

## SHOULD WE RESIST EVIL?

by Rev. Donald L. Rose

This is from the Sermon on the Mount: “But I tell you not to resist evil. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.” (Matthew 5:39).

It goes on to say that if someone takes your tunic, let him have your cloak also. If you are compelled to go one mile, go two miles!

If someone grabs at your purse, should you make sure he also gets your billfold? Should you not protect yourself and others? Is this an impossible teaching without real bearing on our daily lives?

On the contrary, it can be seen to have a lot to do with daily life.

My religious perspective comes from the theological books of Emanuel Swedenborg. These invite attention beyond the literal words. Jesus said, “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life” (John 6:63).

In The book Arcana Coelestia (Heavenly Secrets) Swedenborg says: “Who will give his property to all who ask. And who will not resist evil?” He emphasizes our own inward struggle against the spirit of revenge and its delight. “Those governed by heavenly love should take no delight in any act of retaliation or revenge but in doing good” (Arcana number 8223). The spirit within the words of Jesus beckons us to rise above our natural inclination. We really can inwardly bless those who curse us, and we can pray for those who would persecute us.

This teaching can affect us when it is our job to resist evil. Yes, especially does it come into play when we have to deal with evil. A policeman or other guardian of the peace does his job really well when he keeps his personal inclination to retaliation out of the picture. This takes real effort when you are being taunted.

During my years as an elementary school administrator I was entrusted with the job of overall discipline. I am ashamed of the memories of the times when I lost my temper. My spirit of anger limited my effectiveness. My advice to teachers, and in a special way to parents is to think of this teaching of the Sermon on the Mount on occasions of confrontation.

If someone offends you and you allow this to awaken a spirit of revenge it not only puts others in danger, it puts you inwardly in jeopardy. If someone offends you it need not hurt you at all, but it can, depending on your response. Take the example of someone calling you names. It need not hurt you in the slightest. “Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” Words are but breaths of air, and they need not bring you any harm.

However, if you allow the spirit of revenge to burn within you, if you allow the passions of anger to be aroused within you, then those words really do result in inward harm. They put you in a difference place, and it is not a good one. Your inner protection has for a while been driven away. For there is a safety and secure inner protection in a spirit of love.

We can learn to look upon others with good will, even when they offend us, to forgive, even when they trespass against us. That is the spirit of that wonderful part of the Gospel called the Sermon on the Mount.

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