

## Feet, Cheeks and Prayers

### + Follow the Master's Goals +

In the name of Jesus, our loving Lord and Master, dear fellow disciples:

Wisconsin public school teachers are nothing like the public school teachers I had growing up. They did not let us lie and say we were sick when we weren't. If things did not go our way, we were not allowed to pout or protest. Getting your work done was not an option. And if you were in trouble at school, your parents made it twice as bad when you got home. No, we did not have to slog through snow up to our arm pits; it usually rained on the Oregon coast. But ask my sisters; it was uphill both directions.

Can you imagine how different life would be if teachers and students, officials and politicians, bosses and workers all listened to the Lord? "You're dreaming!" I can hear them say it. "You're not living in the real world!" In a way they're right. "***We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.***" (2 Peter 3:13 NIV84) According to the Lord's promise, all sin and selfishness will be gone in that land of light and blessing. Jesus, the Master Teacher, continues to show why none of us sinners can make it on our own. God wants to win our hearts with His love to glorify Him here and now. Let's get personal: **Feet, Cheeks and Prayers – Follow the Master's Goals.**

Some negative Bible critics are troubled by the fact that Jesus quotes Moses (1500 B.C.), and maybe Moses was reflecting the Code of Hammurabi (ca.1700 B.C.). And secular humanists in our day would certainly call this harsh: "***An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.***" But this was actually quite merciful in ancient times. Judging from pre-Flood violence (Genesis 6:11), some thought it fair to destroy both eyes if someone took out one of yours, or several teeth in vengeance for one. Jesus quotes from Moses (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21) where the Holy Spirit was giving His stamp of approval on limited punishment with fair restitution. But did you notice, this is not enough for God? Jesus is teaching His disciples God's Law of love, which calls for suffering evil rather than doing evil. We heard it in the Old Testament Lesson: "***Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.***" (Leviticus 19:2 NIV84) And God's holiness is a quality that sounds so unrealistic to earthbound ears.

Is Jesus serious here? That's the question in *Meditations*<sup>1</sup> this week. Does He really mean to "***turn the other cheek***" if someone hits you? A demand from some evil person for your shirt means give him your coat too? (NETNT) Kidnapped for a mile, go along for two? Give and lend just for the asking? Why does this sound unreasonable? Because like our **Feet, Cheeks and Prayers**, our ears and hearts are naturally full of sin. If farmers can't see "city slickers," and high rollers don't get fertilizer and seed, how can we understand God's holiness? God does not owe us an explanation. Remember when you kept asking, "Why, Mom?" "Because I said so!" "Why, LORD?" "***Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.***" Sin makes as little sense to God as us letting wild turkeys in here to mess the carpet.

You and I have known teachers who gave their best for their students, who worked long hours for the simple satisfaction of imparting knowledge. I had a public school coach who drove forty-five minutes to get me home from basketball games just so I could play. We remember teachers who challenged us, but do you remember what the Master did to teach us? They struck Him in the face. He could have stopped them with a word like the mob in the Garden of Gethsemane (John 18:1-11). But Jesus turned the other cheek. From the cross He watched in agony as the soldiers divided up His clothes. (John 19:23f) In all that bloody abuse Jesus had but one prayer: "***Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.***" (Luke 23:34) That's how serious God is about giving us His holiness.

<sup>1</sup> Daily devotions available from Northwestern Publishing House (1-800-662-6022).

You see, it was not just to set a good example that Jesus suffered so. This was God's way to make us holy and to win our hearts for Himself. God wanted us to see how His ***"mercy triumphs over judgment."*** (James 2:13) Strife and bitterness in banking and business, politics and humanistic education always lead to violence and heartache as surely as our sins would cost us hell forever. Only the love of God could provide the innocent suffering and death of Jesus Christ to take our sins away – and with them, the sins of the whole world – even of Peter who denied Him and Judas who betrayed Him. No price was too high for Jesus to rescue us from sin. He paid His holy, precious blood in love to God's justice.

Does God not have a right to expect holiness from His creatures? The Creator made us! Does God not have a right to demand, ***"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"***? Jesus did for us! Does God not have every reason to demand that we be ***"perfect"*** since He is? Look outside any day. No matter what the weather, you can tell that God is perfect through and through. Watch the sunshine. Does it warm only the houses of sincere Christians? Or do hypocrites and idolaters, criminals and crack addicts all get God's sunshine too? Jesus is right. God ***"sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."*** Seriously, ***"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."***

Here's the lesson: We won't find that perfection in us. But it's there in God's true Son from heaven and the rain of God's Word that falls gently on our souls. God's love is perfect. God demonstrated His self-sacrificing *agape*-love for us when Jesus gave His life for sinners. (Romans 5:8). ***"And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."*** (2 Corinthians 5:15 NIV84) Yes, His perfect life counts for you. His innocent death too, by your Baptism. Heaven is our home. But while we're here below, ***"Let us live up to what we've already attained."*** (Philippians 3:16) **Feet, Cheeks and Prayers + Follow the Masters Goals.**

God wants us to be different than disobedient children or selfish teachers, pastors, parents, workers and bosses. By His mercy God empowers us to live the love that conquers evil with good. ***"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."*** (Romans 12:17–21 NIV84) In short for **Feet, Cheeks and Prayers – Follow the Master's Goals.**

As blessed as I was by dedicated, caring teachers in public school, I especially treasure the lessons from God-fearing teachers in our WELS ministerial schools. They could bring God's Word to the classroom to correct sinful attitudes while lifting our eyes to the cross of Christ and God's love in action. One incident from college stands out in my mind. As we were discussing the former Soviet Union, I made some foolish comment about being glad bad things happened to them, "Because they're our enemies...." Professor Don Sellnow didn't blow up. He didn't skip a beat. He said quietly enough for everyone to hear: "That's your sinful nature talking." Then he went on with the lesson. Through that professor it was really the Master Teacher talking to me, my Lord Jesus Christ, as surely as He is pleased to teach His lessons to me and through me today.

Let's pray for all parties suffering from the unrest throughout our land – workers and bosses, teachers and students, parents and politicians. Let's pray that they will learn with us these precious lessons from the Master. Let's pray for their perfection. In God's dictionary, ***"perfect"*** means reaching the *goal* of believing in Jesus. And faith works in the self-sacrificing *agape*-love of God in Christ. God has much good for us to do as we live in faith-born love on our way to the ***"home of righteousness."*** **Feet, Cheeks and Prayers + Follow the Master's Goals** to glory in His holiness. Amen.