

Replacing Passive Love with Active Love (Mt. 5:43-48)

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. In Matthew 5:21-48, Jesus spoke of six temptations that we must resist: **anger** (5:21-26), **immorality** (5:27-30), disregarding the **sanctity of marriage** (5:31-32), not **keeping our commitments** (5:33-37), **retaliating** (5:38-42), and being **passive** in our love to our enemies (5:43-47). By resisting these, we cultivate a vibrant spirit and function as salt and light (5:13-16).
- B. The sixth temptation that must be resisted is the temptation to be passive towards our enemies who hate us instead of actively loving them. To refuse to retaliate is the beginning of our victory, but it is not complete until we actively love them. Jesus told us what **not to do** (to not resist evil men; 5:38-42) and **what to do** (to love our enemies 5:43-48). Much potential good is lost in our relationship with God, our family, and with others when we refuse to actively love our enemies.
⁴³***“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’***
⁴⁴***But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father...for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good...”*** (Mt. 5:43-45)
- C. This brings us to the highest and most challenging part of the Sermon. It is praised by many, mocked by some, and ignored by most. Embracing this ushers us into a supernatural lifestyle.
- D. It is a victory to say nothing and not retaliate against our enemies. Jesus calls us to do more than just keep a passive distance from them. Some say, “I cannot even look at them at the meeting and I refuse to be in the same room with them.” But to act in the opposite spirit of our enemies by actively loving them instead of passively avoiding them, causes us to face our bitterness and fear. This is the place we experience the supernatural realm and make great advances in the kingdom.
- E. Jesus is referring to our attitude toward people who mistreat us in everyday life. He is not addressing the issue of self-defense against a criminal who physically attacks your family.
- F. Jesus corrected the Pharisees’ distortion of the command to love. They limited it by taking out “*as yourself*” and adding the command to “*hate your enemy*.” They saw their fellow Jews as neighbors, but not foreigners (Gentiles). They limited the command to loving people who were nice to them (not those who troubled them) and to those like them. They lived with revenge toward their fellow Jews and racism towards outsiders, instead of with God’s all embracing love.
⁴³***You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.”***
(Mt. 5:43)
¹⁸***You you shall love your neighbor as yourself...³⁴ The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself... (Lev 19:18, 34)***
- G. In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:29-37), Jesus identified our neighbor as any human being regardless of their race or religion. Our neighbor includes our enemies as human beings.

II. LOVING OUR ENEMIES (MT. 5:44)

- A. The call to actively love our enemies includes our words (bless), actions (do good), and prayers. This is the highest summit of love and is much more than sentiment it has practical actions. It is an act of our will that transcends negative feelings. As we obey this, our feelings will change.
- ⁴⁴***But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you... (Mt. 5:44)***
1. ***Love your enemies***: Loving people who hate us makes the greatest impact at the deepest level (especially martyrdom). Embracing this lifestyle opens the supernatural realm to us. Our enemies are adversaries who seek to hurt or hinder us or who hope to see us fail.
- ⁴***Love suffers long and is kind...⁵is not provoked, thinks no evil...⁷endures all things***
(1 Cor. 13:4-7)
2. ***Bless those who curse you***: We are to speak words of blessing to them and about them. We are to go beyond refusing to answer their insult with an insult. It can be a fierce struggle to speak words of blessing, but it will dynamically change and liberate us.
 3. ***Do good to those who hate you***: We are to look for practical ways to do good for them.
 4. ***Pray for those who use or persecute you***: By praying for an enemy, we stand in the gap before God for them. This increases our love. It is impossible to pray for someone without loving them. Jesus prayed for His enemies as they were killing Him (Lk. 23:34).
- B. We can overcome evil by doing good to our enemies (Rom. 12:21). In Romans 12:20, Paul quoted an Old Testament passage that commands us to love our enemies (Prov. 25:21).
- ¹⁴***Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse...¹⁹Do not avenge yourselves...***
²⁰***If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.*** ²¹***Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.***
(Rom. 12:14-21)
- C. We view passage as a temptation to resist passive love, since the other five exhortations were temptations to resist (Mt. 5:21-42), or as one of the five kingdom activities to pursue as described in the next section of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:1-21). This passage elaborates on the implications of forgiving our enemies (Mt. 6:14-15).
- D. The imprecatory Psalms contain prayers for God to judge the wicked (Ps 5; 11; 17; 35; 55; 59; 69; 109; 137, 140, etc.). These prayers are not in response to the psalmist's personal offense or injury, but because the wicked stood against God's cause and name. In other words, the imprecatory Psalms are not about the vindication of individuals in this age, but with the vindication of God's glory and purpose. For example, at the end of His ministry, Jesus spoke judgment or curses on the very leaders who killed Him (Mt. 23).

