

For all of their faults, the Pharisees they were patriotic, loved their country and hated Rome with a passion. The Herodians supported King Herod who supported Rome by collecting their taxes. The taxes were crushing, and had to be paid in Roman coin, the very possession of which was contrary to Jewish Law because it had the image of Tiberius Caesar who claimed to be a god. To add insult to injury, the system was filled with graft and corruption.

Under normal circumstances, these two groups wouldn't give each other the time of day unless they were actively engaged in beating the snot out of each other on the street corner. So why did they come together to try to trap Jesus so they could discredit him and remove his influence over the general population?

Anyone here ever read the short story "Who Stole my Cheese" by Ilene Hochberg? The book speaks to how people resist change, even when the change is in their own best interest. Jesus was stealing the Pharisees and Herodians cheese. Although the status-quo was not acceptable to either party, it was better than the unknown that Jesus represented. If he was going to lead a revolution to drive out the Romans, the Pharisees wouldn't be in charge and that was unacceptable. If Jesus came out in support of Roman rule, he would be the one to gain the credit, not the Herodians. They saw Jesus as changing the balance of power, and as a threat to their power and income, he was stealing their cheese.

The Pharisees and Herodians never considered the possibility that Jesus had a better way, a way where both parties would be better off than before. They couldn't imagine life without their constant conflict. Instead of looking for someone to love, they focused on maintaining power by finding someone to hate.

Fast forward about 2000 years and it doesn't seem that much has changed. Liberals hate Conservatives, Republicans hate Democrats, the religion and cultures of the Middle East hate everybody else, and we won't even need to mention the really bad guys. The root of all the issues still boils down to money and power. It gets wrapped up and thinly disguised as politics, religion, and a dozen other subjects, but at the end of the day, it is money and power maintained in the hands of the few by finding someone to hate.

Over the past couple of weeks we have had a bit of a crisis in my family pertaining to my grandson. Although I have complete trust in God, although I love him and his mother unreservedly, I am still worried. In fact I have been scared silly. I know that God will resolve the problem in his own time and in a manner that is the best for my grandson's salvation. What worries me is that God may see a different path toward his salvation than I do. I am afraid that my hopes and dreams for him are going to be altered, that his life is going to be changed forever. I am afraid that God was going to steal my cheese.

I have spent my time between being angry, trying to stay too busy to think about it, praying for my solution and an itty-bitty bit of time surrendering to God's will because I do trust him. I have even managed to work my way halfway through Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's stages of grief. Friday morning my grandson's problem resolved itself and he was functioning normally. Saturday morning he had a slight relapse, but the slope is in the right direction. Seems that God likes my plan for Chase, or more accurately, my plan is in line with his plan so we are all happy with how his solution is working out.

I bring up my personal story up because it is a common experience in our lives. Every one of us has had the same chain of events and experience; the malady and names are different, the emotional rollercoaster is the same. Many times, our solution and God's solution don't line up. We are disappointed and may even be angry with God, and where does that leave us?

The anger response makes for great talking points, and in public life can be used to steal someone else's cheese. Fanned by the media it seems to be our first, middle and last resort in society today, and it is also why society is such a mess. At the end of the day all it does is lead to frustration, indigestion and high blood pressure. We aren't always going to agree, many times agreement with the positions and actions of others is a grave and serious sin and we must not agree with or support those positions in any way. That doesn't mean that we need to be angry with or hate the people who hold those positions.

In the microcosm of my family's ongoing experience, prayer, love and support have had the greatest influence. The words of comfort and support from everybody who knows about the situation are wonderful. Their prayers help the entire family. The practical help from people who know

Chase, including the offer of doctor's referrals and free private flights to out of state clinics for treatment are amazing. These are the kind of responses that Jesus is asking of us in response to the events that provoke us to anger.

How would spending time just listening and honestly evaluating what Jesus has to say changed the lives of the Pharisees and Herodians? How would that same action change the world in which we live if the many people who reject or distort what Jesus has to say took some time out and did the same honest evaluation? How many lives would change?

And what about us? Are we willing to honestly evaluate what Jesus has to say and modify our behavior to be more in line with his teaching? Are we willing to build our personal relationship with Jesus and do our level best to set the anger response aside?

This isn't a one-time exercise; it is the work of our lives. Always examining, always evaluating, always re-converting ourselves as true Disciples of Christ. Always trying to become the people that God wants us to be.