

Commentary on Matthew 5:43-48

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, November 13, 2011**, is from **Matthew 5:43-48**. Five **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse by verse [*International Bible Lesson Commentary*](#) below. The **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, which are also available on the [Bible Lesson Forum](#), will aid teachers in class preparation and in conducting class discussion.

Matthew 5:43-48

(Matthew 5:43) “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’”

The world and some religions teach hating your enemy is an appropriate standard of behavior. Christians who try to do what the Bible teaches are hated, persecuted, and even killed in some countries, for they are considered enemies. Some Christians are refused promotions where they work. It is easy to love and help a good neighbor. It is easier to hate an enemy and want them to suffer.

(Matthew 5:44) **But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,**

God the Father and His Son, Jesus, love their enemies. Jesus did not ask His followers to do anything that He did not do himself (or would do himself). Jesus came into the world to save His enemies. “At the right time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Jesus wants His followers to help His enemies and their enemies to become godly people by praying for them and trying to be friendly with them when wise and possible. Remember, Jesus also taught, “Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you” (Matthew 7:6).

(Matthew 5:45) **so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.**

Children are sometimes similar to their parents. Jesus’ followers should become similar to their heavenly Father and Jesus, His Son. When the Father sends rain, He does not prevent it from raining on the fields of those who do evil. Perhaps by treating those who do evil with goodness and kindness in the natural world they will see evidence of a loving God and repent and love God.

(Matthew 5:46) **For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?**

It is easy to love someone who loves us, perhaps who loved us first. “We love [God] because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Loving God is the “reward” or response He deserves for first loving us while we were still sinners. There is no reward for doing the easy and expected thing. Exceptional deeds of goodness and valor are rewarded. We expect tax collectors to take care of one another.

(Matthew 5:47) And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Some people refuse to speak to, acknowledge, or extend any form of friendship to anyone they do not personally like or to anyone who may have offended them at one time. Rather than forgive, they treat them as enemies. This is the typical way of behaving that Jesus wanted His followers to avoid.

(Matthew 5:48) Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

The Father and the Son love their enemies and show everyone a better way to live, a perfect way to live. By loving and doing good to their enemies, they expect them to learn the right way to live, to change their attitude and behavior, to begin loving God and others and to follow the commandments of God. Perhaps by loving our enemies they will come to know God too. “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5).

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

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?
2. What might you include in your prayers for your enemies and for those who persecute you?
3. Why do you think God sends rain and sunshine onto the fields of both His friends and enemies?
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?
5. Why does God the Father expect His children to be as perfect as He is?

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