

Panthers:

Do you hate someone? Is there a person or people group that you just don't love? It might be someone who is gay, Muslim, addicted, unsaved, rude, late, or disorganized. It could be someone who is introverted or extroverted, rich or poor, conservative or liberal, irreligious or religious, attractive or unattractive. It is probably someone who has wronged you. In our humanness, we make lists. One of them is a list of those we love (those who love us) and a list of those we hate (our enemies). We want to treat others as they treat us.

Jesus offered a different way. In His final illustration of *six examples of inside-out righteousness*, Jesus taught His disciples to *be hate 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: "*You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor'*" (Matt. 5:43). The command came from the Old Testament Law (Lev. 19:18). Israelites who were moving from slavery to freedom were commanded by God to not withhold their love from one another, even from someone who had wronged them.

The Legalistic Interpretation: "*Hate your enemy*" (Matt. 5:43). Two thousand years later, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law added a loophole to love. In essence, they said, "*Treat others as they treat you*". This axiom followed the letter of the law, but it missed the spirit of the law. It was outside-in righteousness.

We do the same today. If someone mistreats us, we withhold love. If our business competitor criticizes our company to a potential client, we withhold love toward that competitor. If our spouse is rude, we withhold love until it he or she repents. If someone disagrees with us, we withhold love. If someone cuts us off on the highway, we withhold love. If someone gossips about us, we withhold love. If a church differs on disputable matters, we withhold love. The problem is that withholding love is hate.

The Spirit of the Law (Heart): "*But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*" (Matt. 5:44). The spirit of the law was to love everyone without parameters. God's design was that hate would never flow from one's heart (Lev. 19:17). Paul said that love fulfills the law (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-14).

Jesus offered two ways for His disciples to model the heart of God: (1) love our enemies and (2) pray for those who persecute us. Jesus fulfilled the law by giving us the ultimate picture of God's heart. He loved His enemies and He prayed for those who persecuted Him (Luke 23:34). Jesus said that these practices flow from a heart like God's whose heart is perfect, meaning complete, or whole (Matt. 5:45, 48). God withholds His love from no one (Ps. 145:9) because God is love (1 Jn. 4:8). Christ is the perfect picture of God's boundless love (Eph. 3:18; Jn. 1:14). Luke quoted Jesus as saying "*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful*" (Lk. 6:36). Mercy doesn't treat others as they deserve; instead, mercy loves its enemies and prays for its persecutors. The pagan culture in Jesus' day wasn't merciful (Matt. 5:46-47). Two millennia later, things haven't changed.

Inside-out righteousness desires a heart like God's. This week, be complete in your love. First, love your neighbor *and* your enemies. When someone wrongs you, sacrificially serve his needs. Second, pray for those who persecute you. When someone

mistreats you, pray for him to be blessed in the same way that you want to be blessed by God. It won't be you doing so; rather it will be Christ in you.

Hate free,

Mitch