

# An Eye for an Eye – Not!

01/28/18

Romans 12:2 -- *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- His good, pleasing and perfect will.*

When studying the words of Jesus, it is apparent that he is trying to change the way we think so that we can change the way we behave. One strategy he uses is to compare the old way of thinking with his new way: “You have heard this, but I say this.” He is attempting to help us transcend our current belief system and embrace a higher spiritual pattern of thought.

His ideas can seem insurmountable at times; especially to our 21<sup>st</sup> Century ears and minds. But his truths are eternal, timely, applicable to our lives today, and worthy of considering, and incorporating into our thinking.

Matthew 5:38-39 <sup>38</sup> “*You have heard that it was said, 'An Eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.'*” <sup>39</sup> *But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.* We’ve all heard the phrase “An eye for an eye” many times. We may have even used it. Over the eons, it remains today a powerful belief in the universal unconscious mind. This thought powers our wars and our family disputes; it is the rationale behind our desires for taking revenge on those who have injured us

in some way. It is the foundation for our ‘appropriate response’ to enemy at the global level.

It is humankind’s default method of seeking justice: a life for a life, an eye for an eye. It is easy to be drawn in by this logic. We’ve all fallen prey to the enticement of this justice system at some point in our lives, and may have taken pleasure in the idea that: “He got what he deserved.” “They’ll get what is coming to them.” All such similar thoughts are corollaries to the idea of meeting one evil with another evil.

Yet Christ came to move humanity past this barbarism. “Do not resist an evil person,” meaning that we are not to give way to evil as a response to the evil that we receive. Although we have been taught that we reap what we sow, let it not be from us that some ill-fated person reaps their result; let it be from God.

The Buddha taught: *Hatred never ceases by hatred, but by love alone is healed.* This is an ancient and eternal law. Abraham Lincoln recognized this when he asked, “Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?”

It is an eternal law; ever has it been true, ever will it be true.

Often misunderstood is the verse: “If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” We have misinterpreted this as meaning that we must allow ourselves to be beaten. To give a little context, historically, there was much power and control being exerted by the Roman soldiers over the Jews, who were used

indiscriminately for tasks and errands. If not done in a timely fashion, they were reproached. In those days it was considered an assertion of authority, dominion and superiority to strike someone with the back of the hand who was considered of lower socioeconomic status, as were the Jews. When the assaulted person “turned their cheek”, it placed the offender in a dilemma. If they intended to strike the person again, they could do it only with their left hand; and since it was considered ‘the sinister hand’ and was used for unclean purposes this was not allowed.

After all, there were rules about how you could assault someone.

This left the aggressor with only one choice: to punch or slap the persecuted person, and this would have been seen as a demonstration of equality. So, in one sense, when Jesus taught his followers to ‘turn the other cheek’ he was calling for a “peaceful rebellion.” He neither wanted them to seek vengeance out of anger nor to cower in some misconstrued sense of meekness. No, he was asking his followers to claim their identity -- as a Child of God. Christ was teaching his people to rise above the situation and make a quiet statement to the Roman soldiers: “We are not second-class citizens; we are equals.” He wanted the Jews to stand up and demand respect, making each attacker stop and think about how they were mistreating another human being. Christ wanted to bring awareness to all their hearts: both persecutor and persecuted.

Christ continues to speak to us at the spiritual level through his teachings. When he instructs us to ‘turn our cheek’, he is telling us to look at the situation from a different perspective; to turn away

from vengeance and violence. He means for us to examine the habitual way of reacting and choose again; take the higher road, see the person in a new light, and not let them control our emotions and actions. We are to let go of the old ways and respond from a mental state of love and neutrality. We are to release the struggle.

Nothing can disturb the calm peace of our soul without our permission. By mentally “turning the other cheek” we release resistance, which automatically opens us to the flow of the Christ. In Christ dwell love, peace, joy, forgiveness, and wisdom. Spirit is attempting to impart all of these qualities to our minds and hearts, including compassion and discernment; two important and distinct qualities that sometimes seem to be at odds. It is always the nudges of Spirit that settle quandaries. We are to listen to our hearts, and the guidance of God for solutions.

Christ shares this in Matthew 5:43-48 -- *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' <sup>44</sup> But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

This is another iteration of the idea that evil cannot defuse evil, and a dramatic restatement of the Christ's most powerful teaching: love

your neighbor as yourself; and not just love our neighbor but love our enemy. We are asked to hold in prayer those who treat us poorly and who have harmed us.

That is tough stuff there. It just doesn't get much more difficult than that. It is easy to love those who love us, much harder to love someone who despises us. Yet when we mentally "turn the other cheek" we can see our enemies in a new light. They are just like us, trying to get by the best they can, trying to figure this life out and adapt with what skills and knowledge they have.

A phrase to keep in mind is this: If they knew better, they'd do better. But let us not point our fingers; we must accept the fact that if we knew better, we would do better. We act from our knowledge and skill sets. Fortunately, we are learning from the Master Teacher in our spiritual affairs. Our task as a student is to absorb the teaching, internalize it, and apply it.

The same God causes it to rain on the awakened as well as the sleepers. The same Christ dwells within the ill-mannered as the well-mannered, the good and the evil.

And as usual, Christ sets a high standard: be perfect. Implicit in this statement is the idea that we can be perfect; we are capable of being perfect. Remember, Jesus is speaking to our spiritual natures. In truth, we are children of God and are perfect in that sense, but we have to own that, realize that idea, and express it in our lives.

At another point Christ quotes Psalm 82:6 and says, *“I said, “You are gods, And all of you are children of the Most High.”* Then he adds ... *“and the Scripture cannot be broken”*. Jesus was emphasizing our true nature, and that is why he stresses that we live up to our true nature and claim our perfection, claim to be a child of God. He reminds us of our divine origins, and our dormant potential for peace, joy, love, freedom, and mastership over self.

There is no power in evil except what we give it and allow. We cannot be kept in bondage except through our own thinking and beliefs.

“Know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” The truth is that our minds, attitudes, and feelings determine our lives and filter how we perceive our world. Wayne Dyer said, “If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.” We see things the way we are. If we change our thinking, change our attitudes, our world transforms. We are free from any claims that hatred, anger, and fear have over us. When we are free, we are reflecting our perfection, the perfection to which Christ refers.

It is my prayer that we release the old patterns of thought and try on the new ones of Christ. I pray that we allow the Light of God to illumine our paths and clarify our thinking.

Let us pray....