

8-24-08: Letting Go – Part 1: Insult and Rejection

“This is what I say to all who will listen to me: Love your enemies, and be good to everyone who hates you. Ask God to bless anyone who curses you, and pray for everyone who is cruel to you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, don't stop that person from slapping you on the other cheek. If someone wants to take your coat, be willing to give him your shirt. Give to everyone who asks and don't ask people to return what they have taken from you.” Luke 6:27-30

Ever since I was a new Christian, this teaching from Jesus has blown me away. Jesus declares an objective and a standard that is just about totally opposite to human nature. Normal people, guys for sure, are wired to counter-attack and to take no crap from anybody. If there's a typical human motto it would be closer to this...

“I don't just get mad, I get even.” We're geared toward defending our dignity (in other words, ego) and to get revenge for any offense, insult, rejection or slight. In the Old Testament, God tells the people “Vengeance is mine, I will take it” and also, “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” Both of these are meant to limit violence and escalation. An eye for an eye is called the Law of Talon – it says if someone hurts you, only hurt them equally, don't escalate it.

But Jesus takes it much farther – basically to the point where it might seem impossible. Love your enemies? Be kind to people who hate you? Bless those who curse you? It doesn't sound likely. But remember, Jesus is opening the gates to a new human order, a whole new level of redemption. This teaching doesn't strive to just limit the escalation of violence, it directs us to disarm the power of evil. A side note here, I take this teaching to refer to individuals, not to countries or whole societies, though sometimes it might apply. Jesus looked into the human soul and saw that the common source of evil is the escalation of personal exchanges based on what people perceive to be violations of their ego and humiliation. Our natural reaction to perceived insults is to counter attack and it's easy to see how that unfolds.

Jesus' teaching here is to not counter-attack, nor is it to passively not respond. He tells us to do good to these people, to bless them and to pray for them. First off, this might stop the whole problem because what we perceived as an insult might not have been the intention of the person. Second, most negative stuff from other people comes from their hurt, not from their wickedness and we have to learn not to take most things personally. Third, the very act of being kind, blessing and praying for people, especially difficult people, changes us as we do it, as we become agents of good. Finally, it opens the gate for that person for God's redemption – not always immediately. Think about these points because sooner or later, somebody is going to say or do something that offends you. At that moment, the collision between lower human nature and the spirit of God is unfolding before your eyes and in your life. Jesus tells you to rise to the occasion for good – theirs, yours and all of us as ambassadors of God's Way.