

# Turn the Other Cheek

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[ 0 : 00 ] All right, well this morning we're continuing our way through Jesus' sermon found in Luke chapter 6. And last week we heard Jesus give some very challenging instruction.

! He said we must love our enemies. He said we must do good to those who hate us. He said we must bless those who curse us.

He said we must pray for those who mistreat us. And we spent all of last week's message just reflecting on those four imperatives. Well this morning we continue on the same subject.

Jesus isn't finished yet. He has more to say about this challenging issue of how we respond to those who mistreat us. We're in Luke chapter 6 and I'll read our passage for us starting in verse 29. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them.

[ 1 : 12 ] Give to everyone who asks you. And if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Now many questions arise as we hear Jesus say these things. What does Jesus mean when he says, turn the other cheek? What does he mean when he says, do not withhold your shirt?

What's wrong with demanding that someone return what they have taken from us? Is Jesus saying that we must simply put up with the abuse and mistreatment of others?

Is he saying that we should just allow them to hurt and take advantage of us? Are there exceptions to these words?

And how do we apply these words in everyday life? So many questions come up and Christians for centuries have been discussing these words of Jesus and trying to answer these questions.

[ 2 : 20 ] Let's start at the beginning with Jesus' first statement in verse 29. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also.

We first remember the context. Jesus is talking about enemies. He's talking about how we respond to those who mistreat us. And so this slap in the face is another kind of mistreatment that we may experience from an enemy or from someone who hates us or is in conflict with us.

And from the study that I've done, I think it's significant that it's a slap or strike on the cheek.

Various commentators and pastors that I read made mention of how in their culture, a slap on the cheek was widely understood as an act of insult rather than an act of violence intended to injure.

The Mishnah, a written record of Jewish oral traditions and laws and teachings. It was written to interpret how to live according to the Torah.

It predates Jesus' birth by centuries and it wasn't written down until about 200 AD. But this is what it says in the Mishnah, the teachings of the rabbis from around the time of Jesus.

[ 3 : 42 ] One who strikes another must give him a selah. That's an amount of money. Rabbi Yehuda says in the name of Rabbi Yosei Hagelili that he must give him 100 dinars.

If he slapped another on the cheek, he must give him 200 dinars. If he slapped him on the cheek with the back of his hand, which is more degrading than a slap with the palm, he must give him 400 dinars.

So notice how in kind of their mindset, their culture at that time, hitting someone or striking them required only 100, but slapping them on the cheek was even worse.

It was a denigrating, a humiliating act, an act of insult. That was worth double in compensation. And then backhanding them, which would be the right hand across their right cheek, required four times as much, 400 to be paid.

So this kind of just illustrates how they conceived of a slap on the cheek. It was an act done to humiliate, to insult, not mainly to injure. And according to the Mishnah, at least, if you did this, you were liable to pay compensation for that.

[ 4 : 58 ] So, if someone does this deeply humiliating and insulting thing to you, what does Jesus say we should do in response? Turn to them the other cheek also.

And here's where the questions and the discussion really begin. What does that mean, to turn to them the other also? We'll start with what everyone agrees on. The natural response of a person who is slapped in the face is what?

Slap them back. How dare you do that to me? I'll slap you. Insult them back. Hate them back.

Respond in kind.

And so what everyone agrees on is that turn the other cheek means at least, do not retaliate. Do not respond in kind.

Don't try to get even. Don't take revenge. Now, let's wade into the more difficult discussion here. At some point, we need to acknowledge that these words give us a broader principle.

[ 6 : 11 ] Is Jesus only forbidding us from retaliating to slaps on the cheek? I think we all know the answer is no. What if we're kicked in the shins?

What if a bully at school sneaks up behind us and pulls our pants down? I think we know that Jesus means for us to apply these words to those situations as well.

It's not just for slaps on the cheek. And so the slap on the cheek is representative. It's a representative example of all kinds of things that might be done to us that are wrong, to which we're to respond by not retaliating.

And I think it helps us a bit because in our culture, getting slapped across the face is not nearly as common as it used to be. I think I can only remember one time in my life ever being slapped in the face when I said something rude to somebody, and I probably deserved it.

I don't know what you guys can remember from back in your years. We can talk about that after the service. But what are some of the other ways that people commonly retaliate today?

[ 7 : 25 ] It could be a push or a shove or an elbow. That's usually about as physical as it gets between mature adults. Whether you're on the ice, that's a whole other story.

But it could be other things too. Maybe it's leaving a smelly surprise on someone else's doorstep after their dog takes a poop on your lawn for the umpteenth time. Another common thing done today is keying a person's vehicle.

Or how about calling the town office or the RM office frequently to complain about how your neighbor is managing their property. So we need to think beyond just the slap here.

Because I think for most of us it rarely comes to blows. Probably the way in which this applies the most is how people speak to us when they say something that's unkind to us or rude, insulting, or impatient.

