

Jesus and Non-Violent Resistance Matthew 5:38-41

The traditional interpretation of Jesus' words is something like this:

--*turn the other cheek*

--remain passive and complicit in the face of injustice

--*do not resist evil*

--don't fight back but submit

--*go the extra mile*

--cooperate with those who are oppressing or taking advantage of you

Jesus, however, does not teach nonresistance to evil; Jesus teaches resistance without violence

The Greek word translated "resist" is *antistenai*, which literally means "to stand against evil"

--context is everything: *antistenai* is most commonly used throughout Scripture as a technical term for warfare

--it refers to the way two armies on the battlefield march toward one another then make a stand and fight

--*antistenai*, therefore, most commonly means "stand and fight violently"

--therefore, Jesus is not saying, "be submissive to/complicit with evil" but, "do not resist evil with violence"

Three examples of resisting evil without violence

1) "Turn the other cheek"

--note Jesus specifies the *right* cheek

--striking on the right cheek requires assailant to use the *back* of his/her right hand

--in Jesus' time, backhanded slaps were not intended to injure but to degrade and humiliate

--by turning the other cheek—that is, the left cheek—the assailant cannot slap with the back of his/her hand

--turning the other cheek, therefore, is a metaphor for proactively standing up to abuse without resorting to evil

2) "Give your cloak as well"

- income inequality was rampant in Jesus' time; a particularly common example was large estates owned by absentee landlords, managed by stewards, worked by tenant farmers, day laborers, and slaves
- those without wealth, in order to continue living, were often forced to take on great debt they could not repay, so they were often taken to court
- Jesus' teaching is, if they're going to take your coat (your outer garment), then give them your cloak (your under garment) as well, thereby leaving you completely naked
- give your cloak as well, therefore, is a metaphor for proactively demonstrating the inherent inequality in wealth and the meeting of basic needs

3) "Go also the second mile"

- Roman soldiers were allowed to force civilians into service, e.g. carry their packs for them
 - remember Simon of Cyrene being forced to carry Jesus' cross
- soldiers could force people into such service for one mile; longer than that was an infraction of military code
- to encourage people to carry the pack a second mile means that they, and not the soldiers, are making the choice rather than being coerced
- go also the second mile, therefore, is a metaphor for asserting in a non-violent way that you are not a lesser individual vis-à-vis someone in power but of equal value as a human being
 - it is an exercise in asserting your own dignity as a person

Rather than the two most common responses in the face of evil—violent resistance or passive submission—Jesus taught and modeled a third way: active, non-violent resistance