

By Jerry W. Scheidbach, pastor of Lighthouse Baptist Church  
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**Introduction:** The idea that Christianity is a pacifist ideology is pretty wide spread.

When I was in Russia, I think it was my second or third of something like nine trips (1991-1992), on a train traveling from Moscow to Minsk, in Belarus, I shared the sleeping compartment with a Muslim man who assumed I was Christian because I was American. He was very aggressive about his point of view that Christianity was weak, but Islam was strong. He told me that Islam would defeat Christianity for this reason.

I asked him why he thought Christians were weak. He explained that Jesus was a very fine person, but that he was weak and that Muhammad was a strong, courageous warrior. He explained that Jesus was a pacifist—that his teachings made people weak.

About a year ago I was driving along on one of my many excursions for a speaking assignment somewhere, I think it was down south this time, and I heard these guys talking about why war requires a pagan ethos versus a Christian ethos.

The talk show guest explained, *you see President Bush is a paradox because he is a Christian morally who is conducting his war from a pagan and not a Christian ethos, while former President Clinton was more of a pagan morally yet guided the military from a Christian and not a pagan ethos.*

You remember, Clinton sent our military to Somalia on a meals-on-wheels mission!

Please don't think I'm unconcerned about the plight of the poor in Somalia—fact is, that whole mess over there tears my heart out. What some people simply do not understand is this.

You can't help people who will not help themselves; and second...

You don't help anyone by accommodating the bullies who are abusing them.

You give a kid a lunch and every day, when he gets to school, this bully comes and takes it away. So, you give him two lunches, one for him and one to buy off the bully. Guess what? The bully decides the kid is easy prey and takes both lunches, or, he accepts the pay-off. In either case, bullies behavior is rewarded, and the kid has sent a message to every other bully in school that he is a free lunch. They start lining up. Yielding to bullies only makes them bolder, and stronger, to demand yet more.

**So, what is an ethos anyway?** An ethos is the essence of what a particular group believes, or values collectively. One can have a personal ethos. Generally, however, it refers to a group's core values, and beliefs, the principles that guide their actions.

In other words, according to radio talk show guest I mentioned earlier, former President Clinton lived morally in a manner consistent with a pagan ethos and conducted the military in a manner more consistent with a Christian one; while, President Bush lives his personal life in accord with a Christian ethos and conducts the military from a pagan one.

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In fact, according to this fellow, who was promoting his book, *Why War Requires a Pagan Ethos*, the Christian ethos is entirely inconsistent with warfare. I thought, *well here it is again*. I realized that today most folks simply do not understand Christianity.

**Did Jesus Teach Pacifism?** The idea that Christians are pacifists is taken from a distortion of some of Jesus' most popular teachings.

Jesus taught us not to resist evil,<sup>1</sup> but rather to turn the other cheek [Matthew 5:39].

He taught us to do unto others, as we would have them do unto us [Luke 6:31].

Jesus instructed us to love one another [John 13:34]. More than that, He taught us to love our enemies, even to bless them, and to do good to those who persecute us and use us despitefully [Matthew 5:44].

He taught us not to avenge ourselves, but to give place to wrath [Romans 12:19].

Do these principles apply to a war situation, or to acts of criminal violence? This is what pacifists tell us. But there is something wrong with this, and every reasonable person intuitively knows it.

For example, does anyone, even the most radical pacifist, believe that to realize the ideal of Jesus teaching, we must turn the other cheek to Osama bin Laden? The concept of *turn the other cheek* clearly means we yield to the offense, and offer the *other cheek* to the aggressor. Would not that mean, that from a Christian ethos perspective, we should send Osama a message to come and attack Los Angeles towers next. Wouldn't that be in keeping with the concept of *turn the other cheek*—I mean, like, *Ok, we submit, you may strike us again*. Further than that, would we not be obligated to facilitate the aggressor, by delivering the target to him?

Likewise, we are supposed to do unto others, as we would have them do unto us. Well, doesn't that mean that to live up to Jesus ideal, we should consider that since we would not want the Afghanistan military to drop bombs on us, it is hypocritical for us to send our planes over there to drop bombs on them?

Is bombing Afghanistan consistent with loving our enemies, doing good to those who have persecuted us, and used us despitefully?

