

September 20, 2015

THE SECOND MILE

Matthew 5:38-42

Isaac Newton's Third Law of Physics says that "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." Jesus says, "No!" As natural as it may seem to do unto others what they do to us, He says, "Do to others what you would have them do to you!" (Matthe2 7:12) Of course, implied within His directive is "Do not do to others what you would not have them do to you!" If you don't want others to act in retaliation, don't retaliate!

The old law of "*an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*" was meant to limit a person's reaction to "no more than" an injury equal to what you have suffered. We are not supposed to over-react in our anger and frustration and resentment. We are to be always loving, patient, and kind... because that is who we are. In fact, Jesus would have us do our best to not be reactive at all... in some cases. In other cases... we are to react as graciously as our Lord has done.

D ONT R ESIST AN EVIL PERSON – What? I would tend to think that's just plain bad advice. Paul even said we who believe are to "*pit on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground!*" (Ephesians 6:13) On the one hand, our greatest battle is against evil. While, on the other hand, we are not to resist an evil person???

Let's sort this out. The armor of God does not consist of worldly weapons; it includes the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. (Ephesians 6:14-17) That shield of faith, Paul says, can "extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one!" (v. 16) Evil has no power over us. To return evil for evil is beneath us. We're better than that!

And yet, if I was to see a bully picking on someone, I would physically stop them. If someone was about to do me harm, I would do my best to avoid them. And...if someone was about to attack my family or friends, I would defend them... even at the risk of losing my own soul. I'm not in favor of fighting. But I'm okay with self-defense, and, with defending anyone who might need defending.

But I don't think Jesus is suggesting that we just let ourselves be abused; though He did say, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me! Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in Heaven!" (Matthew 5:10-12)

Retaliation? We're better than that? Retribution? Is that really justice? We do not stoop down to the level of those who are evil.

Not only will we take it when we are slapped or when someone wants to take our tunic; we will let them slap us again, and we'll give them our cloak as well! We will go out of our way to be gracious. There's a scene in *Androcles and the Lion*, where Androcles and his very large friend are being taunted by a wealthy Roman snob who says, "If I slap this man (the big guy), he won't hit me back? In fact, he'll let me slap him again?" Androcles says, "That's our way... but the last man who did that to him, when he wanted to teach him the same lesson in turning the other cheek, got a broken jaw!" The Roman snob did not slap the big guy.

Still, part of divine justice is that you reap what you sow. We are not to take revenge. "Vengeance is Mine," says the Lord! Romans 12:14-21 says, "*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty; but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'*" No, if your enemies are

hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good!” The idea is that their conscience will be seared by your gracious behavior; you will shame them into realizing that their behavior is unconscionable. And that’s one of the ways grace can work in someone’s soul.

Our purpose is to out-grace others. To not only go the distance, but to go the second mile! To give to those who ask, to lend to those who want to borrow, and to be good to those who don’t deserve it. And yet, let’s not be foolish. Someone may want you to go a mile into battle; someone will beg for or “borrow” money in order to buy drugs. We still need to use wisdom, discernment, and good stewardship. Christians are to be radically gracious, yes; but because we love even our enemies, we will do them no harm; and because we love even the addicted, we will not enable them to do themselves harm.

We must never sit back and just be compliant with evil or sin. We are light. We are love. We are goodness. We are hope. That Second Mile needs to be filled with grace... from us, through us, and for the glory of God!

The bully needs our pity not the hardening of our hearts. The evil person needs our grace, God’s grace, our forgiveness, our love, ... God’s love! Remember our Lord on the Cross when He said, *“Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they’re doing!”* (Luke 23:34)

Mean-spirited behavior comes from a lost soul. And, *“The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost!”* (Luke 19:10) Evil comes from the devil. *“Submit yourselves, then, to God! Resist the devil, and he will flee from you!”* (James 4:7)