

DEATH TO LIFE *PART 3*

We love to love people who love us. That's fun. That's easy. But what about the people who hurt us, or betray us, or disagree with us. Do we really have to love them too? Jesus answer is "yes". But how he asks us to do that may surprise you.

1. We all carry around with us an *Enemy List* (whether we admit it or not). These are people, or groups of people, that we find it very hard to love so we either fight them or flee from them. How has this been true in your life? How have your fought or fled from people on your list? (Note: please be wise in how you answer this question to not disparage people)
2. When we live under the Law of Retaliation, we always keep the "hate in play". (Think of the old video game *Pong*) How have you found this to be true? Why is it so easy to do so?
3. In his powerful message on Matthew 5, "Love Your Enemies" in 1957, Martin Luther King Jr. said these words...

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."

"Discover the element of good in your enemy. And as you seek to hate him, find the center of goodness and place your attention there and you will take a new attitude."¹

How does love propel you to see the good in the person who has hurt you?

4. In Matthew 5:39 Jesus says, "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." On the surface this seems like we have to let people steamroll us. However, if understood properly in the context of the day, it means something far different. Take time to read the excerpt from Paul Penley below as a group.

In Jesus' day Roman soldiers strutted arrogantly around Israel. The Jewish land was Roman occupied territory. There was no love lost between the occupying soldiers and the Israelite population. When a soldier decided that he needed a Jew's goods or services, resistance was futile. The Jewish subject better be quick to fetch water, strong enough to carry a load, and ready to give away his shirt or else. If the subject could not perform the request to the soldier's liking, then a quick backhand to the face was not far behind. This was the situation Jesus addressed in the Sermon on the Mount.

¹ To listen to King's full message <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=522wcqUIS0Y> or read the transcript here, http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/Vol04Scans/315_17-Nov-1957_Loving%20Your%20Enemies.pdf. November 17, 1957.

“If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other cheek toward him.” The statement seems to imply that one should invite an aggressor to leave no part of the face out of a good beating....

Jesus does not just tell someone who takes a fist to the face to expose the uninjured side. He gives clear instruction to expose the left cheek. This leads to a couple important questions. Why would Jesus indicate that the first blow will come to the right cheek? Why would he instruct someone to offer the left cheek to an attacking Roman soldier?

The answer is simple. Roman soldiers tended to be right-handed. When they struck an equal with a fist, it came from the right and made contact with the left side of the face. When they struck an inferior person, they swung with the back of their right hand making contact with the right cheek. In a Mediterranean culture that made clear distinctions between classes, Roman soldiers backhanded their subjects to make a point. Jews were second-class. No one thought twice about the rectitude of treating lesser people with less respect.

When Jesus tells fellow Jews to expose the left cheek, he is calling for “peaceful subversion.” He does not want them to retaliate in anger nor to shrink in some false sense of meekness. He wants to force the Roman soldiers to treat them like equals. He wants the Jews to stand up and demand respect. He wants to make each attacker stop and think about how they are mistreating another human being. It is the same motivation behind his command to “go an extra mile” after a soldier forced you to carry water for the first mile (Matt 5:41). It is intended to activate the soldier’s conscience.

Jesus’ command to “turn the other cheek” is ultimately a call to peaceful resistance....“Turning the other cheek” is not blanket acceptance of brutality. It is a strategy for motivating others to change. If you meet evil with evil and blow for blow, the cycle of vengeance will never end....

“Peaceful subversion” is one among many of Jesus’ plans for changing the world. You’ll miss it if you misunderstand his cultural context. Jesus didn’t command us to get beat up. He commanded us to activate people’s consciousness of injustice.²

As you read this understanding of the context of Jesus’ statement in Matthew 5, how does that change your understanding of Jesus and how he wants us to interact with those who keep hurting us?

What does “turning the other cheek” or “peaceful subversion” look like practically in situations where you keep getting hurt? Be specific.

5. The final step of loving our enemies is to “surprise them with kindness.” What does this look like practically? How can you do this in the difficult relationship you find yourself in this week?

² Adapted from Penley, Paul. “Turn the Other Cheek: Jesus’ Plan to Challenge Injustice”. April 18, 2013. <http://www.reenactingtheway.com/blog/turning-the-other-cheek-jesus-peaceful-plan-to-challenge-injustice>