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LOVE FOR NEIGHBOR

Eternal life and the Mosaic Law

When the Seventy disciples returned joyfully from the preaching, Jesus blessed them more than the prophets and the kings of the Old Testament, because they were granted to see the Messiah and to become acquainted with the divine gifts which He brought to the world, sent by His Father. The main gift and source of joy for the apostles is that their names were written in the heavens, something which means that they were granted to inherit the heavenly kingdom, or in other words, eternal life.

A certain teacher of the Law hearing Jesus blessing His disciples for these revelations which were given them by the heavenly Father, considered Him a transgressor of the Mosaic Law. Because this lawyer knew that the Law blesses those who keep the commandments of God. Consequently, in his opinion, only in the keeping of the Law does salvation and life exist. So for this purpose he got up and asked the Lord slyly what to do to gain eternal life, having as a goal to accuse Him that He is teaching things contrary to the Mosaic Law.

The Lord understanding the slyness of the teacher of the Law refers him to those things which are written in the Mosaic Law. That in other words, eternal life is found in the keeping of the commandment of love for God and neighbor. Furthermore He himself didn't give the answer, but He urged the lawyer to answer according to the knowledge he had obtained from the study of the Law. Thus, essentially He showed him that the question which he had given him was superfluous, since he already knew what the Law teaches. Simultaneously, He clarified to him that He doesn't disagree at all with the teaching of the Mosaic Law.

The Law and the understanding of the neighbor

Jesus' answer made the lawyer feel awkward, since he appeared in everyone's eyes to be asking and seeking to learn something which he himself knew very well. So, in order to justify his question, he pretends that he doesn't understand the meaning of the word "neighbor" and asks for

more explanations from the Lord. In this way also he returns to his aim, which is to prove that the Lord is teaching contrary to the Mosaic Law, since He is preaching love for the gentile and the idolatrous peoples. In the thought of the lawyer and in general of the Jews, as Saint Nektarios the miracle worker observes, the commandment of love for neighbor did not have as a boundary the noetic horizon which includes all of humanity, but the narrow boundaries of Palestine.

To this second sly attack of the teacher of the Law, the Lord, who captures the wise “in their craftiness” (1 Cor. 3:19), gives a wonderful answer through the parable of the Good Samaritan. With this parable He places the Samaritan who was from another nation and heretical, to become neighbor to the Israelite who was severely wounded by the thieves. Neither the Jewish priest, nor the Levite helped him, but the Samaritan. If He would have placed an Israelite showing love to a foreigner, the lawyer would have immediately accused Him of transgressing the Law of Moses. Now however He places the man from another nation and heterodox to help him, to show that it is impossible for the Law given by God to be preaching a form of love lower than that which we encounter even in those who are in delusion and in sin. If the Samaritan who was deluded and far from the people of God, following the dictates of his conscience, showed love to the storm-tossed Jewish fellow, how much more so must people of the true God be showing perfect towards all people, seeing them as familiar in faith, and relatives and their brethren? Consequently, when the Law of God speaks of “neighbor”, it is not referring only to those familiar in faith, to the virtuous ones and to those of one’s own nation, but to all humanity, independent of race, religion, color, quality, virtue or whatsoever other mark.

Law and grace

It’s a fact that the Mosaic Law taught love for neighbor and hate towards the enemy. This the Lord Himself assures in His Sermon on the Mount. As the blessed elder Porphyrios observes, hate in the Old Testament was a good thing. “Because if one had a good heart, the other one would eat him up”. Grace and eternal life had not yet come. So for this reason the faithful people of God had to safeguard themselves from the other peoples and defend themselves from them, so they wouldn’t be wiped out. The Mosaic Law hid of course in it all the high meanings of perfect love, but as if with some cover it covered them with its external legal regulations. It kept its deep meaning hidden, for the Messiah to reveal when He would come and would bring grace (see 2 Cor. 3:12-18).

So now the Messiah came, Jesus Christ. He brought grace and abolished death. So for this reason He revealed all the truth which the commandments and the words of God hide, which were given to people from most ancient years. Now the believers have grace and through this we know the truth and do not cower from any fear, since now death was wiped out. In the grace and the truth we receive enlightenment and divine power to love all people as our own self. So let us spend our life in the grace of the divine mysteries of the Church and the correctness of her dogmas, to be able to fulfill the commandment of love, in which all the Law and the Prophets are summarized.

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