

Study Hints for Thinking Further

International Bible Lessons

Matthew 5:43-48

Sunday, November 13, 2011

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Some Bible study groups or classes can further discussion by asking some or all of the **Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** below. Others may want to send the bulletin size *International Bible Lesson* home with their students for further study in the coming week to encourage continuing Bible study. The *Study Hints for Thinking Further* below are not actually intended to be answers to the discussion questions, but hints a teacher may use to help students think through and discuss the questions in class.

1. In Matthew 5:43-48, what do you think Jesus means by the word “love”? What do you learn about love from other portions of the Bible?

Love means Jesus' followers should treat everyone with goodness and kindness, whether they are an enemy or not. This does not mean that they should not punish the criminal. God will punish the criminal sometimes and discipline His children sometimes. By trying to do what is best for everyone, which is what love would do, we may help some come to trust in God and Jesus Christ. Love would also motivate us to pray for our enemies and the enemies of God. The best description of love is found in 1 Corinthians 13 — “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

2. What might you include in your prayers for your enemies and for those who persecute you?

If we love our enemies, we can pray that they will make the changes in their lives that are necessary for them to make. If they steal, we can pray that they will repent and stop stealing. If they must be punished for stealing, we can pray that the punishment will be effective in helping them stop stealing in the future when tempted, and serve as a warning to others who may be tempted to steal. If they are hurting or persecuting us, we can pray for them to stop and we can pray for God to show us a way of escaping from them. We can pray that God will stop them, perhaps through someone else confronting them (perhaps a preacher or a police officer). We can pray that they will change their attitude toward us, as Paul changed his attitude toward Jesus and stopped persecuting Him and the church after His experience on the road to Damascus. We can pray that they will become true followers of Jesus Christ, which would lead to a change in their behavior toward God, others, and us.

3. Why do you think God sends rain and sunshine onto the fields of both His friends and enemies?

God shows His friends and enemies that He wants them to live, be blessed, and be happy. Perhaps if His enemies see from experience that God loves them by meeting their needs, then they will change their attitude toward God and love Him too. Perhaps they

will want to learn more about God from Jesus and the Bible as they see God loving them by meeting their needs (especially in times of trouble). At the Judgment, when God's enemies do meet Him, God can show them how much He loved them and did for them and in spite of all He did they chose to remain His enemies; therefore, they deserve to spend eternity apart from God and His children. His enemies will be given what they have always wanted, a life apart from God, but it will be an unhappy life of suffering.

4. Why are people inclined to love only those whose behavior is similar to their behavior; for example, tax collectors love tax collectors and Gentiles greet Gentiles?

Someone has said that likes attract. Tax collectors know the kind of people that tax collectors are and what they can expect from them, so they tend to love one another. Gentiles tend to have a prejudice against those who are not Gentiles. Many people prefer the people of their own race and look down upon those not of their own race. It is more difficult to try to understand someone who is different from what you are; whether because the occupation is different, the religion is different, the race is different. God's children try to find friendship with each other because of Jesus Christ and what they have learned about God and the Bible, even though they may be of a different occupation or race.

5. Why does God the Father expect His children to be as perfect as He is?

God expects His children to be "Like Father like son (or daughter)" in the way they behave. God has demonstrated tremendous love for others and He expects us to demonstrate tremendous love for others too. God will not lower His standards to permit us to sin from time to time. To expect us to be less than perfect is to expect us to be sinful sometimes. God expects us to be perfect, perfect in love and obedience. He sent Jesus to forgive us and teach us what to do when we are not perfect, but commit a sin. He has sent His Holy Spirit to indwell us and empower us to be perfect when we are tempted to sin. When we are tempted, God will show us the way of escape. So, we need to strive to be perfect as God is perfect, and not excuse our sins by saying, "Nobody is perfect." Just because we do not live up to God's expectations of us is no reason for God to lower His expectations (which are consistent with our human nature as created in the image of God). We can only be happy as we live up to God's expectations and obey Him.

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