

Old Testament: Isaiah 50: 4 - 9

New Testament: Matthew 5: 38 - 42

Please pray with me. And now Lord God may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

You may have noticed that we as humans have a tendency to over-exaggerate or hyperbolize things. We see this tendency in our literature and in our daily lives. You can think of Chicken Little running about in a panic declaring that the sky is falling or any politician anywhere along the liberal/conservative spectrum declaring, effectively, the same thing; that the sky is falling. We've all got a friend or acquaintance whose stories get more and more outlandish everytime he or she tells them. I don't have any understanding for why this is the case, it's just an observation that I've made that I believe most of you would resonate with.

So then, the law of Moses in which over-exaggeration and hyperbolization is directly countered, eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth, is not all that terrible a pronouncement. With these tendencies towards exaggeration, you can see how regulating responses to "in-kind" should be an effective way to curb our tendencies towards over doing it. Japan attacked Pearl Harbor killing 2,403 people, 68 of which were civilians, and wounding 1,143 people, 103 of which were civilians. The United States dropped not one, but two nuclear warheads on two different Japanese cities killing approximately 70,000 people in Hiroshima and approximately 40,000 people in Nagasaki for a total of 110,000 people. The majority of these people were civilians. These numbers are on the low end of the estimates. Eye for eye and tooth for tooth probably doesn't sound so bad to the Japanese people.

We see this similar type of over reaction in gang warfare and in mob violence when that was more prevalent prior to gangs gaining prominence in the United States. Some folks in one gang or mob "rough up" a person in another mob or gang, you know break an arm and bruise some ribs, and the response is to come back armed to the teeth with guns blazing, laying waste and causing chaos everywhere you look and harming innocent civilians, often children. Eye for eye and tooth for tooth probably doesn't sound so bad to the mothers and fathers of innocent children who were murdered in the gang and mob cross fire.

So then, what is the problem with eye for eye and tooth for tooth? Why does Jesus teach that that is insufficient and a deeper level of thought and consideration needs to be reached? Well, the short answer is that because sooner or later in an eye for eye, tooth for tooth system, you're going to have a population full of folks missing various,

and perhaps numerous, parts of their body. These people would then be lacking even the capacity to contribute to society in a positive way nor earn any kind of income. This then would cause the society to have to substantially increase the social safety net because you'd have a bunch of blind, mute people sitting around with no hands and no feet. Perhaps I exaggerate, it is a human tendency after all, but you get the point. So what is Jesus getting at then when he says, "but I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you in the right cheek, turn to him the other also".? Perhaps, in a very similar way to what Jesus was getting at when we talked about lust, divorce, and oaths, he wants us to consider what is going on in our hearts.

We learned from Matthew 15 that whatever is in your heart is what you put out into the world. Matthew 15:10-11 & 18-20a So, if someone slaps you in the right cheek then disrespect or jealousy or hatred or violence is what is in their heart and is manifesting in that person's behavior towards you. Is that what is in your heart? If someone sues you and takes your tunic then anger or envy or confusion is what is in their hearts and is manifesting in that person's behavior towards you. Is that what is in your heart? If someone forces you to go one mile then arrogance or pride or spite is what is in their hearts and is manifesting in that person's behavior towards you. Is that what is in your heart? When you turn to him the other cheek also, you force the person to consider what is in their heart. It's one thing for a person to act out of turn and without thinking; just automatically doing what is in their heart without giving it much consideration. It's a whole other thing to force that person to pause and consider their own actions; what they are actually doing to another human being. Not only does it force the person to consider their own actions, but it can have the further effect of revealing to others around the horribleness and injustice of the person's behaviors. The non-violent, non-retaliative resistance of the civil rights era was so effective because it caused the overtly racist people of that era to consider their own actions and it revealed to people across the nation watching on news channels the horribleness and injustice of those actions. To unleash dogs and water cannons and beat people with batons who were unarmed and marching peacefully, not looting or rioting, was supremely unjust; and everyone saw it. Indeed those marchers had their right cheeks collectively slapped and turned the right cheek to them also. Words do not reveal character; actions do.

Actions revealing character is exactly the point of Jesus' command here "to turn to him the other also". I repeatedly tell my children this; you cannot control anyone, except yourself. You can control how you treat people and you can control how you respond to the way people treat you. You cannot control how other people treat you. So, turn the other cheek also and reveal to them, and to anyone else who is around, the injustice and immorality of their actions. Those actions will reveal to everyone, themselves included, exactly what is in their heart. Amen.