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<sup>1</sup> Note: The Bible's use of the word *evil* is misunderstood. For example, in Isaiah 45:7, we are told that God creates evil. He ordained that *evil* would be the natural and/or Divine consequence of sin in the world. The word speaks of harm, ruin, disaster, affliction, grief, sorrow, and so on, whether this comes in the form of natural disaster or at the hands of man—it is the general consequence of letting death into the world by sin [Romans 5:12]. However, God condemns those who “do evil” [Philippians 3:2; Psalm 26:5], and appoints men to execute wrath upon *evil doers* [Romans 13:1-7; I Peter 2:14]. It goes beyond the scope of this study to discuss it further than to say, when Jesus instructed us not to resist *evil* He was not telling us to yield to the Devil [James 4:7], or to iniquity (sin) [Romans 6:13-16], or to unreasonable and wicked men [II Thessalonians 3:2].

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You already know, intuitively, that something is wrong with applying Jesus' words in this way; but you might be like most Christians who are confused about how exactly to explain what is wrong with this kind of thinking.

I intend to show you, clearly, that war is consistent with a Christian ethos. In fact, you shall see that the rise of American pacifism is the result of drifting away from the Christian ethos of our Founders toward paganism. In other words, that fellow I spoke of earlier got it exactly backwards.

### **What Does the Bible Really Say?**

The idea that Christianity is a pacifist ideology is pretty wide spread. But it is unfounded. Jesus neither taught pacifism, nor behaved as a pacifist.

I mentioned my conversation with a Muslim man on a train traveling from Moscow to Minsk. He expressed the opinion that Jesus' teachings made us weak as a nation.

I asked him if he had ever heard about the time Jesus took a whip and chased the moneychangers from His Father's temple in Jerusalem. (Actually, He did this at least twice, once in the beginning of His ministry [John 2:15], and again at the end [Matthew 21:12]).

He looked at me with something of a bemused expression, as if thinking I was preparing him for a joke. I told him it was true, and I opened up my Bible to the Gospel of John chapter 2, and read to him the story of Jesus taking a whip and chasing the moneychangers out of the Temple.

This fellow was perfectly stunned. He said, with a tone and expression of bewilderment, "I never hear this story." Then, I really amazed him.

I opened up to the place in Revelation where it describes Jesus' second coming - Revelation 19:11-21.

It was kind of comical in one sense; I mean, this guys eyes were fixed on me, and from time to time I would look up to see his reaction, and his eyes were widening more and more.

You see, he had the view of Jesus that many have of Him: you know, the limp wrist, the almost feminine mien and mannered, soft spoken, soft stepping, almost shy persona that is represented in so much art. That is a very unfortunate misrepresentation of Jesus Christ. Anyway, my Muslim friend was very familiar with all, or at least most of the best-loved teachings of Jesus:

*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*

*Turn the other cheek.*

*Love your enemies, do good to those who despitefully use you and persecute you.*

*Avenge not yourselves rather give place to wrath.*

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*The meek shall inherit the earth...*

If you asked almost anyone around the world what Jesus taught, most would be able to recite at least one if not all of the above. These are the teachings of Jesus that the world likes to hear. The spirit that operates in the world [Ephesians 2:2] wants to stereotype Jesus as a pacifist. Any suggestion that Jesus is rightfully the Lord of all the earth and that all power (authority and right to rule) in heaven and in earth belongs to Him [Matthew 28:18] is met with intense resistance, anger, even rage. The world wants a nice, *sweet pie* Jesus, who sits on the sidelines and stays out of the world's way. Whenever we assert the right of Jesus Christ to rule in the earth, we witness the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy in Luke 19:14, where He warned us His citizens would say "we will not have this man to reign over us." It answers the question posed in the second Psalm, "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing. The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His anointed, saying Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us" [Psalm 2:1-3].

Anyway, our Muslim friend was not familiar with the passage where Jesus explains to His followers that during the time that He would be away, it would be necessary for them to obtain a sword [Luke 22:36-38].

Nor had he heard of Romans 13, where we are told that God has given the sword of civil judgment to government for the specific purpose that that evil would be judged. God calls these servants His own ministers, charged with the power to serve as a "revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" [Romans 13:4]. (As an aside, bear in mind here that Jesus claimed all power, that is, all right to rule, in heaven and in earth had been given to Him [Matthew 28:18]. Satan opposes Christ's right to rule, and is the spirit that works in the children of disobedience, stirring them to rise up against Him [Ephesians 2:2]. Every leader in the world who opposes the right of Christ to reign is a usurper. Romans 13 should not be taken to mean every ruler man appoints to rule over him is approved of by God, or appointed by God [Hosea 8:4—"They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not..."]).

