

TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK: JESUS IS SERIOUS ABOUT IT!

by
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But I say unto you, that ye resist not the evil one: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. (St. Matthew 5:39)

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. (St. John 13:34)

Have you or I turned our other cheek lately to our neighbours? Now, hopefully and prayerfully, we are at peace with all we encounter. But sometimes this is difficult, isn't it? Nevertheless, Our Lord means just what He says above. We are not to strike back at our neighbours when they act against us under the devil's influence; instead, we must show "patient endurance". We fight the evil one with Christ's spiritual tools "For fire is not extinguished by fire but by water".¹

[Blessed Theophylact's *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Matthew* (tr. From the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade,) Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 4th printing 1997, p. 54.]

Blessed Theophylact is not giving his personal views in his *Explanation of the New Testament*; rather, he presents the unadulterated Truth of the Holy Scriptures according to the 'mind' of the holy Fathers with heavy reliance on the views of St. John Chrysostom:

The contents of BL. Theophylact's *Explanation* are based entirely on the works of the great Fathers of the early Church, and above all, St. John Chrysostom.... The result is not simply the interpretation of one person, but an expression of the consensus of the mind of the Church, in short, what the Church has believed and taught 'at all times and in all places'.²

[*ibid.*, Introduction by Fr. Christopher Stade, p. 3.]

Bl. Theophylact's True Orthodox work is called *The Herald* and has been relied upon by the True Orthodox Church for over 900 years.³

[*id.*, p. 1.]

Here is what the wonderful 19th century St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov) states about the spiritual necessity of reading *The Herald*:

While reading the Evangelists, the novice should also read *The Herald*; that is, the explanation of the Gospel by Blessed Theophylact, Archbishop of Bulgaria. The reading of *The Herald* is indispensable. It is an aid to the right understanding of the Gospel and consequently to the most exact practice of it. Moreover, the rules of the Church *require that Scripture be understood as the holy Fathers explain it, and not at all arbitrarily. By being guided in our understanding of the Gospel by the explanation of the holy Father, by the explanation received and used by the Church, we keep the tradition of holy Church* (emphasis supplied).⁴

[St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov), *The Arena*, On Reading The Gospel And The Writings Of The Fathers, p. 21.]

When we think about the meaning of turning the other cheek, it is natural to consider that violence is involved. Many times that is so, but the Scripture does not limit its application to an event whereby one slaps or hits another, and that person turns his other cheek as an offer to strike it to the attacker. No, a blow to the cheek is just one example: “Do not think that the Lord is speaking only of a blow on the cheek, but of any and every other kind of affliction.”⁵

[Bl. Theophylact, *Matthew*, p. 54.]

The New Commandment

Christ changes the focus from the Old Testament eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth to concern for our neighbour; that is, to say, regard for everyone including our enemies. No longer are we to just love our neighbour as ourselves (Lev. 19:18). Our duty is a higher one: we are to love our neighbour as Christ loves us. This is the new commandment given by Our Lord in St. John 13:34:

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

This commandment may resemble the Old Testament one, but it is different. In it, there is no concept of owing love. We are to love freely, without condition. According to the Fathers through Bl. Theophylact, Jesus taught:

I freely loved you when you had not yet accomplished anything good. When your human nature was still idle and hostile, I took it upon Myself and made it holy. Therefore, you should also love one another freely. When your brother offends you, do

not remember the offence. This is the new commandment of the New Testament: freely love your neighbour when you owe him *nothing* (emphasis supplied).⁶

[Bl. Theophylact, *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to John*, p. 222.]

The upshot of this new commandment is to exalt the previous Old Testament commandment to the point of self-denial. Our love for our neighbour sees the Lord in him. Our love is to be greater than our love for ourselves.

Brethren,

Our love is also to be for our enemies, not just friends. Loving friends is relatively easy! Loving those who appear to despise you – a more difficult matter. Something that can help us in this endeavour is to remember that no one is intrinsically evil; after all, God made everything good. It is ourselves who have failed by sinning, being influenced by this world, the world of the prince of darkness, the slanderer, the devil.

Look at a couple of examples where the evil one has influenced our thinking and behaviour away from the Christian spiritual requirements (yes, I said “requirements,” there is no easy option when we ‘work for’ Christ and His Way):

Road rage – Dallas is now second only to New York City in this national category. Someone cuts you off with his car or truck, you give him “the bird”- this could be a *fatal* mistake along with being downright unneighbourly! He pulls out his ready revolver and ends your life (after all, this *is* Texas!).

Revenge - In the above example, a jury convicts the killer and he is sentenced to death. Your family appear at the execution to watch it (yes, I said watch it- how ghoulish). Some of them express “glee” at the killer’s death with various statements given to the press about justice being done etc. etc.

We can understand the family’s grief, and the killer has been punished by the law of the state, but revenge will never bring you back. It is also an anti-Christian act. We are to love our enemies no matter how difficult that may be.

Anti-Abortion Activities gone amok – Recently, a determined individual killed a doctor (in church of all places) who had performed many many abortions. No matter that abortion is murder according to Christ, He would never condone an eye-for-eye retaliation. Christ gave us the light to His world when He took flesh and walked the earth in the first century (remember, though, Christ is eternally with us as He promised and will return to earth as He promised). The Church of the New Testament augments the Old. The doctor who performed the abortions is

guilty of murder in the eyes of the Church even if his actions are legal by the state and/or federal law of “Caesar”. The doctor’s killer is also guilty of murder in Christ’s eyes as well as the state’s.

Should the doctor’s family forgive the killer? They must if they are *real* Christians.

An excellent spiritual example of the Christian forgiveness required comes from the Amish community:

The Amish rose to the pure Christian occasion. As they drove their wagons during the funerals for their dead loved ones, their drivers nodded to those in front of the dead killer’s house. Many Amish attended the funeral of that man. Imagine that! If a stranger brutally killed our children, could we turn the other cheek? Could we nod respectfully to the family of the killer and even attend his funeral?

Just think about this point. In the midst of their grief and suffering for their loved ones, they still forgave the transgressor. Their code of living knows that forgiveness is integral to salvation. We have none other than Christ’s words to attest to the critical importance of forgiving others. If we do not forgive them, He will not forgive us:

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses

But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

[St. Mark 11:25-26]

The Amish live within themselves as a community. They have in effect walled themselves off from this world. They live in their own kind of catacombs. Yet, though they shun the modern world and its trinkets, they still love its sinners. An example to all of us.⁷

[See +Photios (W), WE CAN LEARN A THING OR TWO FROM THE AMISH ABOUT ‘FORGIVENESS’!, St. James the Just True Orthodox Spiritual Center, <http://www.stjamesthejust.com>, Topical Homilies, [http://www.stjamesthejust.com/homilies/topical/\(51\)%20We%20Can%20Learn%20A%20Lot%20From%20The%20Amish%20About%20Forgiveness.pdf](http://www.stjamesthejust.com/homilies/topical/(51)%20We%20Can%20Learn%20A%20Lot%20From%20The%20Amish%20About%20Forgiveness.pdf)]

Difficult act to follow? You betcha! But our standard is Christian perfection, nothing less. May the Lord +bless you on your Christian struggle. +In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.