

The Other Cheek & the Second Mile

Thomas Robinson, *Seeing Life Through Jesus' Eyes* 8, March 4, 2012

Matthew 5:38-42

³⁸ “You have heard that it was said,

‘**An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.**’ [Ex 21:24; Lev 24:20; Dt 19:21]

³⁹ But I say to you,

Do not resist the one who is evil.

But if anyone **slaps** you on the **right cheek**,

turn to him the other also.

⁴⁰ And if anyone would **sue you and take your tunic**,

let him have your **cloak** as well.

⁴¹ And if anyone **forces you to go one mile**,

go with him two miles.

⁴² **Give to the one who begs from you**,

and do **not refuse the one who would borrow** from you.

Deuteronomy 19:18-21

¹⁸ The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is **a false witness** and has accused his brother falsely, ¹⁹ then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. ²⁰ And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. ²¹ Your eye shall not pity. It shall be **life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.**

Leviticus 24:19-20

¹⁹ If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, ²⁰ fracture for fracture, **eye for eye, tooth for tooth**; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him.

Luke 6:28-31

²⁸ Bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ To one who strikes you on the **cheek**, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your **cloak** do not withhold your **tunic** either. ³⁰ Give to everyone who **begs from you**, and from one who **takes away your goods** do not demand them back. ³¹ And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

John 2:13-16

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. ¹⁵ And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade.”

How Can Jesus Possibly Say This?

One of the most surprising statements in all of Jesus' teaching: *"Do not resist the one who is evil."* Shouldn't it be just the opposite? Think of the great prophets (Amos, Jeremiah, Isaiah, et al.) who resisted with their lives injustice, oppression, corrupt worship, faithlessness to God. Is Jesus rejecting them? Doesn't Jesus himself resist evil at every turn? Isn't proclaiming the Kingdom of God overthrowing all evil? What's going on? Jesus' statement is intentionally startling both in general and in specific examples. But he's serious and wants to challenge us to serious self-examination of our thought and action. His aim is not a new law but a transformation of his followers to a new way of thinking.

Proportional Retaliation: Eye for Eye

As in other antitheses, the old law is reasonable and enforceable. It may seem brutal to us but was aimed at real deterrence and limited retaliation for a crime. It expressed the need of society to take wrongdoing seriously but not to allow disproportional revenge. It was sin/crime management, as law must be. But that is not Jesus' aim. Jesus is not giving reasonable and wise guidelines for how to keep wrongdoing within bounds, how to deter bad behavior, how to teach the evil-doer a lesson. His aim is changing our view of Life.

Under Attack: Resisting One who's Evil

Preceding antitheses pointed to bad attitudes initiated by disciples: anger, contempt, coveting, lust. Here the disciple is on the receiving end, under attack, responding to evil. He's in the right and suffering: slapped, sued, forced. Jesus knows sin is adaptable: Right(eousness) becomes self-righteousness. Sin gives us self-satisfying battles to fight. Under attack I see my person, my honor, my property, my independence threatened. Everything in me wants to fight back. I'm powerfully drawn to respond in kind, fight fire with fire. So whether I'm the "one who is evil" with anger or contempt, or I'm resisting/reacting to "one who is evil," still "one who is evil" is shaping my actions. I give the one whom I'm resisting power to define/shape me. I become more defensive about my honor, possessive about my stuff, insistent on my rights, resistant to appeals. There's a strong tendency to hit back harder, creating a cycle of retaliation hard to control. I become ever more sure of my rightness and more willing to resist with greater force.

Seeing the Real Danger; Knowing My Real Identity

Jesus knows the power of this cycle. Seek God's rule. Let God in his grace, love, and generosity define your identity and your actions. Never grant that power to anyone else. Everything is at stake in this. The real danger is not an outside threat. It is in myself. I can't control the actions of others, but I can learn to trust God. Let God change me first. Jesus knows the danger of retaliation is such that being stoic and doing nothing isn't enough. We have to act positively to assert our identity, seeking God's kingdom. I can't just take the slap, I need to act against the slap to disempower its ability to draw me into violence. I can't just lose the tunic. I need to assert my identity by actively giving my cloak. I can't just submit to coercion, I need to serve as God has served me in Jesus. I define myself. This is the real resistance to evil. The way of Jesus. Trusting God's love, acting boldly.