**What about the teaching that we should turn the other cheek?**

With what I have said above in view, it is obvious that when Jesus told us to turn the other cheek, He did not mean to suggest we are to encourage criminal activity.

In other words, the Christian woman who is raped is not instructed to invite the rapist to do it again.

There is another biblical principle that is important to keep in mind; *do not give place to the devil* [Ephesians 4:27].

We must not yield territory to Satan, who, according to the Bible, has come to maim, kill and destroy [John 10:10].

If a murderer kills our son, we do not offer him our daughter.

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The liberal Christian today is absurd to apply the turn the other cheek principle in any of the above cases. Obviously, in cases of criminal activity, it does not apply.

What did Jesus mean when He said *turn the other cheek*?

**First, it is obvious Jesus meant it to apply to us on a personal level, and not on a community, or national level.** One way to understand this is to note, Jesus does not tell me, as a leader of others, to *turn their cheek* by my policies and expose them to repeated abuse or mistreatment.

Absolutely not! Government is charged with the responsibility to execute wrath upon evil doers—the government cannot turn its cheek, nor does it have the right to turn the cheek of its citizens to criminals. It has no application to governments.

Imagine a police officer responding to a call to respond to an assault. Suppose the officer arrives on the scene and then instructs the person who is being assaulted to turn his other cheek. That is nonsense, and everyone with sense knows it. **Yet, that is exactly what these fool hearted liberals are doing in our courts. They are sending down sentences, and making laws, that effectively say to the victim, turn your cheek. That is a misuse of their power and an abuse of judgment.**

What did Jesus mean then? Well, first, it applies only on a personal level, not on a community, or national level.

**Second, the principle does not apply to criminal behavior;** that is, to behavior that is outside the sanction of law. How do we know this? Well, if you agree with me that Paul understood Jesus' teaching on this matter, consider that when he thought he was unlawfully slapped across the face, he resisted the action and rebuked the offender. He did not *turn the other cheek*. You can read about it in the book of Acts 23:1-5.

Think maybe Paul erred? Well, this will likely surprise some of you, but Jesus Himself was once slapped on the face and He rebuked the offender; **He did not merely turn His other cheek.** Really, check it out in John 18:23. However, later when Jesus was being slapped *legally* (albeit immorally) in Pilate's Hall, in accordance with the power He declared to Pilate that God had given him, Jesus did not protest [Matthew 26:67]. By the way, when Paul learned that the person who slapped him did it in accord with the power God had given to the High Priest, he withdrew his protest. An interesting insight begins to emerge!

These passages give us clear insight into the meaning of Jesus when He said we should turn the other cheek. He did not mean that we should apply it on a national level—that is clear from the teaching of Romans 13 about the role of government.

He did not mean we were to accommodate illegal acts, which is clear from the example of both Jesus and Paul.

When the context of the verse where this statement is found is taken into consideration, it becomes clear what Jesus is talking about.

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Have you ever actually read this in the Bible? Many of you (in my radio listening audience) probably have not. You have merely heard it stated repeatedly and never actually read the verse as it is found in the Bible. You should. It is in Matthew 5.

You will notice that He speaks of a provision in the Law, which states the principle of *eye for eye and tooth for tooth*. Of course, that is exactly the way government is required to approach the execution of judgment. There is no other principle that can guide government in executing judgment for the purpose of establishing the peace.

Government has no legitimate business telling a victim of a crime to *turn the other cheek*. That is outrageous and absurd and government is abusing its role in society if it begins acting on that principle.

Legally, the principle of justice is *eye for eye and tooth for tooth*. Not eyes for eye, or teeth for tooth, but equity, balanced and measured judgment to establish justice.

However, personally, on the level of someone offending us, or doing something they have the legal power to do that offends us or even damages us in some measure, Jesus instructed us to *turn the other cheek*—our own, by the way, not our neighbor's.

It is often said, in jest, that Jesus did not say what we are to do beyond that. Although, I think there is something to that observation. The injunction to us in such matters is this, “as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” [Romans 12:18]. People offending you repeatedly can become unlivable, and in such a case, you will need to take steps to avoid such persons.

