

obeyed, our society, our country, and ourselves would soon be destroyed by those who are intent on doing evil. It is clear therefore, that when the Lord was speaking these words, He was speaking more in the language of a parable, that is, He was relating spiritual truths in natural terms. What is meant to be understood and obeyed is not the literal meaning of these words but their deeper or internal meaning. That this is so we can see from this passage from the Arcana Coelestia:

"Who cannot see that these words are not to be understood according to the sense of the letter? For who will turn the left jaw to him who deals a blow on the right jaw? And who will not resist evil? What is there treated of is spiritual life, the life of faith, not natural life which is the life of the world."

(Arcana Coelestia 9049)

The children of Israel were given the law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, known as the law of retaliation (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21). This law understood more deeply is a law by which the evil are kept in order. It is the law which reigns over hell. This law is that every evil carries with it the corresponding punishment which is in that evil. This can be seen in the words from Deuteronomy 19:19, "*you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother.*" So, for example, when an evil spirit intends doing evil to another, he immediately brings upon himself the punishment which corresponds to that intended evil. That punishment is not inflicted by angels, nor by the Lord, but by other evil spirits who are permitted to punish. Thus the evil intended to be done to others recoils upon those who attempt to do it. In the other life those who wish to do evil are kept in order, and evil is kept restrained by means of this law of retaliation. (see Apocalypse Explained 556)

When the Lord said resist not evil, He was speaking about this law of retaliation in relation to those who are in good. Those who are in good, as are the angels, never wish to retaliate, but forgive freely, because they know that the Lord protects the good from the evil according to the good which is with them. Everything has a corresponding opposite. So, just as evil brings with it its own punishment, so also good has its own reward. Those who do good to others are continually receiving good from the Lord. In proportion as they do good, they receive good. And so far as angels and people receive good, they are protected by the Lord from the evil, thus as to their spirit they cannot be harmed.

With respect to the meaning of "resist not evil" and turning the other cheek, it is said in Apocalypse Explained 556:

"Resist not evil signifies that there should be no fighting back or retaliation; for angels do not fight with the evil, much less do they return evil for evil, but they allow it to be done, since they are protected by the Lord, and therefore no evil from hell can do them harm. 'Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other also,' signifies that if anyone wishes to do harm to the perception and understanding of interior truth, it may be allowed as to the effort... This also is what the angels do when they are with the evil, for the evil can take away no good and truth from the angels, but they can from those who ... burn with enmity, hatred, and revenge, for these evils prevent and repel protection by the Lord. This is the spiritual sense of these words, in which are stored up the hidden things that have now been said which are especially for the angels... They are also for those in the world who are in good, when the evil are trying to lead them astray." (Apocalypse Explained 556)

The evil in the other life are punished by their own evils, that is, the evil they try to do to others recoils upon themselves. The good on the other hand receive good in proportion as they intend good. They are protected from the evil so far as they remain in good. So we read:

"From all this it can be seen what is meant by the Lord's words in Matthew about loving one's enemy, and about the law of retaliation, which was not set aside by the Lord, but explained; namely, that they who are in heavenly love should take no delight in retaliation or revenge, but in doing good; and that the very law of order which protects the good, achieves this of itself, by means of those who are evil." (Arcana Coelestia 8223)

The law of order here treated of applies to those in the other life, who are in the spiritual world, and as well as to those of us in this life as to spiritual things. But we may ask, how does this law apply to our lives in this world, that is, to civil, moral, and also ecclesiastical affairs? We can see that to literally not resist evil and turn the other cheek would be insane and benefit only the wicked. As we read earlier in Arcana Coelestia 9049, the Lord's words in Matthew are not to be taken literally. We can also see that to retaliate against every wrongdoing, to act out of revenge and hatred is to do evil. How then are we to understand and practice these words in relation to our life in the world?

