

Lesson 11

Righteousness That Surpasses the Scribes and Pharisees - Part 6

Key Scripture Readings: Matthew 5:43-48

Summary

- This section may contain the most challenging teaching of Jesus. In addition to loving their neighbors, disciples are also to love their enemies. They are to love and show concern for those who despise and hate them.
- Most Jews of Jesus' time did not want to love their enemies. Some were so determined not to do this that they tried to bend and twist the Scriptures (Matthew 5:43). "Thou shall love your neighbor" is found in Leviticus 19:18, but "hate your enemy" is found nowhere in the Old Testament Law. The corrupt religious leaders invented the statement!
- The Lord's standard is higher than that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:44). He calls His followers to love all! Disciples are to love like God. God demonstrated love for all by giving His perfect Son to pay the penalty for sin (Romans 5:8-10; John 3:16; 1 John 4:19).
- Jesus prayed for and demonstrated a heart for His enemies while they were mocking Him on the cross (Luke 23:34).
- Loving every person causes disciples to be imitators of God. It causes them to love like God and become "sons" of God. God continues to bless the wicked by causing the sun to rise and the rain to fall (Matthew 5:45).
- There is no virtue in loving only those who love you back (Matthew 5:46-47). Godless heathens do the same! When a Christian follows the standard of the scribes and Pharisees, they don't live by the higher standard of Jesus.
- The "perfect" Jesus uses in Matthew 5:48 intimidates many people. Some feel that the word refers to "sinless perfection." To be saved, one must be faultless and perfectly holy. If this is what the passage is talking about (and it is not), then no person could be saved (Romans 3:9, 23).
- The New Testament often uses "perfect" to talk about completeness and maturity (Matthew 5:48). Paul says, "Not that I have already obtained it or have become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12).
- Jesus uses the word "perfect" in this context to emphasize the blessings that come to Christians when they love their enemies. Those who love their enemies will have a perfect, full, complete, and fully mature love like their heavenly Father (Ephesians 5:1-2).

Study Questions

1. Where did the saying "hate your enemies" likely originate among the Jews? What was the Lord's standard?
2. Who are people who are easy to love? Why? Be specific in your answer.
3. Who are people who are hard to love? Why? Be specific in your answer.
4. Define an enemy. What makes someone your enemy? What makes someone God's enemy?
5. How did Jesus treat His enemies? List some passages to prove the point.
6. What blessings come to those who choose to love even their enemies?
7. Make a list of the qualities of love Paul speaks about in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Which of these are especially difficult to exhibit towards enemies? How do we overcome these challenges?