**Perfect Love**

***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 and pray for those who persecute you,****45****so that you may be sons of your Father who is 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 do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?****47****And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?****48****You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48, ESV)*

 Since we are God’s children, our love must be on a higher level than the love of the worldly masses. Greetings dearly beloved in the Lord, as we talk today about love according to Jesus’ definition. The worldly have their own definitions of what loving looks like. For them (the worldly), love can be an emotional reality, a sexual one, or even expressed by agreement to human ideas. In the Scriptures, however, love begins with God, and mankind follows His example of loving and learns from Him. The most important work of love ever was the salvific act of the Lord Jesus. God’s love can be seen in our daily lives, too, though. Therefore, today we’re going to speak about perfect or complete love, which is not your everyday understanding of it. Again, I stress that since we are God’s children, our love must be on a higher level than the love of the worldly masses. Let’s see how this Divine love expresses itself…

 Our love is called to follow the example of God’s love and not that of our own human logic. In Jesus’ days, everyone knew the word from the Scriptures that said, “Love your neighbor.” But “hate your enemy” had become an accepted moral stance over time (though it was not found in the Scriptures). The great enemy, the Roman Empire was always pressuring the people of God and God’s people were in a constant state of suffering, with the exception of the upper class. Jesus, through these few verses, was purifying their understanding of love. The children of the Heavenly Father were to love like He did. They needed to love, bless, and do good to those who were either working against the Lord God or were opposed to Him as a life stance. In other words, (bringing it to our context), Jesus is saying that a Christian needs to have God’s *modus operandi* (in relationships), and not the world’s. If a believer acts no differently than an unbeliever, then his or her life-fruit will also not be different than the lost people around, who do not know God.

 In that time period, tax-collectors were generally hated because of their habit of extortion. To collect a little extra on top of the tax was an accepted practice, since the tax-collector’s income was to come from that, but this practice had gone to the extreme, and they generally were exorbitant with their “extra fees”. It was a vicious cycle: the more the tax collector took from the people, the more they were hated. The more they were hated or felt hated, the more the ripped the people off.

 In the other example that Jesus gave, a greeting in that time period was much more meaningful than today. When people said, “Hello (peace/shalom)” to each other, it was something that could be considered a spiritual act. In a way, a greeting became a prayer for their brother or sister Israelite. Jesus, however, wanted his disciples to pray for all people, since God did not discriminate among his creatures. He grants everyone the blessings of His created nature.

 Therefore, today we are called to meditate on our behavior toward others: how do we deal with those who are against us? Are we patient with them, or do we sin against them as they do against us? Do we start a war with them, or do we work for peace? Do we show love or hate to our adversaries? Think about this: if God showed us consistent love when were lost, and unbelieving in Him, then we are to be the same way to those unbelievers or even anti-Christian people around us.

 If we want the lost to repent and to come to Christ, they need to see God’s love in us (as opposed to the world’s love). May the Lord teach us to love by His standards, so that people see His love in us (and among us) and desire to have it in their lives as well.

Our love is called to follow the example of God’s love and not that of our own human logic. Since we are God’s children, our love must be on a higher level than the love of the worldly masses. The Lord bless you all. Amen.