

Turn the Other Cheek?

If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him your other cheek.

MATTHEW 5:39

Written by Bill Perkins

In this antithesis, Jesus isn't just telling us
what to do after someone strikes us.
He's exposing what the strike is meant to accomplish:
Humiliation.

The injury is not only physical.
It's an attempt to place us beneath them,
covered in shame.

Many understand a slap on the right cheek
as a backhanded insult.
In an honor–shame culture,
it was a public declaration of inferiority—
a strike aimed less at the body
than at dignity.

This is the disrespectful aggressor.
He tries to pull us into a lie—
that our worth is determined
by another's contempt.

Contempt becomes shame
when we agree with it.
The insult becomes
our internal echo.
It tells us not only
that we have done something wrong,
but that something is wrong with us.

That is why shame isn't guilt.
Guilt speaks to what I have done.
Shame speaks to who I am.

It tells me to hide,
and protect the part of my story
I fear others will reject.

Shame shows up in worn,
hand-me-down clothes
on the first day of school.
Failing a grade,
like my friend Eddy,
who cried walking home.
It shows up in sports
when we're cut from a team.
It shows up in the body—
being a skinny boy,
terrified to be seen without a shirt.

And it shows up in moral failure:
doing something that drives us into the shadows.

Shame makes us hide
and tell only part of the truth.
It's the wound Adam and Eve felt
when they covered themselves
and withdrew from God.

A backhanded slap targets that wound,
trying to convince us we are small
and don't matter.

Turning the other cheek isn't surrender.
It's refusing the shame the aggressor intends
and standing in the dignity Jesus gives—
not the curses spoken against us.

Jesus doesn't ask us to remain in danger
or accept abuse.
He shows us how to shatter
the funhouse mirror
contempt holds before us.

You may not know this about Jesus:
in the Sermon on the Mount,
He acts as a shield
against the disrespectful aggressor.
By confronting contempt,

He clears a path for us
to step out of hiding
and into the grace we share in Him.

Because we are in Him,
His dignity is ours.
His steadiness is ours.
His freedom from shame
is the freedom we carry
into every encounter with contempt.