It could be someone's written communication to us. That nasty letter or email. A hurtful text.

[ 8 : 34 ] An unkind or humiliating comment on social media. Or it could be something they tell us face to face. A word of insult. Speaking to us condescendingly or rudely.

Calling us a name. Saying something that's not true about us. Making fun of us in front of others. I think this is where these words of Jesus apply to us most.

Because people seldom wind up and physically smack us on the cheek. Most of the time it's a verbal smack. Lashing out or striking a blow with their words.

And so turning the other cheek means more than just not hitting people that hit you. It means responding to all kinds of mistreatment with non-retaliation.

Not taking revenge. Not insulting back. Not being rude back to them. Not doing something to get even.

[ 9 : 38 ] Another thing we should talk about here is whether there are exceptions to this. Some see these words of Jesus as a prohibition of all violent behavior outright.

All physical force. Others, I think, wisely suggest that these words of Jesus have to do with our conduct in personal relationships.

And so these words are not intended to apply to situations of law enforcement. Or to situations of war or battle. The apostle Paul taught that governing authorities are established by God and serve his good purposes even by bearing the sword.

That's Romans 13 verse 1 and verse 4. John the baptizer called people to repent. And among the people that he was speaking to were soldiers. He didn't tell them to quit their jobs.

Saying it's immoral to do that job because it involves using force. He told them rather to stop extorting people. And so this isn't mainly a prohibition of violent behavior.

[10:43] It's a prohibition of retaliation. Getting revenge. Getting even. And it's just sort of understood that it applies to our personal day-to-day interactions with people.

A possible other kind of realm of exception here, I would suggest, is that turning the other cheek does not mean we must simply sit there and allow others to repeatedly abuse us.

In the case of physical violence, it doesn't mean that we must simply sit there and let them beat us to death. The slap on the cheek is a humiliating blow.

It's an insult. Not an attack with intent to wound or kill. And so fleeing is an option. Of course, removing ourselves from the situation. Self-defense is an option as well in cases of physical violence.

Whether it's blocking, parrying, disarming, restraining. In the case of verbal abuse, it doesn't mean that we just have to sit there quietly and let them continue to berate us.

[11:49] There are times for rebuke. There are times for correction. So turning the other cheek does not mean that we just simply allow ourselves to be injured or repeatedly abused.

It means not retaliating. Not responding in a spirit of revenge to get even. Or to pay them back. We also have to be careful about the way in which we turn the other cheek.

And this is something that's maybe a little lost in translation from their culture to ours. But if someone was to actually wind up and slap you on the cheek.

And you were to actually turn to them the other also. What would that communicate to them in that moment? Okay. Maybe.

That didn't hurt. Is that all you got? Okay. So it kind of depends on the way in which you turn the other cheek.

[12:51] Right? Are you doing it with a smirk on your face? Like is that the best you can do? And if so, don't be surprised if you get slapped another time.

Jesus is not commanding us to invite them to slap us again. We see this kind of brutish arrogance in movies. You know, come on, hit me again.

Is that the best you've got? That kind of cheek turning is not what Jesus has in mind. He's talking about a kind of cheek turning that's not proud.

That's not arrogant. That's humble. That's gracious. Rather than taunting. And it's probably a sort of graphic exaggeration that Jesus gives to make the point that we're not to strike back.

Jesus sometimes used very graphic illustrations or examples to make the point. Like if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. And so Jesus is not suggesting that we go so far as to invite the further mistreatment or abuse.

[13:57] Rather, it's something like be willing to be slapped a second time rather than return slap for slap. It's better to be shamed or humiliated again than to return insult for insult.

When someone wrongs you, don't immediately lash back. Bear it with grace. Don't repay it. Let the insult fall on you and show them mercy instead.

Be willing to take a blow and let your response speak of love and not revenge. Jesus now gives a second very tangible example here.

He says, If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Now there's two different explanations given for this one. Some think this refers to a robbery situation where a person's coat is stolen from them.

It could be that they just left it lying there and it was unattended. Or because of being held up by thieves who demanded it under threat of violence. A second explanation comes from the parallel passage in Matthew chapter 5.

[15:14] Here in Matthew 5, it's a very similar statement, but it comes in a legal context. It says in Matthew 5 verse 40, If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.

Probably they were two different statements that Jesus made, but just notice the legal flavor of that second one. They're suing for the shirt, so give them the coat as well, says Jesus.

And so some think this taking of the shirt in Luke is along those lines of legal and lawsuit rather than robbery. Either way, it's an example of how someone might wrong you.

It's your coat. It's your shirt. I mean, it might sound funny in today's world, but back then in this culture, your coat was one of your most valuable possessions.

And you usually only had one. Probably, as with the first, Jesus is giving this as a sort of representative example. And also an extreme way of saying it to make the point.

