

J.C. Ryle:

WE have here our Lord Jesus Christ's rules for our conduct towards on another. He that would know how he ought to feel and act towards his fellow-man, should often study these verses. They deserve to be written in letters of gold: they have extorted praise even from the enemies of Christianity. Let us mark well what they contain.

The Lord Jesus forbids everything like an unforgiving and revengeful spirit.

"I say unto you, That ye resist not evil." A readiness to resent injuries, a quickness in taking offence, a quarrelsome and contentious disposition, a keenness in asserting our rights,-all, all are contrary to the mind of Christ. The world may see no harm in these habits of the mind; but they do not become the character of the Christian. Our Master says, "Resist not evil."

The Lord Jesus enjoins on us a spirit of universal love and charity.

"I say unto you, Love your enemies." We ought to put away all malice: we ought to return good for evil, and blessing for cursing. Moreover we are not to love in word only, but in deed; we are to deny ourselves, and take trouble, in order to be kind and courteous: if any man "compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." We are to put up with much and bear much, rather than hurt another, or give offence. In all things we are to be unselfish. Our thought must never be, "How do others behave to me?" but "What would Christ have me to do?"

A standard of conduct like this may seem, at first sight, extravagantly high. But we must never content ourselves with aiming at one lower. We must observe the two weighty arguments by which our Lord backs up this part of His instruction. They deserve serious attention.

For one thing, if we do not aim at the spirit and temper which are here recommended, we are not yet children of God.

What does our "Father which is in heaven" do? He is kind to all: He sends rain on good and evil alike; He causes "His sun" to shine on all without distinction.--A child should be like his father; but where is our likeness to our Father in heaven if we cannot show mercy and kindness to everybody? Where is the evidence we are new creatures if we lack charity? It is altogether wanting. We must yet be "born again." (John 3:7.)

For another thing, if we do not aim at the spirit and temper here recommended, we are manifestly yet of the world.

"What do ye more then others?" is our Lord's solemn question. Even those who have no religion can "love those who love them;" they can do good and show kindness when affection or interest moves them. But a Christian ought to be influenced by higher principles than these.--Do we flinch from the test? Do we find it impossible to do good to our enemies? If that be the case we may be sure we have yet to be converted. As yet we have not "received the Spirit of God." (I Cor. 2:12.)

There is much in this that calls loudly for solemn reflection. There are few passages of Scripture so calculated to raise in our minds humbling thoughts. We have here a lovely picture of the Christian as he ought to be. We cannot look at it without painful feelings: we must all allow that it differs widely from the Christian as he is. Let us carry away from it two general lessons.

In the first place, if the spirit of these ten verses were more continually remembered by true believers they would recommend Christianity to the world far more than they do.

We must not allow ourselves to suppose that the least words in this passage are trifling and of small moment: they are not so. It is attention to the spirit of this passage which makes our religion beautiful: it is the neglect of the things which it contains by which our religion is deformed. Unfailing courtesy, kindness, tenderness, and consideration for others, are some of the greatest ornaments to the character of a child of God. The world can understand these things if it cannot understand doctrine. There is no religion in rudness, roughness, bluntness, and incivility. The perfection of practical Christianity consists in attending to the little duties of holiness as well as to the great.

In the second place, if the spirit of these ten verses had more dominion and power in the world, how much

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew 5:38-48

happier the world would be then it is.

Who does not know that quarrelings, strifes, selfishness, and unkindness, causes half the miseries by which mankind is visited? Who can fail to see that nothing would so much tend to increase happiness as the spread of Christian love, such as is here recommended by our Lord? Those who fancy that true religion has any tendency to make men unhappy, are greatly mistaken: it is the absence of it that does this, and not the presence. True religion has the directly contrary effect: it tends to promote peace, and charity, and kindness, and goodwill among men. The more men are brought under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, the more they will love on another, and the more happy they will be.