



International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

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Matthew 5:38-48 New International Version July 21, 2019

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, July 21, 2019**, is from **Matthew 5:38-48**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

(Matthew 5:38) “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’

This command can be found in Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21. The command relates to how the Israelite government was to enforce just laws in their society with just punishments. If someone intentionally harmed another person, then the offender must make restitution to compensate the person he hurt. A

tooth and an eye were so valuable to a person that if a slaveowner knocked out a tooth or an eye of a slave then he was to compensate the slave by letting the slave go free. Thus, the slaveowner learned not to abuse his slaves, and in the Israelite's form of government slaves had human rights that the government intended to enforce. Likewise, in the system of justice revealed by God to Moses, people could not escape punishment for knocking out people's teeth and eyes because they were influential or wealthy, while others less influential or the poor suffered the penalty for doing the same things. God's intention was to create a just form government, so no one would be punished more or less than they deserved. When some people took the law into their own hands, they sometimes unjustly punished someone more than they deserved, and this law was intended to prevent injustice. For example, in Genesis 4:23, Lamech bragged that he had killed a young man for striking him. Even though the Israelite form of government was far superior to other governments of the time regarding human rights, and just laws and punishments, it was still a kingdom of this world – the best God could do with the people He had to work with at that time; whereas, Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. Jesus' kingdom deals with the human heart and not just external rules of behavior

(Matthew 5:39) But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.

In John 18:36, Jesus answered Pilate, saying, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” Jesus, the King of the universe, in obedience to God His Father, died in behalf of sinners that some might be saved. Jesus did not resist the evildoer when He was arrested, tried, and crucified. At that time, Jesus did not physically resist the evildoer because He wanted to fulfil a higher purpose, God’s purpose. Jesus did not mean that a just government should not enforce just laws to prevent evildoers from flourishing (see verse 38 above). In some sense, Jesus suffered injustice on a personal level because the religious leaders hated Him personally and manipulated the Roman government to murder Jesus. Verse 39 refers to injustices that people suffer personally when there is not a need to justly prosecute and punish someone to restrain them from harming others in similar or worse ways. The principle here does not teach that the children of God cannot defend themselves and others using physical force. Prior to His arrest, in Luke 22:38, Jesus indicated that His disciples could carry swords in self-defense, but two swords would be enough that night because He did not intend to defend himself using physical force or by calling down angels from heaven to save Him. In fulfillment of the Scriptures, Jesus said His Father would protect His disciples that night, and He did. This verse most probably relates to an evildoer or mocker who insults a Christian by backhanding

them with the back of their right hand to hit their right cheek. To defuse the situation, a person could turn the other cheek to them or simply walk away without striking back. The intention seems to be that Christians do not need to strike back when struck, there may be a better God-given response rather than escalating violence. In this world, Christians are typically insulted for their faith, persecuted, and murdered. Even before they are treated with contempt and backhanded, Christians can ask themselves and pray, “What is God’s will for me in this situation?” In His Beatitudes, Jesus taught, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

(Matthew 5:40) And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.

Whereas a criminal offense against someone involves the government and the concern for public justice, a lawsuit is a civil matter. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount considers both types of problems that a Christian may face. In this verse, Jesus has turned to a civil matter. Perhaps the lawsuit is justified or perhaps not. But as we studied previously on July 14, in Matthew 5:25-26, Jesus said, “Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.” Jesus advised Christians to do good beyond what the worldly person expects. Maybe the

person suing you will repent and want to become the type of person you are as a Christian. Or because of your self-sacrificing kindness, they may recognize they were wrong to bring a lawsuit against you. They may repent and drop the charges. Our real goal is to do the will of Jesus.

(Matthew 5:41) If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.

