

# Weaving the Word

## *Turn the Other Cheek*

Part 27 – March 15, 2015

Welcome to where we're learning to open our eyes to see, and our ears to hear.

### How do you respond to caustic comments about your faith?



#### Do you treat the enemies of your faith the way they treat you?

“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 someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” – Matthew 5:38-39 NIV

But, if he strikes you on the *left*, I guess *he's all yours!*

Oh, wait. Luke's covering the *same portion* of Jesus' teaching.

“But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on **one cheek**, turn to him the other also.” – Luke 6:27-29a NIV



Some commentators do backflips to try and change Jesus' words! And, I don't blame 'em. **It sounds like He's saying that it's a sin to defend yourself, or to protect your property.** They say He's actually talking about resisting our enemies, or protecting ourselves, or He's using hyperbole. The backflips are only necessary if you try to apply this to any and every enemy.



#### But, **which enemies was Jesus referring to?**

He's talking to His newly appointed, mostly teenage, **prophets**, concerning their heart, and those who oppose their faith.

And, He began with His woes to those, of the religious elite, whose forefathers had similarly mistreated the prophets. (Luke 6:23)



He's preparing these young men to go out in His name. (Mark 3:14-15)

And, **He's addressing the enemies of the faith.**

**He isn't denouncing soldiers or police or judges or jailers. And, He isn't discussing muggers or wife beaters or child abusers.**

The most loving thing you can do for an abuser is to hold them accountable. Otherwise you enable them to set themselves up for further sin, harsher judgment, and more harm to others.



We're not called to be door mats, but, we are called to know when to lay it down for the sake of Christ and His kingdom.

So, how do you react to mean spirited comments posted online, especially biting ones by atheists and other foes of the faith? Eye for eye and tooth for tooth? It's so tempting.

And, it's exactly what Jesus is saying *not to do*.

When I started looking at this passage, you know what stood out? That "right cheek". Why is Matthew so *oddly specific* about the *right* cheek? Was everyone left handed?



There's something distinct about the left hand. Very distinct. It's the unclean hand. The T.P. hand. Distinct hand.

You didn't touch food with it, without shaming yourself.

You didn't strike others with it, without shaming yourself.

At Qumran, a Jewish community of Jesus' day, *gesturing* with the left hand meant exclusion and 10 days of penance! (1QS 7)

This is why Jesus said, "If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off." That's the valuable hand! And, it would only force you to sin by using your left ... *and then you'd have to cut that off as well*.

So, the right cheek is being struck by the right hand. Hmm. How's that work? It's a backhanded slap, a fairly universal symbol of insult. We even use the phrase, "a backhanded compliment" for a remark that sounds flattering, but contains an insulting insinuation. It's not meant to injure, but to insult, humiliate, and degrade.

Matthew is *specific* so his *Jewish* readers won't be confused. And, Luke is *non-specific* so his *Greek* readers won't be confused. Now we need to grasp the severity of the backhanded slap so we won't be confused. For this we need a quick sidebar on the Mishnah.

40 years after Jesus' death, when Jerusalem was destroyed (70<sup>AD</sup>), there was great concern that the ancient Jewish oral traditions (for carrying out the written Law) would be lost and forgotten.



So, 120+ rabbis spent 130 years collecting and assembling the Mishnah, which is an exhaustive compilation of all the unwritten aspects of Jewish practice and procedure in Jesus' day!

Including the fine for a backhanded slap.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/2029-assault-and-battery](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/2029-assault-and-battery)

For shame-based violence causing minor pain and no impairment, there was a fixed scale of compensation in Jesus' day that assigned a value, based on an action's degree of disgrace.

- A punch in the face                      \$ .60                      *That's per punch!*
- A knee to the groin                      \$ 1.80                      *That's grossly undervalued!*
- A palm slap to the face                      \$ 30.00
- A backhanded slap                      \$ 60.00

Realizing you can punch someone 90 times, in response to a backhanded slap, and they'd *still* owe you \$6.00 ... *priceless!* These fines are not pain based, but shame based. **A backhanded slap was 100x more insulting than a punch in the nose!**

Matthew's oddly specific detail shows that **Jesus wasn't covering violence in general, but disciple persecution in particular.** He's preparing his apostles to go out in His name, and encounter those who oppose their message, their *enemies*, again and again.

And, they're bound to get that \$60 slap, again and again. In front of everyone, again and again.

And, they need to offer the other cheek, again and again. In front of everyone, again and again.

Why do they have to "turn" it? How do you turn it? Well, your head jerks from the impact, which causes your left cheek to be shielded by your shoulder. Jesus says, "Reset it."



**We must make ourselves vulnerable to the insults of our enemies.** Know why? His eye's on you.

So, no eye for eye. Aye-aye? **When you have the perfect comeback, refuse to lash back. Instead, open yourself, in love, to further insult. That's what makes us different, shines the light, conveys God's love and mercy, and gives the atheist and the enemies pause for thought.**

"And if someone [who is your enemy] wants to sue you [in the Sanhedrin Court] and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone [who is your enemy] forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one [who is your enemy] who asks you, and do not turn away from the one [who is your enemy] who wants to borrow from you." – Matthew 5:40-42 NIV

**When you have your enemy at your mercy, show 'em mercy!** According to the Mishnah, there were other \$60 insults besides the backhanded slap. For instance, taking someone's cloak.

"If someone [who is your enemy] takes your cloak, [Usually this would be their prayer shawl (or tallit)] do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone [of your enemies] who asks you, and if anyone [of your enemies] takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others [who are your enemies] as you would have them [who are your enemies] do to you." – Luke 6:29b-31 NIV

Remember, **all this comes just a few days after the showdown in the synagogue**, ending with the plotting of Jesus' death. (Mat 12:14)

**The religious leaders had likely backhanded these “blasphemers”, and confiscated their prayer shawls (both by asking and taking), and demanded that they go with them to face the Sanhedrin.**

And, I'm guessing there was a striking difference between the way Jesus had acted and how His young disciples had reacted. He had to talk to 'em about heart-murder, and making amends with their adversaries while on the way to the Sanhedrin. (Mat 5:22, 25)

**I'm guessing they didn't offer their cheek.** I'm guessing they were spitting mad. Did I mention the Mishnah says that spitting was a \$60 offense? As was hair pulling and ear tugging.

Remember how he said they could be turned over to the jailer, and they wouldn't get out until they paid every last cent? (Mat 5:26) These are the cents He was talking about.

Which means ... *they fought back.*

Which explains why Jesus is telling 'em how they *should've* behaved, and *will* behave, if they want to be *His* disciples. And, I'm guessing at some point He showed 'em this scripture:

The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust — there may yet be hope. **Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him**, and let him be filled with disgrace. — Lamentations 3:25-30 NIV

**“You prevented them from seeing this. If you'd offered your cheek they might've found it, remembered it. But, by demanding an eye for an eye, you rendered all those who oppose blind to the truth.”**

**Do you treat the enemies of your faith the way they treat you?**

**Eye for eye and tooth for tooth?**

**Or, do you treat 'em the way you hope they'll one day treat you?**

**And, allow 'em to “taste and see that the Lord is good”?** (Psalm 34:8)