

What Power Has God Given You?

International Bible Lesson

Matthew 5:43-48

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

“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48—ESV).

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48—KJV).

Jesus gave His followers the “power to become children of God” (John 1:12). As the Son of God, Jesus knew and revealed what the Father expected of His children. Their heavenly Father expected them to do His will always, and even do what He does on Earth (within the limits of being finite humans). God the Father sets a higher standard of behavior for His children to obey than most people follow. Whereas tax collectors love tax collectors and Gentiles greet only Gentiles, Jesus said the children of God must love their enemies because their heavenly Father loves His enemies. When God sends sunshine and life-giving rain to fall on the crops of those who love Him, He does not withhold these blessings from the nearby fields of those who hate Him as an enemy.

Jesus told His followers that their heavenly Father is perfect. Whatever their heavenly Father commands is perfect. Whatever God promises is perfect and can be trusted. Whatever He does is the best for all concerned because God loves perfectly. God commands His children to be perfect and represent Him perfectly because He is perfect. God would never say that it is okay to murder sometimes, especially when He has said that we should not remain angry with someone or insult them or call them names (Matthew 5:21-22). God would never tell His children that sometimes they could tell lies, cheat, or steal. God will not lower His standards of behavior just because His children do not perfectly obey, or because they think it is impossible to obey perfectly. Instead, the Father sent His Son to make forgiveness possible and His Spirit to make perfect obedience possible.

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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?