Loving one's enemies means to act out of charity to the evil as well as to the good. It is really acting out of a love of the neighbor. But charity is not to be exercised indiscriminately. It can be easily seen that bestowing benefits upon the evil equally as upon the good may indirectly result in encouraging and aiding those who are in evil, and also may result in harming those who are innocent. Charity is to be exercised in accordance with the nature of the love which is with the neighbor, thus in one way to the good and in another way to those intent upon evil. We read in the Arcana Coelestia:

"The affection of charity consists in loving one's enemies, and in doing good to the evil. But enemies are loved, and good is done to them, when they are instructed, and also when they are corrected through suitable measures." (Arcana Coelestia 9174)

Further it is said in True Christian Religion 407:

"To love the neighbor is not only to wish well and do good to a relative, a friend, or a good man, but also to a stranger, an enemy, or a bad man. But charity is to be exercised to the latter in one way and toward the former in another; toward a relative or friend by direct benefits; toward an enemy or a bad man by indirect benefits, which are rendered by exhortation, discipline, punishment, and consequent amendment... A judge who punishes an evil-doer in accordance with law and justice, loves his neighbor; for so he makes him better, and consults the welfare of the citizens. Everyone knows that a father who chastises his children when they do wrong loves them, and that, on the other hand, he who does not on that account chastise them, loves their evils, and this cannot be called charity...The end in view declares whether it is charity or not." (True Christian Religion 407)

Charity towards those in evil may appear as anger or punishment, yet with those who have genuine charity it is not anger, but actually a zeal for doing what is right. (True Christian Religion 408)

In order to exercise genuine charity to others it is necessary that we have something of genuine charity within ourselves. Genuine charity comes to be within us by our first putting away the evils we have. Therefore, the first act of being charitable is for us not to do evil, and the second is to do good. When our evil intentions and behavior are resisted and put away, then the Lord is able to enter and give us not only a genuine desire to do good to the neighbor, but also

the wisdom necessary to do it. By means of such wisdom we can better discern how best to serve our neighbor. For us to come into that state meant by the Lord's words "to resist not evil" and turn the other cheek, and so to truly be able to love our enemy, we must be in a state of regeneration by the Lord. Putting away evils as sins, and then doing good, this is what the Lord meant when He commanded us to be perfect.

Amen.

Prayer:

We will sing of mercy and justice. To You, O LORD, we will sing praises.
We will behave wisely in a perfect way. We will walk within your house with a perfect heart.
He who walks in a perfect way, he shall serve You. (cf. Psalm 101:1-2, 6)

LESSONS

Lesson I

Exodus 21:22-25 (NKJV)

²² "If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges *determine*.

²³ But if *any* harm follows, then you shall give life for life,

²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

Leviticus 24:19-20, 22 (NKJV)

¹⁹ If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him--

²⁰ fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him.

²² You shall have the same law for the stranger and for one from your own country; for I *am* the LORD your God.' "

Deuteronomy 19:15-21 (NKJV)

¹⁵ "One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.

¹⁶ If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing,

¹⁷ then both men in the controversy shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days.

¹⁸ And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, *if* the witness *is* a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother,

¹⁹ then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you.

²⁰ And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you.

²¹ Your eye shall not pity: life *shall be* for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Lesson II

Matthew 5:43-48 (NKJV, KJV)

³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, '*An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.*'

³⁹ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

⁴⁰ If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also.

⁴¹ And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

⁴² Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, '*You shall love your neighbor* and hate your enemy.'

⁴⁴ 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,

⁴⁵ 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.

⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

⁴⁷ And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

⁴⁸ **Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.**

Lesson III

AC 894.

... there is no definite period of time within which man's regeneration is completed, so that he can say, "I am now perfect;" for there are illimitable states of evil and falsity with every man, not only simple states but also states in many ways compounded, which must be so far shaken off as no longer to appear, as said above. In some states the man may be said to be more perfect, but in very many others not so. Those who have been regenerated in the life of the body and have lived in faith in the Lord and in charity toward the neighbor, are continually being perfected in the other life.

AC 8326. And plant them. ... this signifies regeneration continually, from the signification of "planting," as being to regenerate, for regeneration is like planting. When a tree is planted, it grows into branches, leaves, and fruits, and from the seeds of the fruits it grows into new trees; and so on. Similar is the case with a person's regeneration, and therefore in the Word a person is compared to a tree, and a person who has been regenerated to a garden or paradise. The truths of faith with him are compared to the leaves, and the goods of charity to the fruits. The seeds from which come new trees to the truths which are from good, or what is the same, to faith which comes from charity. It is said "regeneration continually," because a person's regeneration begins, but never ceases, being continually perfected, not only while he lives in the world, but also in the other life to eternity; and yet he can never arrive at any such perfection that he can be compared to the Divine.

AMEN.