In other words, we do not live our personal lives by the principle *eye for eye and tooth for tooth*—or, in other words we do not give *tit-for-tat*. That would be petty, and just a whole lot of work, when more often than not, the offense can be absorbed and forgotten about. You see, it works on a personal level, and is applied by the individual who is offended, not by the offender, or by anyone else.

Now we are ready to look at the full context of the popularly known Jesus saying, “Turn the other cheek.” Notice the verse that follows.

Matthew 5:38-42—Here He is talking about how we should handle being sued in court. If the court, the legal court system, decrees against us, and awards the other party our coat, we should demonstrate our yielding to the power God has invested in government to the point that we go the extra mile and give our cloak also.

Jesus said more than once that His people were to be obedient to the civil powers. In fact, He said if one of His own gets into trouble with the law, Jesus would make certain they pay the utmost farthing [Matthew 5:26].

### **What about loving our enemies, and doing good to those who despitefully use you?**

Once again, we must differentiate between a personal application of these principles and a general, national, or political application of these principles.

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Of course, on a national level, we can love our enemies—and I think President Bush demonstrated that Christian principle when he offered aid to the Afghanistan people who are innocent of the crime of terrorism but who have been devastated by this war effort.

Is not this country crazy with the business of giving aide to countries that despise us?

But doing good to our enemies does not mean allowing them to fly airplanes into our buildings killing thousands of our citizens.

What people don't understand is loving someone does not mean yielding to anything they want to do to you or giving them anything they want. Sometimes loving someone requires us to judge them—Jesus said, more than once, as many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. God is love. He is also a God of judgment. *Love* and *judgment* are not antithetical. Genuine love requires righteous judgment. It is amazing how, in our society, liberalism has used *love* to corrupt righteous judgment, and justice. It is disheartening to see all the evils that are being unleashed into our society in the name of *love*.

**Conclusion:** A word about the issue of vengeance?

Once again, we are compelled to differentiate between a personal application of an ideal and a national application of the same ideal.

Jesus told us not to avenge ourselves, but He also promises that all will be avenged. Read Revelation 6:9-11, and so many other places in Scripture where God promises to avenge all injustice. Romans 12:19 declares, “vengeance is mine, saith the Lord; I will repay.”

We don't take it into our own hands. It is something that God has committed to divinely appointed government. God's Divinely appointed ministers are charged with the responsibility to serve Him as a “**revenger** to execute wrath” upon the evil doers [Romans 12:4]. That is the reason God gave them a sword. On the question of whether Christians are to participate in this application of the sword, that is, whether for example a Christian can serve as an officer of the Law or in the military, we remind you that Jesus told His disciples that since He was leaving, they **would be wise to get a sword**. I also remind you that neither John the Baptist, nor any of the Apostles ever instructed any Christian who was in the military service that they had to leave that service to be a consistent Christian. Neither did Jesus.

Clearly, when all that Jesus taught is taken together, He did not mean Christians were to independently assume government power to execute the judgment of the sword, on the other hand, He expects us to defend our families and indicates we certainly may participate in government enforcement of law and in fact, I say, more Christians ought to make themselves available to government for such service.

However, only God has the power and knowledge to ensure vengeance is meted out justly.

This means that governments do not go to war in order to exact vengeance (that's something God does with governments sometimes, but it is not properly the purpose of

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governments to exact vengeance). Rather, government is charged with the duty to execute judgment necessary to establish and maintain justice.

**Only when justice prevails can freedom endure.**

Freedom and justice are like siamese twins, the sort that killing one destroys the other. Freedom is always the casualty of injustice. You cannot have one without the other.

Consider, true justice always encourages freedom and injustice always violates freedom.

Liberal “Christians” have perverted the teachings of Jesus and unwittingly use them to advance the cause of injustice in the world, compromising liberty and justice for all.

I hope this lesson has helped you. Call, toll free 1-888-770-8000 and let me know if you have been helped by this study. Use the same number to contact me about any questions you have on this, or any other subject for which you desire a truly Biblical perspective. You may contact me by email at [pastor@baptistlighthouse.org](mailto:pastor@baptistlighthouse.org). Or, go to our website, as [www.santamarialighthouse.org](http://www.santamarialighthouse.org) and click on the CONTACT US button in the menu bar at top. For other helpful articles or messages on various topics of concern to all God fearing patriots, go to our website and click on the RADIO, or BOOK STORE buttons. God bless you. God, save America. I'll see you in Church.

**End**