



Luke 6:28–29

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. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.

Reflection

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew chapters 5 to 7, is the best-known

and most extensively studied speech in the history of the world. In Luke chapter 6, we have some of Jesus' earlier workings for this speech, a condensed version of the Sermon on the Mount, with variations, preached at an earlier time in Jesus' ministry to be sure, but no less brilliant. All great speeches and pieces of communication are filled with word pictures and figures of speech that bring the orator's words to life. So it comes as no surprise to see how adept Jesus was in using them.

One of Jesus' favourite techniques is the use of hyperbole, the technical term for exaggeration. You might remember Jesus speaking of camels going through the eyes of a needles, of specks of dust in your brother's eye and a plank of wood in your own; that if your right hand causes you to

stumble, you should cut it off and throw it away. Hyperbole. Exaggeration. For rhetorical effect.

Shakespeare, in Henry IV, uses hyperbole to make fun of the portly Falstaff. Instead of saying, 'You're very fat' he describes Falstaff as 'this horse-breaker, this huge hill of flesh.' Or more sublimely in Macbeth, picturing a vast green ocean, and one bloody hand,

'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash
this blood

Clean from my hand? No, this my hand
will rather

The multitudinous seas incarnadine
[crimson red]

Making the green one red.'

Not a vast green ocean washing the blood off Macbeth's hand, rather, his bloody hand turning a vast green ocean crimson red. Beautiful, striking, memorable hyperbole. But is Jesus using hyperbole in today's passage from Luke 6:29–30?

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The English translation of the Greek is too mild here. More like, 'If someone punches you in the face, stand up straight and let them do it again'. But is this hyperbole? Is Jesus exaggerating here to make a stun-

ningly memorable point like cutting your hand off and throwing it away rather than it causing you to sin again? And if Jesus is exaggerating, what is his point? And what about the rest of the passage? What about,

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Can Jesus really be saying, 'If someone robs us, make sure they'd don't leave anything behind, give it all to them? In fact, give to every outstretched hand, to anyone and everyone who asks for something that is ours, and not by way of loan, give it to them for good?'

Surely this is absurd? Willingly beaten, extorted, robbed and naked? What's Jesus driving at here? Well, one commentator sees in Jesus' response to persecution a calculated vulnerability; not arming oneself and retaliating in the face of evil and injustice but instead becoming naked in the face of it. Why? The reasoning goes that instead of taking up arms and inviting further aggression, laying down arms and becoming naked in the face of persecution has a dampening effect, reducing and perhaps even bringing to an end any future aggression. And when we think about it, the twentieth century was powerfully altered by courageous observance of this essentially pacifist teaching. Gandhi's radical response to injustice liberated India from British rule. Martin Luther King

Jnr.'s similarly peaceful protests resulted in massive gains for the African American civil rights movement. One might say the same approach resulted in the fall of the Berlin wall, and the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa which came about through the Truth and Reconciliation movement rather than through bloody racial revenge.¹

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Calculated vulnerability? Perhaps. But for

¹ James R Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 2015, 198–99.

me I think Jesus is again telling his followers to simply reflect the character of God in the way they act under persecution. Just as God loves his enemies and blesses them through his common grace, so will God's children find the strength not to respond in kind when we are badly treated. When they took the clothes from Jesus' back he did not retaliate. When they struck him in the face he did not strike them back. Because he loved his persecutors enough to suffer hardship for their sake; he loved them enough to die in their place.

Think & Pray

But practically, what about a little closer to home? Yesterday I asked the question, 'Who is your enemy?' How can you reflect the unmerited kindness of God towards

them? How can you extend to those who are mistreating you a radically countercultural generosity? But don't think for a moment that this means embracing your victimhood and cowering under their harsh treatment. To turn the other cheek is not a passive response, but a provocative response, freeing you of victimhood, rising above it in order to return kindness for evil. Jesus is exaggerating in the details of this passage, but his 'return kindness for evil' principle is clear. Yesterday I challenged you to consider how you might pray for those who are mistreating you. Today I'd gently like to encourage you to think about how you might extend them grace. Amidst their mistreatment of you is there some small way you might be able to reflect the unmerited kindness of God to them?

One important caveat before we close in prayer. At the start of his sermon Jesus taught us that blessed are those who weep now (6:21). He was talking about weeping for sin's effects on our world. And one of sin's most devastating effects is the abuse of power, especially in marital and family relationships. Domestic violence comes in many shapes and forms. It can be physical, emotional, financial or involve restrictions of friendships or other liberties. Under no circumstances should this passage be used to condone remaining in an abusive relationship. Jesus' shocking language is meant to make us sit up and think. It is intended to make us remember God's radical generosity that extends even to those who hate him. But Jesus never meant his principle of returning kindness for evil to

extend to a situation of ongoing abuse. The greatest kindness you can show a perpetrator of domestic violence is to leave, and expose what they have done, so that they'll stop, be punished and experience remorse for the evil they are committing for which they will one day experience the full judgment of God. If you or someone near to you is in a situation of domestic and family violence there are many people out there very willing to listen and who are ready to believe you and make themselves available to you. In Australia, for example, a great first step is to call 1800 RESPECT or Lifeline on 13 11 14, both 24/7 telephone services that provide information, counselling and support.

As Christians we weep with those who weep, and mourn the effects of domes-

tic violence on our world. So with a heavy heart today please pray for victims of domestic violence. And with sober consideration, and wisdom, pray for contexts in which you might be able to extend Jesus' principle of returning kindness for evil. Who is it in your life that you might be able to extend unexpected kindness to, and slowly begin to win for the kingdom of God?