

Panthers:

Have you been harmed by another person this week? Has someone insulted you, taken something from you, or abused your time? In our humanness, our first inclination is to retaliate by harming the offender in the same way that he harmed us. Retaliation is to repay—evil for evil. Jesus offered a different way. In His fifth of *six examples of inside-out righteousness*, Jesus taught His disciples to *be retaliation free*. In each example, Jesus followed a three-fold pattern: (1) He addressed an Old Testament command saying, “You have heard that it was said;” (2) He alluded to the Pharisees’ legalistic interpretation; and (3) He clarified the intent, or spirit, of the law, prefacing His fulfillment with, “But I tell you.”

The Old Testament command: “*Again, you have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth’*” (Matt. 5:38). Old Testament civil laws allowed for equity in judicial matters. If someone took a resource from you, you were to be repaid one-for-one (Exod. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21).

The Legalistic Interpretation: “*Repay those who harm you.*” The legalistic interpretation of the law followed the letter of the law and missed the spirit of the law. It said that one should retaliate when harmed. The motto was “When a resource is taken from you, take the same back—one-for-one.” We see it today among our children. When bumped on the playground, our child bumps back. We see it in the marketplace. When taken advantage of, a businessman retaliates. We see it in sports. When fouled, an athlete fouls back. We see it in marriages and divorces. When harmed by a spouse, the other harms in return—one-for-one. While retaliation might feel good at the moment, it enslaves us.

The Spirit of the Law (Heart): “*But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person... Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you*” (Matt. 5:39-42). The word *resist* meant “to take strong opposition against,” or “to retaliate.” Jesus fulfilled the law by clarifying its intent. The spirit of the law is that we should give generously, or *be gracious* in our hearts. Being gracious does not mean relinquishing one’s rights nor does it prohibit conflict resolution. Rather, being gracious means not repaying evil with evil (Rom. 12:17). Being gracious means being generous with our resources: our *talent, treasures, and time*.

First, Jesus said, “*If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also*” (Matt. 5:39). Being struck on the right cheek meant that someone slapped you with the back of his right hand. That was a cultural expression for an insult. We use the same imagery today when we say, “That was a backhanded comment.” By teaching His disciples to *turn the other cheek*, Jesus had reiterated an Old Testament principle, “*Ignore insults*” (Prov. 12:16). An insult is designed to attack our *talent*—that unique value of life that God has placed in each one of us. When we ignore the insult, we defuse it by eliminating the insulter’s desired reaction. If we retaliate, we play right into his hands.

Second, Jesus said, “*And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well*” (Matt. 5:40). Two thousand years ago, one’s interior and exterior clothing was often his only *treasure*, and the laws protected him from being wronged or cheated out of it. At the same time, the courts were littered with law suits arising from disputes. Rather than sue each other in retaliation, Jesus said that we should be gracious, or generous, with our treasures. Paul said that we should rather be wronged

or cheated than retaliate with a law suit (1 Cor. 6:7). When someone wrongs or cheats you out of a treasure, even through the threat of a lawsuit, be retaliation free.

Third, Jesus said, *“If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles”* (Matt. 5:41). A Roman centurion often interrupted any person at any time for official business. The law required the person to carry government goods one mile at the centurion’s request. Jesus said that when interrupted, one should not retaliate, but go another mile. In essence, He said that we should be generous with our *time*. When you are hurried and someone asks you to take your time to do something for him, be gracious and serve him beyond his request.

Inside-out righteousness desires a heart like God’s. God is gracious (Exod. 34:6) and generous with His resources (Matt. 20:15). Christ is gracious. When evil people hurled insults at Him, he did not retaliate (1 Peter 2:23). He was generous with His resources. Though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor, so that through His poverty, we might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). When we are gracious, we recognize that our resources come from God (Ps. 145:9). His greatest resource is Christ in us. Christ frees us from the enslavement to retaliation and the weariness of outside-in righteousness.

This week, be gracious with your resources; when harmed, don’t retaliate one-for-one. Be gracious with your talent: when insulted, ignore it. Be gracious with your treasures: when threatened, wronged, or cheated, don’t retaliate with litigation. Be gracious with your time: when interrupted, serve beyond the request.

Gracious,
Mitch