Sermon on Being Perfect, Part II - Going the Extra Mile

Lessons: Genesis 1:9-13

Luke 6:26, 29-36; Matt. 5:40-42

Arcana Coelestia 9174:3

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“If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.” (Matthew 5:40-42)

As we noted in the sermon last week, when the Lord delivered the Sermon on the Mount, he set some really high standards for us to live by. First, he was telling us to not resist an evil person and instead to turn the other cheek. This was the subject of our sermon last week. This week we continue on the theme of being perfect with a discussion of the Lord's instructions that, "If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your coat also. Whoever compels you to go one mile, go two. And give to those who ask you, and don't turn away anyone who wants to borrow from you."

The Lord's words as given in Matthew are reflected in the gospel of Luke with a similar intent. In Luke we are told that, "... from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask for *them* back. If you lend to *those* from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? ... But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High."

Are we meant to lend to those who ask us, never requesting nor hoping for the return of what we lent? Should we give away our clothes to those who ask for them? If that sounds far-fetched, think of those charities which ask for used clothing, food for the hungry, and the donation of old automobiles. If we were to practice literally the principle of going the extra mile, we would not only donate our old clothing, but donate our new clothing also – even the shirt off our back. And we would feel compelled to not only donate our old car, but give away our new or running automobile also. By contrast just walking an extra mile sounds easy. How then are these words of the Lord meant to be understood and obeyed?

Charity is meant to be practiced with wisdom and prudence. What we are meant to understand and obey is not simply the literal meaning of the Lord's words but their deeper or internal meaning. We are meant to live according to the spirit of the Lord's words. It is this meaning, and our obedience to this deeper meaning that gives life to the letter. That passage we read last week from Arcana Coelestia 9049 applies to this text also:

"Who cannot see that these words are not to be understood according to the sense of the letter? ... What is there treated of is spiritual life, the life of faith, not natural life which is the life of the world."
(Arcana Coelestia 9049)

First, let us consider one reason why we are not to simply give away our money, clothing, automobiles, houses, land, or whatever, to anyone who asks. Doing so would obviously quickly result in our own poverty and place us in the position of being needy and then in want in all things. And being in need of all things, we would not be in a very good position to continue practicing charity. We know this from common sense. This is also explained in Arcana Coelestia where it treats of how a person should be a neighbor to himself first. There we read:

The saying that everyone is a neighbor to himself and has to look after himself first should be understood in the following way. Everyone must first provide himself with the necessities of life - with food, clothing, accommodation, and many other things which are necessary for living in his community. He must provide them not only for himself but also for his dependents; and not only for the present but for the future also. Unless everyone acquires the necessities of life for himself he is in no condition to exercise charity towards the neighbor, since he himself is in want of everything.

The end in view makes plain the way in which everyone ought to be a neighbor to himself and look after himself first. If his end is to become richer than others solely for the sake of possessing riches, indulging in pleasures, holding important positions, and the like, it is bad. Therefore anyone who supposes, because he is ruled by that kind of end, that he is being a neighbor to himself is harming himself to eternity. But if his end is to acquire wealth in order to provide the necessities of life for himself and his dependents and so be in a condition to do good in the ways that the teachings about charity command, he is looking after

himself for evermore. His actual end in view makes a person what he is, since that end is his love; for everyone has as his end that which he loves. (Arcana Coelestia 6934, 6935)

From these passages, we can get a sense of what the Lord meant when he was telling us not to hope for or expect something in return when we may give to others. He was referring to our not taking merit in the good things and actions we may do that benefit others. We should walk that extra mile, but not brag about it. However, the Lord, after telling us to do good and to lend, hoping for nothing in return, then speaks of our being rewarded by being sons of the Most High. Now that puts us into a bit of a quandary. If we are to do good hoping for nothing in return, then why does the Lord then speak of our being rewarded? It seems as if we are meant to forget about that last part. We should go about doing good, hoping for no reward in heaven or about being sons of the Most High. Is it even possible, after being told about a reward for doing good, then to not hope for or desire it?

Well, yes it is possible. But we don't come into this state of thinking quickly. It's connected with our regeneration. In the beginning of regeneration, of being born again, we are still doing a lot of good with ourselves in mind. For example, I don't want to end up in hell, so I will shun evils as sins and obey the commandments and do good. Aren't we then thinking about heaven as being a reward for doing good – or escaping hell because we are obeying the Lord and living according to the commandments?

