

7th Grade New Testament (Gospels)

Lesson Plan: Retaliation (Matthew 5:38-42)

Learning Goals: Students should evaluate the alternative responses to violence that Jesus lays out and distinguish between nonviolent resistance and “passivism” (non-action).

Opening Question: What is your natural response to conflict? (fight or flight)

Prayer

Discuss question on board.

Jesus and Nonviolent Resistance (*Antithesis*)

- You have heard that it was said . . .
 - “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (See parallels in Exodus 21:23-25; Leviticus 24:19-20; Deuteronomy 19:21.)
 - *Lex Talionis* - “The law of retribution”
 - ▶ The punishment must be equal to the crime. (Curbs violence and prevents it from getting out of control.)
 - ▶ In these texts, though, retribution is required (even demanded).
- But I tell you . . .
 - “Do not resist an evil person.” This is not a good translation of this passage. Maybe a better one is “Do not react violently against the one who is evil.”
 - Jesus is not telling us we should be a doormat on which everyone comes and wipes their feet.
 - Essentially, Jesus is saying:
 - Do not submit to evil.
 - Do not allow the oppressor to dictate the terms of our opposition.
 - Do not mirror evil; do not become the very thing you hate.
 - You must engage in active nonviolent resistance.
 - Three examples (*quotes from Walter Wink*):
 1. Turn the other cheek.
 - “The only way one could naturally strike the right cheek with the right hand would be with the back of the hand. We are dealing here with insult, not a fistfight. The intention is clearly not to injure but to humiliate, to put someone in his or her place. . . .
 - “A backhand slap was the usual way of admonishing inferiors. Masters backhanded slaves; husbands, wives; parents, children; men, women; Romans, Jews. We have here a set of unequal relations, in each of which retaliation would be suicidal. The only normal response would be cowering submission. . . .
 - “Why then does he counsel these already humiliated people to turn the other cheek? Because this action robs the oppressor of the power to humiliate. The person who turns the other cheek is saying, in effect, “Try again. Your first blow failed to achieve its intended effect. I deny you the power to humiliate me. I am a human being just like you. Your status does not alter that fact. You cannot demean me. . . .
 - “If he hits with a fist, he makes the other his equal, acknowledging him as a peer. But the point of the back of the hand is to reinforce institutionalized inequality. . . . He has been given notice that this underling is in fact a human being. In that world of honor and shaming, he has been rendered impotent to

instill shame in a subordinate. He has been stripped of his power to dehumanize the other. . . .

2. Give your cloak as well.

“Only the poorest of the poor would have nothing but a garment to give as collateral for a loan. Jewish law strictly required its return every evening at sunset. . . .

“Why then does Jesus counsel them to give over their undergarments as well? This would mean stripping off all their clothing and marching out of court stark naked! Imagine the guffaws this saying must have evoked. There stands the creditor, covered with shame, the poor debtor's outer garment in the one hand, his undergarment in the other. The tables have suddenly been turned on the creditor. . . .

“Nakedness was taboo in Judaism, and shame fell less on the naked party than on the person viewing or causing the nakedness (Gen 9:20-27). By stripping, the debtor has brought the creditor under the same prohibition that led to the curse of Canaan. . . .

“Jesus provides here a hint of how to take on the entire system by unmasking its essential cruelty and burlesquing its pretensions to justice. Here is a poor man who will no longer be treated as a sponge to be squeezed dry by the rich. He accepts the laws as they stand, pushes them to absurdity, and reveals them for what they have become. . . .

3. Go the second mile.

“Jesus' third example, the one about going the second mile, is drawn from the relatively enlightened practice of limiting the amount of forced or impressed labor (*angareia*) that Roman soldiers could levy on subject peoples to a single mile. . . .

“Imagine then the soldier's surprise when, at the next mile marker, he reluctantly reaches to assume his pack, and the civilian says, ‘Oh no, let me carry it another mile.’ Why would he want to do that? What is he up to? Normally, soldiers have to coerce people to carry their packs, but this Jew does so cheerfully, and will not stop! Is this a provocation? Is he insulting the legionnaire's strength? Being kind? Trying to get him disciplined for seeming to violate the rules of impressment? Will this civilian file a complaint? Create trouble?

From a situation of servile impressment, the oppressed have once more seized the initiative. They have taken back the power of choice. The soldier is thrown off balance by being deprived of the predictability of his victim's response. . . .

“Jesus does not encourage Jews to walk a second mile in order to build up merit in heaven, or to exercise a supererogatory piety, or to kill the soldier with kindness. He is helping an oppressed people find a way to protest and neutralize an onerous practice despised throughout the empire. He is not giving a non-

political message of spiritual world-transcendence. He is formulating a worldly spirituality in which the people at the bottom of society or under the thumb of imperial power learn to recover their humanity. . . .

- Jesus is bringing the kingdom (revolution). The expectation was for a violent revolution. Jesus brings a different kind of revolution.

“To those whose lifelong pattern has been to cringe before their masters, Jesus offers a way to liberate themselves from servile actions and a servile mentality. And he asserts that they can do this before there is a revolution. There is no need to wait until Rome has been defeated, or peasants are landed and slaves freed. They can begin to behave with dignity and recovered humanity now, even under the unchanged conditions of the old order. Jesus' sense of divine immediacy has social implications. The reign of God is already breaking into the world, and it comes, not as an imposition from on high, but as the heaven slowly causing the dough to rise (Matt.13:33//Luke 13:20-21). Jesus' teaching on nonviolence is thus of a piece with his proclamation of the dawning of the reign of God.”

- Walter Wink

- Jesus' Third Way (*nonviolent resistance - not “fight” or “flight”*)
 - ▶ Seize the moral initiative
 - ▶ Find a creative alternative to violence
 - ▶ Assert your own humanity and dignity as a person
 - ▶ Meet force with ridicule or humor
 - ▶ Break the cycle of humiliation
 - ▶ Refuse to submit or to accept the inferior position
 - ▶ Expose the injustice of the system
 - ▶ Take control of the power dynamic
 - ▶ Shame the oppressor into repentance
 - ▶ Stand your ground
 - ▶ Make the Powers make decisions for which they are not prepared
 - ▶ Recognize your own power
 - ▶ Be willing to suffer rather than retaliate
 - ▶ Force the oppressor to see you in a new light
 - ▶ Deprive the oppressor of a situation where a show of force is effective
 - ▶ Be willing to undergo the penalty of breaking unjust laws
 - ▶ Die to fear of the old order and its rules
 - ▶ Seek the oppressor's transformation

Lesson Summary /Review:

Students should review and highlight the following vocabulary terms and concepts from this lesson in their notes:

- Lex Talionis
- Finish this statement, “You have heard it was said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I tell you . . .”
- Name the three examples Jesus gives of non-violent resistance.

Much of the information in this lesson from:

“Beyond Just War and Pacifism: Jesus' Nonviolent Way”

by Walter Wink

http://www.cres.org/star/_wink.htm