III. BEING LIKE OUR FATHER (MT. 5:45)

- A. God blesses evil people because it is His nature to love. He loves by providing sun and rain to wicked men. We must not mistake His blessings over them as His approval.
⁴⁵...that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Mt. 5:45)
- B. Calvin referred to this as God's *common grace* in contrast to God's *saving grace*. Common grace is God's gift of provision given to all people in this age and is not like the gift of salvation.
- C. Jesus died for us while we were His enemies (Rom. 5:10). Our standard of love is to love like He loves, as we love our enemies (without the condition of our self-interest). God loves people while they are unthankful and evil instead of waiting until they are grateful.
³⁵Love your enemies...you will be sons of the Most High. He is kind to the unthankful and evil. (Lk. 6:35)
- D. **Sons of the Most High**: In loving this way, we prove that we have received the Father's love. We are filled with gratitude for love that we did not deserve so it makes sense to us to share that love with our enemies. This is the most convincing way to prove that the Father's love exists. It is God's grace to unbelievers to witness God's love through you in the times they mistreat you.
³⁵By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (Jn. 13:35)

IV. WHAT REWARD (MT. 5:46-47)

- A. Unbelievers know about married love, parental love or friendship love. Even tax collectors (greedy manipulative men) love people who love them. The essence of what Jesus wants us to understand is the value of love that is more than what is natural affection for family and friends.
⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? (Mt. 5:46-47)
- B. **Reward**: Jesus often taught on eternal rewards related to our deeds and humility (Mt. 5:5, 12, 19; 6:4-6, 18-20; 10:41-42; 16:27; 18:4; 19:21, 28-30; 20:16, 27; 22:14; 23:11; 25:21-23; Mk. 9:41; 10:21, 42-43; Lk. 6:23, 35; 9:48; 12:21, 33; 14:11; 16:11; 18:14, 22; 19:17-19; 22:26-30; Jn. 12:26; Rev. 2:7, 10-11, 17, 26-28; 3:4-5, 9, 11-12, 18, 21; 11:18; 16:5; 19:7-8; 22:12).
¹¹Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹²Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven... (Mt. 5:11-12)
- C. Our natural mindset is, "If you do something bad to me, then I will do something bad to you. If you do something good to me, then I will do something good to you." Our natural way is to give a reward for favors or to take revenge for trouble. "To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human and to return good for evil is divine." (Alfred Plummer, 1852-1916)

V. HAVING A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

- A. In praying for people in an adversarial relationship with me, I discovered a resistance that forced me to go above the storm to the big picture of truth. I focus on three truths.
- B. **Entrusting ourselves to God:** Jesus calls us to not seek revenge when mistreated, but to endure it graciously by knowing that God will vindicate us in His time and way as we commit the mistreatment to Him. (1 Pet. 2:23). No one has the authority to stop our God ordained destiny. No Saul can stop David from his destiny. Only David could stop David.
²³**...when He [Jesus] was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously... (1 Pet. 2:23)**
- C. **Seeing the big picture:** Joseph spoke kindly to his brothers by perceiving the big picture of God's purpose. We speak kindly to our enemies as we realize God speaks kindly to us.
²⁰**But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. ²¹Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you..." He spoke kindly to them. (Gen. 50:20-21)**
- D. **Eternal friends:** Our greatest adversaries in the Body of Christ will be dear and cherished friends for billions of years in the age to come.

VI. BE PERFECT: WALKING IN ALL THE LIGHT THAT GOD GIVES US (MT. 5:48)

- A. Jesus called us to live *perfect* by seeking to walk in all the light the Spirit gives us. Seeking to walk in 100-fold obedience to the light we receive is *relative* in this age and *absolute* in next age. We can attain to this in a relative way in this age and in fullness in the age to come.
⁴⁸**Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Mt. 5:48)**
- B. The Father possesses all light. All His plans, actions, mercy, judgments, and wisdom are in full agreement with His light. As the Father “walks out” all the light that He possesses, so do we.
- C. We cannot love Jesus with the same amount of love in which He loves us. However, we can love Him with our “*all*”—where we hold nothing back. This is all that He desires from us.
- D. When we obey the Spirit's light, then He gives us more light and more experience in God. We have more responsibility to obey, but we experience and express to others more of God's power.
⁹**In Your light we see [more] light. (Ps. 36:9)**
- E. Power in our life is found in pursuing 100-fold obedience. There are powerful dynamics that occur in our heart when we soberly seek to walk in total obedience. The 98% pursuit of obedience has a limited blessing. The last 2% positions us to live with a vibrant heart. Maintaining a sustained reach for full obedience for decades is the definition of living radically before God. We are not radical because we do something unusual for a few weeks or months.