

Turn The Other Cheek

Jesus's teaching about turning the other cheek is from His Sermon on the Mount. He was instructing His followers-including you and me-how to respond when someone hurts us or when we are asked to do something we don't want to do. "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you." Matthew 5:38-42.

The Scriptural Context is "Don't Fight Back"

Matthew 5:38 is one of the most difficult passages in the N.T. The interpretation seems obvious. The problem is that it's rather difficult to make this teaching fit what you and I would naturally want to do. When we read "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, "we are on solid ground. This is what Moses taught in the O.T. Law, "If there is injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise." Exodus 21:23-25.

It is easy for most people to return good for good and evil for evil. Have you ever had the pleasure of getting even with someone? It's easy to hit back. Someone spits on you, you spit back. Most people have no problem fighting back when someone else starts it. Even dogs fight back. However, when we read Matthew 5 and try to make it fit our lives, many of us struggle with what our human selves want to do compared with what God calls us to do.

In the Law of Moses, the principle of punishment to match the crime had two basic purposes.

The first purpose was to curtail further crime. When someone is facing sure punishment, they are less likely to commit a crime.

The second purpose was to prevent excessive punishment. If someone bruises your arm, you have not right to poke out their eye. Punishment was to match, but not exceed, the harm done by the offense.

In the N.T., Jesus is teaching us how to relate to each other as His followers-revealing His love to the world. He's saying, "Don't strike back. Don't spend your life trying to get even." It takes a strong Christian to stand back and refuse to retaliate.

Jesus Is Not Telling Us to Be Doormats

Probably no part of the Sermon on the Mount has been so misinterpreted and misapplied as Matt. 5:38-42. It has been interpreted to mean that Christians are to be sanctimonious doormats. It has been used to promote pacifism, conscientious objection to military service, lawlessness, anarchy, and many other positions that Jesus never meant to support.

On the other hand, if you are walking down the street and see a child or woman being attacked or molested, don't quote that Jesus Christ said, "Resist not evil" and stand there and watch. You had better help.

Jesus said, "If you don't have a sword, sell your coat and get one." Luke 22:36. He also said to Peter, "Put your sword away." John 18:11.

How do we understand both commands? The guiding principle is, there is a time to fight and there is a time to turn the other cheek. Wisdom is needed to distinguish the proper course of action. As Christians that is what we should always be seeking, wisdom.

Jesus Uses 4 Commands to Illustrate This Principle

1. Never return insult for insult. Matt. 5:39

According to the rabbis in Jesus' day, hitting someone across the face with the back of the hand was twice as insulting as hitting with an open hand. It was a double insult to receive a flick of the hand on the cheek, one of the most demeaning and contemptuous of acts toward someone else.

Jesus is saying. "Even if a man should direct at you the most deadly and calculated insult, you must not retaliate." If someone starts insulting or abusing you for something they don't like, wait for them to finish, and go on without even acknowledging it. The problem is theirs not yours. Remember Proverbs 19:11, "It is to a man's glory to overlook an offense."

2. Be willing to give up your possessions or rights in order to bring peace.
Matt. 5:40

Jesus said, "In a lawsuit, return the coat that you want before nightfall." In other words, if you are involved in a lawsuit and the one doing the suing, and receive a man's coat for payment, then take it for a day, but give it back that night. He needs it as a blanket that night when it's cold. Return it to him.

The attitude of a kingdom citizen should be a willingness to surrender even one's coat rather than cause offense or hard feelings with an adversary. Recognize that even those who seek to harm you are people with needs and feelings.

3. Do more than you are required to do for others. Matt. 5:40

Rome had soldiers all over Palestine to keep peace and collect taxes. There's no worse job than being an occupying soldier in a foreign land. The Romans were hated. Jews let them have it at every opportunity.

Jesus is referring to a Roman Law which allowed soldiers to conscript a civilian and have him carry a pack for a mile, but no more. You can imagine the feelings this generated between the Romans and the Jews.

