

REWARD FOR LOVING HATERS

Matthew 5:46 (NKJV)

46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

We should not expect any reward for loving those who love us. Even worldly sinners do this. It's easy to love those who love you. That is no big deal. Jesus said, "***even the tax collectors do the same.***" Who loves tax collectors? Well, other tax collectors!

Tax collectors were considered to be the scum of the earth by the Jews. They were Jews who were hired by the Romans to collect taxes in the Jewish community. They were considered "**traitors**" to the Jewish nation, and on top of that, they tended to be dishonest in charging absorbent rates and skimming off the top before Rome got their share.

By the way, before his conversion, this was the occupation of Matthew, the human author of this book. He could really relate to this statement from Jesus.

There is nothing commendable about loving those who love you – even the low-down tax collectors lived on this level. But to love your enemies who hate and despise you – now that is something. That is commendable. That is reward worthy!

Matthew 5:47 (NKJV)

47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

If you are friendly only to those in your little friendship group, what sets you apart in that? That is nothing special. Again, even tax collectors are friendly among themselves.

In other words, love on this level – that simply loves those who love you and is friendly with those who are friendly to you – there is nothing commendable about this. Even the most worldly of people function on this level.

God sets a much higher standard for His people. Yes, we are to love one another – of course; but beyond that we are to even love our enemies who seek to abuse us.

Evil for Good (*Devil-like*)

Good for Good – Evil for Evil (*Man-like*)

Good for Evil (*God-like*)

Jesus calls His kingdom people to be God-like returning good for evil. When that happens – now we are talking a reward. Now we are talking about a testimony that is God-like. That is powerful living that is completely out of the norm.

Matthew 5:48 (NKJV)

48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

The “*therefore*” follows this section on loving your enemies. However, some think it is given as a summary statement of all the antithesis statements which are essentially all qualified by God’s kind of love.

“The sum of all that Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount – in fact, the sum of all He teaches in Scripture – is in those words.” – **John MacArthur**

This is the heart of the whole emphasis Christ is making in the entire Sermon on the Mount. The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees emphasized external – legalistic – outward conformity to the law. But in contrast the righteousness Jesus emphasized was about an inward character of God-likeness that then works its way out in the life in keeping with the moral intent of the law.

The contrast is between an external emphasis and an internal emphasis. For Jesus BEING comes before DOING! And DOING is based on BEING! The great issue in life is not mere rules but relationship with God that puts Him on display! It’s all about God-likeness – being like God or what the Bible elsewhere calls godliness!

Be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is the great climactic emphasis in the ministry of Jesus! This is what it’s all about in terms of kingdom righteousness and kingdom living.

However, it is undeniable that this emphasis on being like God follows in context on the climactic emphasis of God's unconditional love as seen in loving your enemies.

“The close connection between this verse and Jesus’ teaching about love (vv. 43-47) suggests that unconditional love is the most crucial expression of God’s character in the life of His followers.” – **Holman Christian Standard Bible**

Truly, the greatest demonstration of love is seen in loving our enemies even as God loves His enemies (cf. Rom. 5:8-10).

Many commentators think that Matt. 5:48 is essentially a variant of Lev. 19:2 or perhaps Deut. 18:13.

Leviticus 19:2 (NKJV)

2 “Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: **You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.**

Deuteronomy 18:13 (NKJV)

13 You shall be **blameless** before the Lord your God.

The word “**perfect**” denotes that which is **complete or mature**. God is the standard of perfection, with the emphasis in the immediate context being on the standard of LOVE.

We are to love as God loves. We are to love our enemies as He loves them.

So, when it says, “**be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect,**” the command is to be God-like in our character. This is the goal. We never attain it in this life, but it is the goal (cf. Phil. 3:12-14).

The Jewish spiritual leaders promoted the idea that keeping the legal code of the law made one holy, but Jesus taught that external conformity is not enough; He calls His people to God-like involvement, involving internal character.

“The aim of the disciples’ lives is the molding of their lives after the person of their heavenly Father. This is the climax to the standard of the Old Testament concept of righteousness.” – **Stanley Toussaint**

God's people, changed by repentance, are to live out righteous lives that look like this, as seen in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.

Controlled Anger

Sexual Purity

Covenant Faithfulness

Truth-tellers

Not Retaliatory

Love Enemies

(This is God-like)

The Jews emphasized the external keeping of the Law. Legalistic conformity was to be seen in their lives. That is one level of so-called "righteousness". Jesus went deeper, emphasizing the very character of God as seen in the deeper moral reality of the law. The very character of God is now to be seen in the hearts and lives of His people. Thus, the very righteousness of God is to be lived out in the lives of kingdom people.

This is kingdom living in keeping with kingdom ethics!

"At my church a woman who had often snubbed me went out of her way to give me a big hug before the service. I was surprised and wondered what initiated her change of heart. I got my answer at the end of the service. The pastor said: ***'Your assignment for next week is the same as last week. I want you to go out there and love somebody you just can't stand.'***"

- Gloria Melville

Well, that is our standing assignment! Don't retaliate – Go the Second Mile- Love your Enemies. Put God and His love on display!