going to tor- ►

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ture that person forever and ever and ever? Does that sound at all like overcoming evil with good?

At this point in my life I am convinced that, when it comes to the judgment of God, it is for the ultimate good of the one being judged and that it will serve a loving purpose. Why? Because God is love!

When it comes to God and his dealings with humanity, His judgment is corrective in nature.

Now this is a big topic. It's an important topic, and as I think about it, I can't help but remember the words of Christ as He hung on the cross bleeding and dying, as He looked on His accusers, those who had plotted against Him, those who had lied about Him, those who had beaten Him with whips, those who had spit upon Him, and those who had driven in the nails, and remember what He prayed.

Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

Let me ask you, my friend: Couldn't the same thing be said today of those who have yet to hear the Gospel of grace and are living in their idolatry and false religion? That they don't know what they are doing?



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by — A.E. Knoch

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Couldn't it also be said of those who have heard and rejected Christ that they really don't know what they are doing? That for those who are living a life of total rebellion against everything godly and good that they really don't know what they are doing?

Do you think that if they really knew what they are doing that they would be doing it?

One day they will face judgment, but ultimately it will serve a good and loving purpose, because God is love and I believe He holds himself to an even higher standard of love, mercy, compassion and grace than Jesus was calling His followers to in Matthew 5.

I'm slowly discovering that God truly *is* love, and that everything He does ultimately serves a loving purpose, even for those who are temporarily living as His enemies.

Thank you so much for your prayers. I truly need them.

Be blessed my friend. Be blessed. ■

Celestial Citizenship

by — A.E. Knoch (1874-1965)

We have no valid rights on earth. It, with its fullness, belongs to Jehovah, and He has not delegated any of its privileges to us. But why should we wish to meddle here, seeing that God has given us a far more glorious sphere? We are citizens of the heavens (3:20). We will not go there as fugitives of earth or as guests dependent on the hospitality of others. We will need no pass, no visa, as though we were foreigners, limited in our rights and restricted in our movements, alien expatriates, despised emigrants of a despicable and death-doomed race. This we would be in ourselves, but in Christ we are entitled to all of the rights and privileges which He Himself can claim.

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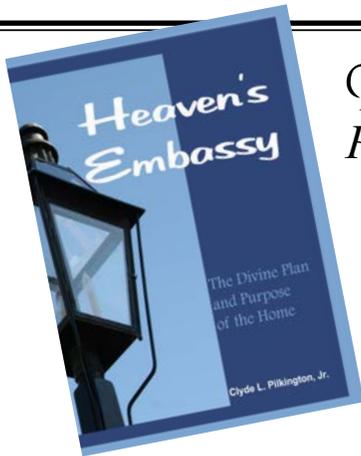


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