According to Roman law regarding the rights of their occupying armies, a Roman soldier could compel a person in the country they controlled to carry their baggage one mile and no further. This law would benefit the soldier and the citizen (the citizen only had to carry the baggage one mile, and it was illegal to force him to carry it more than that). The requirement was like a tax that involved personal service instead of money. Jesus' command here involves the witnessing of a Christian to a Roman soldier. When a Christian offered to carry the soldier's baggage a second mile, the soldier would instantly ask him why he wanted to do more than required by law, because no one else would ever offer to do that. As the Christian carried his baggage the second mile, he would have an opportunity to explain the difference Jesus Christ had made in his life and teach the soldier the good news about Jesus. If the discussion went well, no doubt the Christian would carry his baggage another mile or more to talk more about Jesus and possibly lead the soldier to believe in Jesus. It is possible a bully or a bandit could try to compel someone to carry their baggage; if so, the principle would be the same,

but a Christian should never violate the moral law of God to satisfy a bully or a bandit. In personal and business relationships, a Christian who truly loves Jesus and others can stand out among others by consistently doing more than required to benefit others. By doing so, he may have an opportunity to share the good news of Jesus.

(Matthew 5:42) Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

The principle described above in Matthew 5:41 applies here. Christian culture differs from the prevailing selfish culture of this world, a world where people need to come to faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus does not mean that we should disregard commonsense. The story is told of a minister who obeyed Jesus' command explicitly to the letter, and eventually people learned they no longer needed to work because the minister would never refuse a beggar or a borrower. Eventually, everyone in his town became impoverished, including the minister. A truly poor person can be helped when he begs, but not in a way that will hurt him or go beyond the material means of a Christian to share. In every case, the Christian must pray about how to obey this command of Jesus, and Jesus will give us the wisdom we need. Christians do not need to impoverish themselves to help beggars or give to borrowers. As distinct from a beggar, a borrower usually professes that he will repay the person he borrows from, and if a Christian has the means and divine guidance, he

could choose to help a borrower. Mainly, Jesus does not want Christians to love their money more than God and others. Many can be so selfish they will never help anyone, beggar or borrower, if it costs them time or money. Jesus does not want Christians to become selfish and self-centered (sinful).

(Matthew 5:43) “You have heard that it was said, ‘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 than to love them. In the love Jesus gives us, we can prayerfully seek to do what is best for everyone concerned.

(Matthew 5:44) But I tell 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 not 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). Some may be so violent or untrustworthy that as an expression of our love we may not be able to do anything more than pray for them to come to saving faith in Jesus Christ, but that is far better than praying down a curse upon their heads.

(Matthew 5:45) that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Children are sometimes like their parents. Jesus’ followers should become like 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 God treats those who do evil with goodness and kindness in the natural world so they will see evidence of a loving God and repent and love God. God always does what is best for everyone, but if those who are evil persist in evil; then someday they will be separated from all that is good, loving, and kind.

(Matthew 5:46) If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

It is easy to love someone who loves us, perhaps the one who loved us first. “We love [God] because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Loving God is the “reward” or response God 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. Tax collectors may not have any friends other than other tax collectors, so they take care of one another. God expects us to love and care everyone, not just other believers.

(Matthew 5:47) And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

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. Since we live in Jesus’ kingdom, we should be different from those who live only in the kingdoms of this world.

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

The Father and the Son love their friends and their enemies, and they show everyone a better way to live, a perfect way to live. By grace through faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we can live better morally and

spiritually as we follow Jesus. Christians can show others a better way to live, if they will repent of their sins and trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. By loving and doing good to their enemies, the Father and Jesus may expect their enemies to come to them as they draw them to learn the right way to live, to change their attitude and behavior, to begin loving them and others and to follow their commandments as their God. Perhaps by loving our enemies as God does, they will want to know God too. Paul wrote, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). To be “perfect” also means “complete.” As Christians, we strive to become completely like Jesus in the way we feel, think, speak, love, and act.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. How can the principle in Matthew 5:38 be a form of just punishment?
2. What reasons might Jesus have for telling Christians to follow His teachings in Matthew 5:39-41?
3. Do you think Jesus meant that Christians should never under any circumstances refuse to give to someone who begs or wants to borrow from you?
4. What petitions might some of your prayers to God include when you are suffering persecution?
5. What might you say to someone who always says, “Well, nobody’s perfect,” every time they are confronted with their sinful choices?

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