

Like Father Like Son

Children tend to turn out like their parents. Often the child, even after insisting he or she will never be like a disliked parent, actually becomes like the parent anyway. Children of abusers tend to become abusers themselves. Children who grow up in loving homes tend to do better in life than those who do not. The same is true when we regard our Creator God as a Heavenly Father. Christians are taught to emulate and try to be like the God they worship. This is a good thing, if God is pictured as loving, kind, fair, just and forgiving. But if God is pictured as judgmental, harsh, hateful and cruel towards those who do not conform to a certain carefully defined set of attitudes and behaviors, then we give ourselves license to behave in exactly the same way.

When we teach our children that God is loving by nature, yet hateful and cruel towards His enemies, then we give them an excuse to be hateful and cruel towards their perceived enemies. The reasoning goes like this. It's ok to be judgmental and hateful towards those who deserve it. To make matters even worse, not only is it ok to be judgmental and hateful, towards those who behave badly, but also towards those who might be loving, kind and generous, but whose religious beliefs differ from ours, or who are different from us with respect to ethnicity, gender orientation, political views, dress standards, and so on. It's OK to hate people whom we feel God would hate.

While it is true that Jesus taught us to love our enemies and return good for evil, we don't take this teaching as seriously as we should. Why? Because we believe God does not take it seriously. If it's OK for God to be judgmental, hateful and cruel towards all non-Christians, especially towards egregious sinners, then why would it be so bad for us to behave in the same way?

We look for ways to circumvent God's command to love our enemies and return good for evil. For example, we might say God forgives His enemies, but only if they repent and ask for forgiveness. We even excuse hateful attitudes towards kind and loving people who don't repent of their incorrect theology, sexual orientation, or moral values. When we view God as both loving and hateful at the same time and highly selective regarding those whom He blesses and those whom He doesn't, then we can justify almost any negative attitude towards people who differ from us.

The schizophrenic God described above is not actually the real God of the Bible. I personally believe that most of the harsh and cruel acts of God described in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, are not accurate history and mostly reflect man's imperfect view of God. However, even if you accept those accounts as true and accurate descriptions of God's activities, the Bible also teaches that after judgment, God shows mercy, and the purpose of God's negative judgments is to teach us life lessons and help us to learn and grow. The Bible clearly teaches in both the Old and New Testaments that God's plan for the ages is to restore all humanity to a state of perfection, bliss and union with Himself in Heaven.