

Should we really turn the other cheek in every circumstance?

One of the most difficult applications of Matthew 5:38-42 is in the area of husband and wife battering. What is the Christian response to this problem? This passage states: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,' but I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Does that mean the one who is battered is not to resist, and provide a fresh target every time the abuser wants one? What is the most appropriate response? With the entire teaching and principles of "Responding to an Evil Person" in mind, the following is an attempt to apply that teaching to this tragic problem in many homes. These verses do not give the total response, so we will have to compare Scripture with Scripture to arrive at an answer. Here are general guidelines.

The First Occurrence of Battering

The initial response to the first incident is very critical. Battering a wife or husband is wrong, no matter the excuse, and it must stop. This is not a simple slipup, but a very serious degeneration of the marriage, and it happens in Christian homes. It must be not buried and forgotten, but dealt with quickly. How should that be done? There are two possible courses of action. Those outside the Christian faith should respond according to the dictates of the law and the best counsel of the world. The following suggestions, however, are designed for the Christian and are possible, or even desired, only if a person is drawing upon God's strength and wisdom. If battering occurs, the Christian should consider the following steps.

1. **First**, the believing husband or wife should be confronted lovingly after this first incident with a call to true repentance--Matt. 18:15-20; II Cor. 7:8-13. This is not an incident that should be swept under the carpet with only a stern lecture. True repentance is being sought here, as outlined in II Cor. 7:8-12.

2. **Second**, the abuser's emotional state should be evaluated, and counseling sought. If the abuser is under stress, or angry, he/she should be taught to properly handle stress and acceptably vent anger. The next response should be considered with caution.

Questions about Battering

Written by Bob Stone

3. **Third**, the one who has been abused should examine his actions and see if they are contributing to the mate's behavior. This is not to say the abused spouse is the problem, nor should he/she conclude they are at fault and deserve the battering. *This is never the case!*

No one deserves this kind of treatment. The examination of contributing factors is only designed to lessen the hostility of the environment and give the couple a chance to deal with the abuser's problem.

4. **Fourth**, both wife and husband should recognize the incident as a major communication failure, indicative of the need to establish a regular time to communicate and pray together about the problems of the household and/or job.

5. **Fifth**, either or both spouses may seek out an appropriate support/small group in order to help them vent their feelings and have someone to call in a stressful time.

The Second Occurrence of Battering

What happens if a second incident occurs? The following steps should then be lovingly and strongly pursued. The level of battering and many circumstances or background will certainly vary, but following are the options available to the Christian.

Confrontation

To ensure the incident has its witnesses and to bring others into the solution, the process of Matthew 18:15-20 should be followed quickly. If you can maintain your physical safety, this is a good process which will bring the abused to the counsel and protection of a larger community. The process should be carried out to the last step if necessary. If repentance does not occur and there is danger a further incident could occur, one of the following options may be taken.

Separation

This would be for a period of prayer and fasting under the guidelines of I Cor. 7:5.

Legal means for restraining could be consulted--Acts 16:15-38.

Remember, the commandment of Matthew 5:38-42 does *not* mean that the one being battered should not resist but provide a fresh target every time the abuser wants one.

Evasive means and self-defense should be maintained.

Questions about Battering

Written by Bob Stone

Possible Evasive means and self-defense (whichever is most appropriate):

- screaming
- reasoning
- running
- self-defense

Deut. 22:24,27; 2 Sam. 13:7-14; Gen. 39:6b-12; Lk. 4:29-30; Matt. 3:13-18; Jn. 18:19-23

Intervention must be sought--James 5:13-16.

If you are being abused, you cannot handle this yourself; nor does the abuser get well by himself/herself. You must have competent, well-trained help--e.g., pastor, counselor, City/County Crisis Services--someone who knows the dynamics of battering.

Summary. It cannot be overstated that **what we are listing here is the Christian response**. In all the above options there must be a spirit of love and not retaliation. The enormous physical and psychological damage that may occur to the family calls for a quick response to this tragedy. Seek competent counsel if you have any questions.

Help For the One Being Battered

Many people today have never dealt with the memory of situations where they were mistreated and abused. These situations are often known only to the abused and the abuser, so carrying the memory of these events can often be a very lonely and painful experience. The result is usually tragic. Sadly, these past experiences can affect a person's perception of present events, relationships, and handling of other unrelated problems as well. He/she may even react to everyday situations in a confusing and erratic fashion because of a mind muddled or confused due to unresolved hurts. This person may be difficult to help because he/she may not even know the connection between past and present, having effectively buried it. So be aware that sometimes a victim of abuse won't remember what happened because of "selective memory;" they may have chosen to forget anything too painful. Others may at first play down their pasts just to see how you will respond.

People who have lived through abusive situations often believe what they experienced was their fault, though they were clearly victimized. They may have been told this over and over by an abuser, so they now believe it. Or they may have reasoned, "There must be

Questions about Battering

Written by Bob Stone

something wrong with me for this horrible thing to have happened." Some abuse is further complicated by the fact that often it has come from a parent or family member, maybe even a "religious person." You can imagine the confusion and/or bitterness that can come into the heart of one abused like this. This person may need professional help and/or a spiritually gifted person to deal with the past. The best thing you can do is assist them in finding that help and then staying with them through the process of recovery. You are not a failure if you find you are unable to directly help. Don't be reluctant to find assistance when you're over your head. On the other hand, if you are unsure what the problem is, or whether you can help, the following questions could be used to enable the hurting person to bring the past into clearer focus, so he/she can deal with it. We are not to try and be "all knowing" in our questions and answers. For the most part, we should see ourselves as friends simply trying to be partners in the painful journey of recovery. We are involved in order that they might experience the healing power of Jesus.

Healing Questions

With that in mind, begin by carefully and gently asking about the past. A few or all of these questions might be helpful to show the need for further healing and prayer.

- How do you think your parents feel about you? How did they treat you?
 - How did your family show their love for each other, or their displeasure with you?
- How do you feel about that? Do you feel a need to forgive them?
- Have you gone through any experience that you fear someone will reveal or find out about?
 - Have you experienced any sexual or verbally abusive situations in your past? Do you think these traumatic events have been dealt with, so that now you are being healed of the scars?
 - Is there anything that needs to happen before you can move toward healing? Do you want to talk about it now with me or someone else? Would you be open to attending a support group? Could we begin to pray about it now?