[ 16 : 22 ] Like if they take your coat, give them the shirt off your back rather than retaliate. Allow yourself to be wronged a second time rather than striking back at them.

Some even construe the giving of the shirt as an act of kindness. Jesus is explaining in this passage how to love our enemies.

And so if your enemy is so desperate that they steal your jacket, give them your shirt to go with it as a gift. They must really be in need. Now that doesn't condone the theft, of course, but it sure does meet it with unexpected kindness.

Now, of course, it's well within our rights to seek legal recourse against a person who has wronged us. We have the right to do that.

But Jesus is instructing us here not to go after our rights, but instead to yield them and let ourselves be wronged. Forgive them and move on.

[ 17 : 25 ] Give to everyone who asks you. And if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.

What's wrong with demanding it back? After all, it belongs to you. But can the Lord help us get by without it?

Or can he replace it for us with a new one? He can. You could turn it into a fight. Or you could just leave it to God to deal with them and choose to forgive them and move on.

It's just stuff. Give to everyone who asks you. It's just stuff. God can supply you with more.

And if we're generous to others with what we have, he can always provide what we lack. Notice that word everyone. Give to everyone who asks you.

[ 18 : 34 ] Not just give to your friends or to your family or to those who are nice or to those who are especially responsible. Give to everyone who asks of you.

Now obviously this is a general principle. There are times when we need to be careful what we give so as not to enable an addict or a freeloader.

I'll buy a bag of groceries for someone but I won't give them cash if they're begging right outside the liquor store. It's a general principle.

Be generous to others. Be rich in mercy to those in need. If they ask to borrow a tool and you have three of them, why not just give it to them?

Tell them to take it home with them and keep it. With all of this, Jesus is teaching us the way that he wants us to live. The way that he wants us to stand out in the world.

[ 19 : 36 ] We're not to be people who push and shove and demand our way and our rights. We're not to be people who cherish our belongings over other people.

When we're mistreated, we're not to retaliate. We're to bear the blows and the unkind words of others and forgive. But boy, this is hard to actually live out, isn't it?

What about me? What about me? What about my stuff? What about my honor? What about my reputation? What they said was not true about me.

What if they really hurt us? They deserve to be held accountable for what they did or said to me. There should be consequences.

Am I just supposed to sit there and let them take it? Or take it from them? These are the kinds of thoughts that go through our minds when we hear Jesus say this.

[ 20 : 47 ] And it's the reason that we often struggle to turn the other cheek and let them have the shirt as well. We might wonder, Jesus, are you crazy?

Am I understanding you right here? Is this really how you want me to live? Let's just look at one other passage. This comes from 1 Corinthians. Paul's writing to the Corinthian church.

And we're kind of jumping into the middle of this. So I'll just explain the context briefly. Paul's lamenting the fact that the people in the church at Corinth are taking one another to court and suing each other when they should be able to resolve their disputes with the help of brothers and sisters in the church.

And this is what he says there. He says, This is almost the same thing that we hear from Jesus. Better to allow yourself to be wronged than to seek retribution, to be cheated than to go after your brother in court. Solomon said, I think, what is another way of saying the same principle in Proverbs 19, verse 11.

[ 22 : 23 ] He said, It is to one's glory to overlook an offense. The way of our world is to demand justice, even to take revenge and pay them back.

But we can give glory to God. We can do what is truly noble and honorable by overlooking the offense, by turning the other cheek, by letting them have the shirt as well. What is truly amazing is how Jesus himself lived this way. For three years, the disciples got to see how he handled himself.

They watched as the Pharisees and the teachers of the law slandered him and said nasty things about him. They watched as people rejected him and pushed him away, drove him out of town, a little later in this gospel, Luke chapter 9, there's a sort of comical story.

Jesus sends messengers ahead to a Samaritan village and asks them to make things ready so that he can stay there with his disciples. And the Samaritans in that town don't welcome Jesus.

[ 23 : 39 ] They don't want him coming there. They won't receive him in the village because he's on his way to Jerusalem. And the Samaritans considered the Jews, their enemies.

And so, we read there in Luke chapter 9, verse 54, when the disciples James and John saw this, that Jesus was not received, they asked, Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?

I guess their newfound ability to do miraculous things went to their head a little bit. Like, should we kill them for you, Jesus? Jesus, this is the natural response.

This is the response of our flesh. Anger. How dare they? Payback. Revenge. Jesus responds in verse 55, but Jesus turned and rebuked them.

then he and his disciples went to another village. Like, don't you guys, haven't you guys been listening? Jesus just turned the other cheek and went down the road to the next village.

[ 24 : 50 ] Then there was how Jesus treated Judas, the one he knew would betray him. He stooped down with the towel to wash the feet of the man who was making arrangements to hand him over.

