
The Enemies List (Don't React To Them, Respond)

The Power of God's Love

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February 15, 2026

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Sermon: The Power of God's Love: The Enemies List (Don't React To Them, Respond)

Lesson Text

Matthew 5:43–48 (KJV)⁴³ Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. ⁴⁴ But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; ⁴⁵ That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? ⁴⁷ And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more *than others*? do not even the publicans so? ⁴⁸ Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Introduction

Today we will look at the third of a 3-part series of teachings on how the power of God's love guides us in how we deal with three groups of people – our neighbors, our strangers, and our enemies.

- Neighbors are people God sends us to display his love and compassion.
- Strangers are people God sends to us to display his love and hospitality.
- But this final group, our Enemies, are perhaps the most challenging when it comes to displaying God's love, because they negatively impact our emotions.

Although they may be the most challenging, Enemies also give us the greatest opportunity to live out Jesus' commandment, John 13: ³⁵ *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

How many of you have your enemies list? People who attack, oppose, slander, hurt, and destroy you. Your enemies can come from our own family, workplace, neighbors, or church.

Their evil stirs up the evil in us: Romans 7: ²¹ I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

Our current political leaders talk about their enemies list and being on a retribution tour.

Jesus had an enemies list: Religious leaders who rejected him, political authorities who mocked and sentenced him, the crowd that turned on him, and Judas that betrayed him.

But unlike us, Jesus never operated out of personal rivalry which causes us to react. Our emotions react with anger, our behavior reacts with vengeance, and our character reacts out of God's will.

What Jesus teaches us is that although we can't change our enemies, we can change our response to them. God gives us the ability to not react to them, but to respond with the power of God's Love – to reject retaliation, to respond intentionally, and reflect God's character.

Series and Sermon: The Power of God's Love: The Enemies List (Don't React To Them, Respond)

(Reactive Love, Responsive Love, and Reflective Love)

I. Reactive Love For Your Enemy (Reject Retaliation)

Point 1: Reject the Natural Reaction

Matthew 5: ⁴³ **Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.**

The first key to loving one's enemies is to reject our human instinct for retaliation.

Although they were taught to love their neighbors, they were given space to hate their enemies:

- Deuteronomy 7: ² And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, *and* utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them:

Once you have identified a person as your enemy, it's almost impossible to love them. Our natural instinct is to immediately become defensive, seek to retaliate, cancel them, or just withdraw ourselves from them.

Romans 12: ¹⁹ Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

So why do so many of us engage in vengeance or retaliation? It is because we allow our hurt and pain to dictate our response. We react out of our emotions; sometimes making a permanent decision based on a temporary situation.

To have Reactive Love for your enemy, you must interrupt instinct with instruction!

We must replace our human instinct for retaliation with Jesus' divine instruction for love.

Psalms 1: ² But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

Psalms 119: ¹¹ Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

Don't hold on to Anger: Ephesians 4: ²⁶ Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: ²⁷ Neither give place to the devil.

Change the source of your Emotions: Colossians 3: ¹ If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. ² Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

II. Responsive Love For Your Enemy (Be Intentional)

Matthew 5: ⁴⁴ **But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;.**

The next key to loving one's enemies is to not focus on how you feel about them, but what you do for them.

One of the biggest challenges we will face concerning our enemies is how we feel about them. Not, maybe my emotions may change some day, but it's not today!

I admire people who are able to forgive their enemies of whom they have suffered great pain and suffering, but as for me and my house, I'm still working on it.

So, what do we do in the interim? We take the focus off emotions and put them on actions.

Human love and affection is very emotionally driven, but spiritual agape love is action driven.

To have Responsive Love for your enemy, you must be intentional about your actions!

I may never feel love for you, but I can perform love towards you.

Matthew 5: ⁴⁴ But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

In order to love our enemies, Jesus gave us three things to do: Bless Them, Do Good To Them, and Pray for Them.

- “Bless them that Curse You”: Although their cursing brings slander, evil speaking, and condemnation, you bless them by speaking well, and asking God's favor upon them.
- “Do good to them that hate you”: Although they come with hostility, rejection, and ill will, you do good with acts that are beneficially, morally good, and honorable.
- “Pray for them which despitefully use you”: Although they come with oppression, repeated harassment, and intent to harm, you intercede and approach God on their behalf.

We don't wait on the feeling, we just act with the intentionality of God's Love.

III. Reflective Love For Your Enemy (Shine Your Light)

Point 3: Reflect the Father, Not the Crowd

Matthew 5: ⁴⁵ That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁸ Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

To have Love for our Enemies:

- We need Reactive Love that Rejects Human Instinct for Godly Instructions
- We need Responsive Love that Practices Intentional Love regardless of emotions
- Finally, we have Reflective Love that shines the Light of God's Love in spite of.

God's love shines on the good and the evil, and it rains on the just and the unjust! Simply put, God's love is not reactionary, temperamental, or discriminating, it's always consistent.

And if we are the Children of our Father, we must be the same way.

John 13: ³⁵ By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

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Page 4 of 5 (February 15, 2026)

Jesus said, Matthew 5: ¹⁶ **Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.**

Light shines best in darkness. And love shines best with enemies!

Luke 23: ³⁴ Then said Jesus, **Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.**

Matthew 5: ⁴⁸ **Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.**

To be perfect means it is about representing spiritual maturity!

Psalms 138: ⁸ The LORD will perfect *that which* concerneth me: thy mercy, O LORD, *endureth* for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands.

James 1: ² My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; ³ Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. ⁴ But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

God is perfecting our emotions to not react to anger

God is perfecting my behavior to intentionally love

God is perfecting my love to display the love of God.

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Page 5 of 5 (February 15, 2026)

Midweek Study Lesson Plan (Sermon: The Enemies List (Don't React To Them, Respond))

Lesson Text

- Matthew 5:43–48

Sermon Outline

- I. *Reactive Love For Your Enemy (Reject Retaliation)*
- II. *Responsive Love For Your Enemy (Be Intentional)*
- III. *Reflective Love For Your Enemy (Shine Your Light)*

Questions: (What was your main takeaway from this message?)

I. Getting to Know “Me”

1. When you are relaxing at home, do you choose bare feet, socks, slippers or shoes? Why?
2. What is one piece of good news you've come across this week?

II. Into The Bible

1. In the lesson text, what deliberate choices does Jesus command towards enemies, and how do these choices differ from the natural or cultural response described in verses 43, 46, and 47? What does this reveal about the character of those who are called “children of your Father”?
2. The word “perfect” is *teleios*, meaning complete or mature. Based on the context of loving enemies in verses 44–47, what kind of completeness or maturity is Jesus calling His followers to? How does Romans 2:11, “For there is no respect of persons with God” deepen or clarify this command?

II. Life Application

1. What have you learned from God's Word that will help you to love your enemies?
2. What practical steps can a person take to intentionally act in love toward their enemies?