What Jesus is saying, if a Roman soldier asks you to carry his pack for one mile, then go with him two miles. Go one mile because you have to, but don't just go one, go two.

Most of us try to find out where the milepost is so we know right where to stop. We don't want to go beyond that. We do what we have to and then we quit. Imagine what it said to the hated Roman soldier when the man he made carry his pack went an extra mile without being asked. We should do more than asked, out

of kindness, acceptance and the love of Jesus.

4. Give generously to those who ask. Matt. 5:42

The giving and borrowing that Jesus speaks of here should be understood in connection with the biblical principle of caring for the poor. He is not saying that we should give whatever to any person that asks. We must lend in the sense of Deuteronomy 15:7-8, "If there is a poor man among you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely give him whatever he needs."

When someone asks to borrow something, we should not turn away from him. In other words, we should give him what he needs. The implication is that the person who asks has a genuine need. Sometimes, to give a person what he wants but does not need is a disservice, doing him more harm than good.

4 Ways We Need to Apply This Principle in Our Lives

1. As Christians, we must often give up our rights.

The apostle Paul gave up many of his rights in order to reach others for Christ. I am going to paraphrase what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9. "I gave up my rights for the sake of the gospel! I gave up my right to food and drink. I gave up my right to be married. I gave up my right to receive a salary. Others receive support, but I gave up my right to it. Why? So that I can offer the gospel free of charge. I gave it my right to have a healthy body. My body has been beaten often until it's black and blue."

Our rights are never, ever as important as leading people to Jesus Christ. Showing His love and care through our actions often requires us to put others first. This is never easy, especially in a culture that constantly bombards us to stand up for our rights. But it is critical as followers of Jesus!

2. As Christians, we don't have near as many rights as we think we do.

According to Paul, "If we have food and clothes, we will be content with that." 1 Timothy 6:8. Think about what this means. We don't even have the right

before God to have a house. In other words, we must not think that the world owes us a soft living, or that we deserve anything special in the world's eyes. If anyone thinks that, stop! Stop right now. We have been called to deny ourselves as we follow Christ.

3. We must rid ourselves of the constant tendency to be watching out for our own self-interests.

Jesus says, "Stop spending life trying to get even, quit worrying about whether or not you have all your possessions, stop looking for the mileposts. There are more important things."

One element of the Declaration of Independence is that we have the right to seek, "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." In today's society, the number of rights claimed has greatly expanded. Movements have developed for civil rights, women's rights, children's rights, worker's rights, prisoners' right, LGBTQ rights and on and on. Never has a society been more concerned about rights.

Many conclude that they are free to do anything they want. They demand that we all "have our own truth" and that whatever it is must be accepted by everyone else. That is a misunderstanding of the Declaration of Independence. It never meant that we are free to do anything we like. It means that we are free to do what is right.

That's what freedom in Christ looks like. We are free to do whatever honors God and points others to salvation. It is in that freedom we will find abundant life.

4. Redeem the one who offends us. Refuse to respond in kind. Respond in contrast.

Where the Mosaic Law was aimed at punishing evildoers, Jesus' philosophy is aimed at redeeming the evildoer. When someone does evil to us, isn't our first reaction to do away or retaliate against them? If we want to destroy the one who offends us, the Law of Moses is sufficient. If we want to destroy the evil itself and to salvage the evildoer in the process, we must take a different approach.

They only way to destroy the evil and redeem the evildoer is to respond in contrast. Do not respond in kind.

The Bible tells us to always overlook an offense. We are to be imitators of Christ. We all know the quotes, two wrongs don't make a right, sometimes it's better to react with no reaction, show respect to people who don't deserve it, not as a reflection of their character, but as a reflection of yours, and you can't change how people treat you or what they say about you. All you can do is change how you react to it. And that is exactly what we have been commanded to do, by Jesus Christ, Himself.

Thank you