

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Turn The Other Cheek

(Jerry Fite)

What do you think when you hear that Jesus said you were not to resist those who do you wrong; but whoever hits you on your right cheek, you are to turn to him the other also? Do you say Christianity is not for you, because you are not going to be pushed around by anyone? Do you conclude a Christian can do nothing to defend himself, but must let a person beat him at will?

Jesus did make such a statement in his famous sermon on the mount (*Matthew 5:39*). But did he literally mean you were to let someone beat you up, and you cannot protect yourself? Let's see.

Jesus made his statement in the context of the Law of Moses which taught an “*eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth*” (*Matthew 6:38*). The Law expressed the justice which was handed out by the judges (*Exodus 21:22*). If a man “*blemished*” his neighbor, he was to receive in like manner the same blemish (*Lev. 24:20*). The Law was never given to cultivate a “get even” or

“vengeful” spirit. So Jesus gives four examples illustrating the opposite spirit. When wronged, one is not to retaliate with evil. When forced by government, one should be willing to go an extra mile.

The reason we know Jesus was not teaching that one literally turn the other cheek when struck, is because He did not do it when He was struck. “. . . *one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand*” when he did not like the way Jesus answered Pilate (*John 18:20*). Jesus responded by saying, “*If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?*” (*John 18:23*). Jesus never sinned, and always practiced what He preached. Jesus did not literally turn the other cheek and let the man hit him again. What He did do is refuse to retaliate with evil when wronged. He was not out to get even, but overcame evil with good by forcing a man to think about his own actions.

The Roman government could “compel” a citizen to carry out an order at any given moment. Simon of Cyrene faced such an

occasion, when he was “*laid hold of*” to carry the cross of Jesus to Golgotha (*Lk. 23:26*). If the court forces you to give up your less expensive inner garment, you should not have a vengeful spirit, but be willing to part with even the more expensive outer garment (*Matthew 5:40*).

Jesus did not tell the officer to hit him again, offering him His other cheek. Neither did he leave his disciples defenseless when preparing them for difficult times. He said, “*and he that hath none, let him sell his cloak, and buy a sword*” (*Lk. 22:36*). One may appeal to government for protection. Paul as a Roman citizen appealed to be judged by Caesar in Rome to prove his innocence (*Acts 25:10-12*).

Turning the other cheek is about fighting the “get even” spirit. It is not prohibiting self-protection. A “selfish” “vengeful” spirit is one thing, self-protection is another. Jesus’ own example and the apostles help us see the difference.