Well, yes, very likely we are. And the Lord provides for this. He knows that in the beginning of our spiritual development, our regeneration, we are motivated largely out of self-interest. We can see this reflected in what is said about the third day of creation in the Genesis story. On the third day of creation we have the bringing forth of grass, seed-bearing herbs, and trees bearing fruit. The creation story in Genesis is not meant to be taken literally. Like the Lord's parables, it has a deeper meaning. It is the story of our spiritual rebirth or regeneration. The third day refers to the state we come into when we start producing something that is good, something that has some life in it such as is represented by vegetation and fruit trees. The Arcana Coelestia says concerning that state:

When the "earth" or individual, has been prepared to receive celestial seeds from the Lord, and to produce something of what is good and true, then the Lord first causes some tender thing to spring forth, which is called the "tender herb;" then something more useful, ... and is called the "herb yielding seed;" and at length something good which becomes fruitful, and is called the "tree bearing

fruit.... The person who is being regenerated is at first of such a quality that he supposes the good which he does, and the truth which he speaks, to be from himself, when in reality all good and all truth are from the Lord, so that whosoever supposes them to be from himself has not as yet the life of true faith, which nevertheless he may afterwards receive; for he cannot as yet believe that they are from the Lord, because he is only in a state of preparation for the reception of the life of faith. This state is here represented by things inanimate, and the succeeding one of the life of faith, by animate things. (Arcana Coelestia 29)

The fact that we may, in the beginning of regeneration and in doing good, have something of our self-interest involved is part of our spiritual development. The Lord provides for this. In fact, He uses it to prepare us for the reception of the life of faith and later the reception of the life of good. The life of good is represented by the seventh day in the creation story. When we come into that state, then we are motivated to do good for the sake of good. And then we don't think about reward or about doing good for the sake of any reward. That is called the celestial or heavenly state. Now, imagine doing something simply because it is good, because it is the right thing to do, with no thought of reward or of being rewarded in mind. When we can do that – then we can get a vision and feeling of that heavenly state that the Lord was referring to when he told us *"do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return."*

Amen.

Prayer:

The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds him with His hand.

I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread.

He is ever merciful, and lends; And his descendants are blessed. Depart from evil, and do good; And dwell forevermore. (Psalm 37:23-27)

LESSONS

Lesson I

Genesis 1:9-13 (NKJV)

⁹ And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry *land* appear"; and it was so.

¹⁰ And God called the dry *land* Earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas. And God saw that *it was* good.

¹¹ Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed, *and* the fruit tree *that* yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed *is* in itself, on the earth"; and it was so.

¹² And the earth brought forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed according to its kind, and the tree *that* yields fruit, whose seed *is* in itself according to its kind. And God saw that *it was* good.

¹³ And the evening and the morning were the third day.

Lesson II

Luke 6:26, 29-36 (NKJV)

²⁶ Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets.

²⁹ To him who strikes you on the *one* cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic either.

³⁰ Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back.

³¹ And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.

³² But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.

³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.

³⁴ And if you lend *to those* from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back.

³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the ungrateful and evil.

³⁶ Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

Matthew 5:40-42 (NKJV)

⁴⁰ If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also.

⁴¹ And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

⁴² Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

Lesson III

Arcana Coelestia 9174.

[3] When "borrowing" and "lending" are mentioned in the Word, there is signified to be instructed and to instruct from the affection of charity; as in Matthew:

Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. (Matt. 5:42);

It is evident that "asking" here does not mean asking, for it is said, "Give to everyone who asks"; and neither by "borrowing" is meant borrowing; for if a person were to give to everyone who asks, and also to everyone who would borrow, he would be stripped of all his goods. But as the Lord spoke from the Divine, by "asking," and "wishing to borrow;" and by giving and receiving a loan, is meant the communication of heavenly goods, which are the knowledges of good and truth. In regard to such a communication the fact is that the more an angel gives to another from the affection of charity, the more there flows into him the general good from heaven, that is, from the Lord. Thus by "giving to him who asks," an angel is not deprived of goods, but is enriched with them. The case is the same with a person, when he does good to another from the affection of charity. But charity consists in giving to the good. It is not charity to give to the evil what they ask and desire according to these words in David:

The wicked borrows and does not repay, But the righteous shows mercy and gives. (Ps. 37:21)

And in Luke:

And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back.

But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. (Luke 6:34-35)

AMEN