



Turning the Other Cheek

Jesus' command to "turn the other cheek" is one of His most challenging teachings because it confronts our natural desire to retaliate when we are wronged. In Matthew 5:38-39, Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I say to you, do not show opposition against an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other toward him also." He goes even further, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). This was important enough for Jesus to specifically address because retaliation comes naturally to our fallen nature. We want to defend ourselves, win the argument, expose the person who hurt us, and make sure they suffer consequences. Jesus was teaching us that His kingdom operates differently. Turning the other cheek is not weakness or pretending that evil does not matter. It is refusing to allow another person's sin to dictate who we become. Jesus calls us to surrender personal vengeance to God. Romans 12:19 says, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord." We turn the other cheek because we trust that God sees every injustice and that His judgment is better than ours.

Because of our sinful nature, our instinct is often the opposite. We replay the offense, rehearse what we should have said, keep score, and carry resentment long after the other person has moved on. Bitterness can become a prison in which the person who hurt us continues to occupy our thoughts and emotions.

Research cannot replace the Biblical command to forgive, but it does show that persistent anger, hostility, and rumination are associated with negative physical and psychological outcomes. Many prospective studies found that anger and hostility were associated with increased coronary heart disease events, while research on rumination has found connections between repetitive negative thinking and physiological processes such as inflammation. Research on forgiveness has also found associations between forgiveness and better psychological and physical health.

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The greater Biblical truth is this, Jesus commanded us to forgive because He does not want bitterness to rule our hearts. Forgiveness does not mean saying the offense was acceptable. It means saying, "What happened mattered, but I will no longer allow it to control me. I will place this person and this injustice into God's hands."

Jesus challenges us to go beyond what is merely expected by society. He asks, "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Even the tax collectors, do they not do the same? ... What more are you doing than others?" (Matthew 5:46-47). Anyone can love people who love them. We, as Christians, are called to something greater, to pray for those who hurt us, refuse revenge, bless rather than curse, and overcome evil with good. But this does not mean allowing

people to abuse, exploit, manipulate, or physically harm us. Forgiveness does not require continued access to someone who is unsafe. We can forgive while maintaining boundaries. We can seek justice without seeking revenge. We can protect ourselves and others without hatred. We can walk away without wishing destruction upon the person who harmed us. The point of turning the other cheek is not passive acceptance of evil; it is refusing to become evil ourselves. Romans 12:21 captures the principle, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Jesus is calling us to demonstrate a kind of love that the world does not naturally understand.

We therefore must ask ourselves, Who am I still carrying in my heart negatively? Think about the person whose name immediately brings anger, the betrayal you still replay, or the injustice you desperately want to see repaid. Bring those people and situations before God. The Bible tells us, “God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:14). Jesus said that people will give an account for even their careless words (Matthew 12:36), and Paul reminds us, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10). We do not have to carry God's courtroom around with us. He sees what happened, knows the truth, and will judge perfectly. At the same time, we must use discernment so that these verses do not become legalism that keeps us trapped in harmful situations. Forgive, but establish boundaries. Release vengeance, but pursue legitimate justice when necessary.

Our time on earth is temporary, and Jesus reminds us not to build our lives around earthly things but to “store up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Matthew 6:20). The question is not simply whether we have been wronged; it is whether our response is making us more like Christ.

Give the hatred to God.
Give the bitterness to God.
Give the desire for revenge to God.

He will deal with every account. Our calling is to become like Jesus.

Study Questions:

1. What does Jesus actually mean by “turn the other cheek,” and how is His command different from simply being passive? Matthew 5:38-42; Proverbs 20:22; Romans 12:17-21

2. Why is retaliation so natural to us, and what does the Bible reveal about the condition of the human heart? Genesis 4:23-24; Jeremiah 17:9; James 4:1-2; Romans 7:18-19

3. Is it possible to forgive someone while still recognizing that what they did was genuinely wrong? Genesis 50:15-21; Psalm 34:17-18; Matthew 18:21-35; Colossians 3:12-13

4. What happens to us when we continually rehearse an offense instead of surrendering it to God? Leviticus 19:18; Proverbs 14:30; Proverbs 17:9; Ephesians 4:26–27, 31-32; Hebrews 12:14-15

5. Jesus tells us to love our enemies. What does Biblical love actually require from us? Exodus 23:4-5; Proverbs 25:21-22; Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36

6. Does forgiving someone mean allowing them to continue hurting you? Where does Biblical forgiveness meet Biblical wisdom? Proverbs 4:23; Proverbs 22:3; Matthew 10:16; Matthew 18:15-17; Luke 4:28-30; Romans 12:18

7. Jesus asks, “What more are you doing than others?” What should distinguish our response to being mistreated from the response of an unbeliever? Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:32-35; Philippians 2:14-16; 1 Peter 2:21-23

8. When does seeking justice become personal vengeance? Deuteronomy 32:35; 1 Samuel 24:1-15; Psalm 37:1-9; Romans 12:19

9. How did Jesus demonstrate “turning the other cheek” when He Himself was falsely accused and violently mistreated? Isaiah 53:3-7; Matthew 26:57-68; Luke 23:32-34; 1 Peter 2:21-24

10. What does it mean to trust God with the final judgment of those who have wronged us? Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Matthew 12:36-37; Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:11-13

11. What are you storing up, earthly grievances or eternal treasures? Psalm 39:4-7; Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 12:13-21; Colossians 3:1-4; 1 Peter 1:3-4

12. Who do you need to release to God, and what would becoming more like Christ require you to do? Genesis 50:19-20; Psalm 55:22; Matthew 5:44; Ephesians 4:31-32; Philippians 3:12-14; 1 Peter 5:7