

## THE COUNTERINTUITIVE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

### #3 – “Turn the Other Cheek”

July 9-11, 2005

<sup>38</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’  
<sup>39</sup>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. <sup>40</sup>And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. <sup>41</sup>If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. <sup>42</sup>Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. *Matthew 5:38-42 TNIV*

Introduction: To this point in our series on the counterintuitive teachings of Jesus, we have examined truth that exists in paradox and truth that seems illogical. This week, let’s look at one of Jesus’ teachings that seems to make demands beyond reason, a third category of counterintuitive truth. Jesus’ appeal to his followers to “turn the other cheek” seems high impossible, and perhaps that’s the point.

#### I. Unreasonable Demands

- A. “Unreasonable demands” are injunctions that are irrational, demanding the impossible or implausible.
- B. Typical Unrealistic Demands
  1. “I murdered someone (or ‘I’m considering suicide’), and I expect you to keep my secret.”
  2. “If you really love me, then you will never disagree with me, or we will never argue.”
  3. “I expect you to get straight A’s every semester.”
  4. “You must obey me without reservation.”
  5. “Now go outside and play, but don’t get dirty.”
  6. “Love is never having to say you’re sorry.”
- C. People often sabotage relationships through unreasonable demands, *sometimes* intentionally.
- D. The study of ethics necessitates consideration of unreasonable moral demands.
- E. Reinhold Niebuhr wrote, “Law is a compromise between moral ideas and practical possibilities.” (*The Nature and Destiny of Man*)
- F. A test to determine whether a demand is unreasonable:
  1. Is that which is being demanded physically possible?
  2. Are enough time and resources available to meet the demand?
  3. Can the demand be met without compromising reasonable moral, ethical, or personal norms?
  4. Are the conditions necessary to meet the demand within your personal control?

- II. Turn the Other Cheek, Give Your Coat, and Go the Extra Mile
  - A. Many of Jesus’ moral and ethical demands initially seem unreasonable.
  - B. “Turn the other cheek” in “reasonable” historical context.
    1. “Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth” comes from the Deuteronomic law of Israel (Exodus 21:24-26, Leviticus 24:19-20, Deuteronomy 19:21).
      - a. Part of a legal process.
      - b. Witnesses required.
      - c. Limits imposed, the beginning of mercy!
    2. Other forms of retributive justice, known as *lex talionis* (Latin “law of retribution”), impose similar limits.
      - a. The most famous (and perhaps earliest) example is the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi (18<sup>th</sup> Century BC), which states, for example, that if a person causes the death of another’s child, then that person’s child should be put to death.
      - b. This type of exact, proscribed retribution was a tremendous improvement over common practice.
      - c. “Lex talionis” codes are reasonable, executing exact justice while avoiding escalation.
  - C. Jesus implored his followers not to “resist” evil people (Grk. *anthistemi*, “to stand against” as in a military standoff).
    1. Don’t react in kind, or mirror the enemy.
    2. Don’t become the very thing you oppose.
  - D. Jesus’ moral demand to “turn the other cheek” was paraphrased by Ghandi, “An eye for an eye and the whole world goes blind.”
  - E. By Old Testament law, the undergarment (shirt or tunic) could be taken, but not the covering (cloak or coat), but Jesus implored his follower not to cling to anything at all.
  - F. By Roman law, the occupying soldier could force the Palestinian to carry his pack one mile, but Jesus implored his follower to “go the extra mile” as well.
- III. The “Third Way”
  - A. We generally think of two ways we can resist others, active (often violent) resistance and passive acceptance.
  - B. Jesus taught us a third way to resist evil, assertive protest.
  - C. The blow to the right cheek is a backhand, oppressive blow, but the blow to the left cheek is a blow from an equal.
  - D. Jesus demand is difficult, but not unreasonable, since our response is entirely within our control.

Conclusion: Demands of Jesus that seem unreasonable are, in fact, invitations to “a still more excellent way” of love. When we maintain control of our response, we maintain moral excellence.