

Question: How can a person who has committed his or her life to follow Jesus bully other people? Is this not a contradiction to what Jesus taught?

Bullying among school children has received a lot of attention during the past few years. Unfortunately, when this unhealthy method of relating to others works during childhood, some individuals carry it with them into adulthood. Evidence indicates that it is the bully who has the problem, not the one being attacked.

Often bullies are people in positions of power who feel incompetent and inferior. They try to compensate for these inadequacies by attacking, intimidating and humiliating others. This action shifts the blame for any failures in life away from themselves. The targets of these attacks may be intelligent, competent people who are kind, forgiving, peace-loving people with no interests in asserting power. They are only interested in doing their jobs well. When talking about management styles in the workplace, one writer said, “Those who can, do. Those who can’t, bully.”

Jesus turned the world’s system of power and domination on its head, teaching that one must humble himself like a child to be great in the kingdom of heaven and by saying that to be first we must be last and servants of all (Matthew 18:3-4; Mark 9:35). When his disciples asked him for positions of prominence, Jesus told them, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45). In the Beatitudes Jesus blessed and empowered the weak and poor (Matthew 5:3-12). He also taught his disciples about greatness in leadership by picking up a towel and washing their feet, the lowliest task of a household slave (John 13:1-17).

Later New Testament writings continue this de-emphasis on power and domination. James wrote, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6). Paul addressed the family unit when he wrote: “Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. . . Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they

will become discouraged” (Colossians 3:18-20). Christians were also told, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

Jesus never endorsed the misuse of power or of domination in any way that disrespects our fellow humans who are all created in the image of the same God. He opposed evil in every form, including the injustice of bullying tactics.

Unfortunately, bullies seldom accept personal responsibility for their behavior. Instead they may blame others for causing them to react as they do. Having said these things, I would also remind you that Jesus taught us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). We need to pray for those who bully their way through life. Pray that exposure to Jesus and his words will help them to accept responsibility, repent and change their way of relating to others. (See the website for September 14, 2012, for discussion of how to handle an adult bully.) [Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12th, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881. This article is reproduced on the web: www.universitychurchmurray.com] 2015/02/06