



Six Examples of Inside Out Righteousness Part 3: Be Retaliation and Hate Free (Matthew 5:38-48)

Example 5: Be Retaliation Free (Matthew 5:38-42)

Have you been harmed by another person? 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 means “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’” (Matthew 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 (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 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, a 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: “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” (Matthew 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, but it is *not* repaying evil with evil (Romans 12:17). Being gracious means that we are generous with our resources: our *talent, treasure, and time*.

Generous with our Talent

First, Jesus taught, “If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5:39). Being struck on the right cheek implied 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” (Proverbs 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.

Generous with our Treasure

Second, Jesus said, “And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well” (Matthew 5:40). Two thousand years ago, one’s interior and exterior clothing was often his only *treasure*, and laws protected him from being wronged or cheated out of it. At the same time, the courts were littered with lawsuits arising from disputes. Rather than sue each other in retaliation, Jesus said that we should be gracious, or generous, with our treasures. Paul implored that we should rather be wronged or cheated than retaliate with a lawsuit (1 Corinthians 6:7). When someone wrongs or cheats you out of a treasure, even through the threat of a lawsuit, be retaliation free.

Generous with our Time

Third, Jesus commanded, “If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles” (Matthew 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.

God is Gracious

Inside out righteousness desires a heart like God’s. God is gracious (Exodus 34:6). He is generous with His resources (Matthew 20:15). When He walked this earth, Jesus Christ was gracious. When evil people hurled insults at Him, He did not retaliate (1 Peter 2:23). Instead, He entrusted himself, or literally handed himself over, to the gracious Father, who judges justly. Jesus modeled generosity with His resources. Though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor, so that through His poverty, we might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). When we are gracious, we recognize that our talent, treasure, and time come from God (Psalm 145:9). His greatest resource is Christ in us, who frees us from the enslavement to retaliation and the weariness of outside in righteousness.

Street Smarts for The Restoration Road

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 treasure: when threatened, wronged, or cheated, don’t retaliate with litigation. Instead, hand yourself over to our gracious God. Be gracious with your time: when interrupted, serve beyond the request.

Example 6: Be Hate Free (Matthew 5:43-48)



Do you hate someone? Is there a person or people group that you simply don't love? It might be someone with a different sexual orientation or religion, someone who is 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. Most likely, it is 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*.

The Old Testament command: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor’” (Matthew 5:43). The command came from the Old Testament Law (Leviticus 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*” (Matthew 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: “But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 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 (Leviticus 19:17). Paul said that love fulfills the law (Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 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 revealed that these practices flowed from a heart like God's, one that is perfect, meaning complete, or whole (Matthew 5:45, 48). God withholds His love from no one (Psalm 145:9) because God is love (1 John 4:8). Christ is the perfect picture of God's boundless love (Ephesians 3:18; John 1:14). In a parallel passage, Luke quoted Jesus as saying, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 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 (Matthew 5:46-47). Two millennia later, things haven't changed.



Street Smarts for The Restoration Road

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.

Conclusion

Jesus offered tools that would radically transform our lives. Imagine a world riddled of retaliation and hate. We can contribute to that campaign by applying His words to our lives today.