When they arrested Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, how did Jesus act? He commanded Peter to put the sword away. He said, no, I'm going to let this happen.

He surrendered himself to his enemies. Then there was the trial in the middle of the night as he stood before Annas. I'll just read a little bit of that.

Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. I have spoken openly to the world, Jesus replied. I always taught in the synagogues or at the temple where all the Jews come together.

I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said. When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face.

[ 26 : 04 ] Is this the way you answer the high priest? He demanded. If I said something wrong, Jesus replied, testify as to what is wrong.

But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me? Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas, the high priest. Christ. I'm always amazed at this moment.

Of course, Jesus knew this was not a just trial. He knew they already had plans to kill him and he was exposing them in those moments. He was calling them out on it. He was slapped in the face by order of the high priest and how did he respond?

He spoke no insults. He didn't curse them. He didn't threaten them. He didn't call them names. We do notice, though, that he did ask why he was struck.

It doesn't mean to turn the other cheek. We just have to be totally silent. We can't say anything. He asked them to state the reason, to testify to what he said that was wrong.

[ 27 : 15 ] But other than that, he did not retaliate. And then from there he was taken before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. This time we read in Matthew chapter 26 that the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death.

But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally, two came forward and declared, this fellow said, I'm able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.

Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you? But Jesus remained silent.

Amazing. Amazing. They were falsely accusing him, they were slandering him, they were making things up out of thin air. And this time he chose to remain silent through all of it.

He didn't retaliate, he just turned the other cheek. He didn't say anything until the final question of the high priest where he admitted that he was the Messiah, the Son of God, and told them that one day they would see him sitting at the right hand of God.

[ 28 : 40 ] When they heard that, they charged him with blasphemy and condemned him to death. We read a little just down the page in verse 67. Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists.

Others slapped him and said, prophesy to us, Messiah, who hit you? Then Jesus was taken before Pilate.

Pilate had Jesus flogged, even though in the trial he stated three times that he couldn't find any basis for a charge against him. We read there in John 19, the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head.

They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, Hail, King of the Jews, and they slapped him in the face. This mistreatment of Jesus by his enemies continued on until he arrived at Golgotha, the place that he was to be crucified.

And what did they do there when they arrived? They stripped him of his clothes and they hung him up to die on the cross. The soldiers cast lots for his shirt in a manner of speaking.

[ 30 : 09 ] Jesus did not withhold his shirt from them. As Jesus hung there dying, they hurled insults at him. They mocked him.

When the soldiers crucified Jesus, oh, sorry, the people stood watching and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, he saved others. Let him save himself if he's God's Messiah, the chosen one.

And this is just a small sampling of the things they said. How did Jesus respond? There are seven things recorded in scripture that he said while up on the cross and not once did he curse his enemies.

Not once did he insult those who were mocking him. Not once did he spit on them or retaliate in any way. Instead he uttered the ultimate turning of the other cheek and he prayed for God to forgive them of their sins.

He allowed himself to be wronged in the ultimate way though he didn't deserve it. He gave up his rights. He did not retaliate at all.

[ 31 : 26 ] He received the blows and the insults of others and he left justice in the hands of God. The cross and all that led up to it is the ultimate turning of the other cheek.

It's the ultimate letting people have the shirt as well. Jesus perfectly lived out what he instructed his disciples to do in Luke chapter 6 where we're reading.

He made his life and his death the ultimate example of it. In other words, turning the other cheek is the gospel.

It's our opportunity whenever we are wronged to proclaim the gospel with our actions. To say, yes, I follow the one who loved his enemies, who did not retaliate.

Just as he bore the wrongs of others to death, so too will I. I think this is maybe a part of what Jesus was talking about when he said, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

[ 32 : 52 ] And so I want to encourage you this week just to look for opportunities to turn the other cheek and to let people have your shirt as well. And again, it may not be physical situations where they're trying to slap you, but probably things they say.

Hurtful words, insults, rude tone. And I'll just leave it at that for the application part.

But right now, let's just keep our eyes on Jesus for a moment and what he did on that cross for us. We're going to pass around the bread and the cup momentarily and as we think to the cross, as we look to the cross, we're reminded of what that bread represents.

It represents Jesus' body, which received those blows, that treatment, that mistreatment for us. As we think of the cup, we're reminded of what it represents.

It represents Jesus' blood, which was poured out for us to save us, to reconcile us, to forgive us, to cleanse us.

[ 34 : 12 ] And if you believe in Jesus, if you've made that good confession, that he is your Lord and your Savior, I invite you to partake with us as we do this together.

If not, just let the cup and the bread pass you by. But let's take a few moments now to reflect and just talk to God quietly, to think about how Jesus turned the other cheek for us.

And then after a few minutes, we'll have Charles and Rod will come up and serve us the elements. And as usual, we'll just hang on to them until everybody's been served.

And then we'll partake all together. Amen.