

Is Turning the Other Cheek a Sign of Weakness? *Seeking the Strength of Righteousness*

The 90 pound weakling gets picked on at the beach. Without rippling muscles or 6-pack abs to scare away those who might choose to intimidate him, what tools does he have to face threatening situations? Do we retaliate if someone physically or mentally affronts us? You can look at that question from a human or spiritual perspective. The human reaction is to fight back, but God has another way.

Jesus gave us guidance in the Sermon on the Mountain. Most of us can paraphrase the familiar verse from Matthew, although we often forget that the person affronting us is doing it out of evil. The Bible passage reads: *But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also (Matthew 5:39)*. For Christians, we don't wish to be evil so our approach is clear, although difficult at times. Theologian Oswald Chambers describes that difficulty when he said, "This verse reveals the humiliation of being a Christian."

If we don't physically fight back are we being a coward or a saint? It depends on what is central to your life. Does an evil person bait you to act contrary to your faith? If so, it takes away the strength that comes from God. Chambers said, "In the spiritual realm instead of resenting the insult it is an opportunity to exhibit the Son of God of your life." That makes it a witness for Christ instead of an evil response. A response to witness is what Jesus would do. Chambers said, "A personal insult becomes an opportunity for a saint to reveal the incredible sweetness of the Lord Jesus." We can't control other people's initial aggression but we might possibly show them a better way. Chambers said, "Never look for righteousness in the other person, but never cease to be righteous yourself."

Yes, but aren't we supposed to stand up for ourselves? Do we lose face with others if we don't fight back? It is not about us, but God. Chambers said, "As a disciple of Jesus we need to realize that our actions reveal the Lord's honor, not our own." We honor God by acting in a godly manner. Chambers concludes his comments by saying, "Never look for justice, but never cease to give it." We show our strength in our composure during difficult times.

In the film Kingdom Men Rising former NFL coach Tony Dungy talked about the nature of pro football. Pro football players want to be viewed as the "tough guy." The human perspective suggests that we should intimidate our opponent to show our teammates that we are strong. Think about the way athletes get ready on game day. They have prepared for the game with conditioning and doing what it takes to win the game. How is it different for people of faith? Players of faith do the same physical conditioning but exhibit values that are consistent with the Bible. They realize that their bodies are a gift from God. They do the mental preparation by studying game films. The difference is in the relationships they have with teammates and with God. They build an atmosphere of teamwork and respect for every player on the field. They realize that opponents will try to intimidate them to gain an advantage, but they know not to retaliate. They understand they can't take responsibility for the actions and attitude of others but they take charge of their own actions and attitude. They are strong physically but also mentally focused on being righteous. In describing athletes of the faith Dungy said, "Jesus was the toughest guy in the room. He just showed it in a different way."

Draw your strength from the Lord. Let Him give you the power to respond to your circumstances in a way that is pleasing to God. We all have the goal of succeeding in tasks in front of us. We know that Jesus wins in the end. So can we.

Question: How do you react when others treat you poorly and try to intimidate you?

Prayer: Lord. We can't control other people, but because of our faith, we can draw strength from you to react to situations in a godly manner. Be with us and give us the peace and strength that surpasses all understanding. Amen.

