

Matthew 5:46

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

Analysis

Loving only those who love you merits no special reward—even corrupt tax collectors do that much. Such reciprocal love is natural, requiring no grace. Kingdom love goes beyond natural affection to supernatural love for enemies, reflecting God's character rather than mere human capacity.

Historical Context

Tax collectors (publicans) were Jews who collected taxes for Rome, often overcharging and keeping excess. They were despised as traitors and sinners. Yet Jesus notes even they practice reciprocal love—suggesting this minimal standard falls far short of Kingdom ethics.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How much of your love is merely reciprocal—loving those who benefit you in return?
2. What would it cost you to love someone who offers you no benefit or even actively opposes you?

Interlinear Text

ἐὰν	γὰρ	ἀγαπῶντας	τὸ	ἀγαπῶντας	ὑμᾶς	τίνα
if	For	love	them which	love	you	what
G1437	G1063	G25	G3588	G25	G5209	G5101
μισθὸν	ἔχετε	οὐχὶ	καὶ	τὸ	τελῶναι	τὸ
reward	have ye	not	even	them which	the publicans	them which
G3408	G2192	G3780	G2532	G3588	G5057	G3588
αὐτὸ	ποιοῦσιν					
the same	do					
G846	G4160					

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 11:19 (Parallel theme): The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

Matthew 18:17 (Parallel theme): And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

Luke 18:13 (Parallel theme): And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

Luke 15:1 (Parallel theme): Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.

Matthew 6:1 (Parallel theme): Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

Luke 19:2 (Parallel theme): And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.

Luke 19:7 (Parallel theme): And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.