

Spiritual Karma: Turn the Other Cheek

By Rev. Erik Buss (March 24, 2019)

“But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.” This has to be one of the most misunderstood passages in Scripture. Some take it literally, though most don’t, and New Church teaching says the Lord does not expect us to do so (*AE* 556). But if we don’t take it literally what do we do with it? Many simply ignore it as something they don’t understand, or as a nice but unrealistic sentiment.

A basic principle for understanding this teaching is that everything you do comes back on you. It is a law of heaven that when you do good you receive good, more in fact than you gave in the first place. The Golden Rule tells us to treat others like we would like to be treated. This law says that, spiritually, we will be treated just as we treat others. This is one of the keys to spiritual living. You may not feel like it, but if you choose to do the right thing, the Lord will be transforming you from within, and you always come out a winner in that transaction.

The law of hell is that when someone does something bad to you, you can only do to them as much as they did to you. This was the rule of the Jewish church: An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. And on a deeper level, when we do harm we receive harm back.

So that’s one key idea: There is an immediate spiritual karma in all you do. Evil brings its own punishment and good its own reward. Part of the message, then, is to stop feeling that everyone who has hurt you needs to be punished. They already have been by the very act of doing you harm. To the extent that they meant it, they have opened themselves up to the power of hell and that has hurt them. And that means that at one level we can let it go. Justice was served.

This does not mean we don’t pursue external justice. That’s our job in this world. But we don’t have to be kept up nights because evil goes unpunished. It never does!

One passage from our readings said that angels never resist evil because they are protected. When we understand this properly, we can see that the Lord is telling us to look at what our spirit is like. Think about the place of your spirit. You are going along being a good person and someone hurts you. Your spirit was in heaven, and now you are hurt. What is your response? Do you stay in that heavenly place and try to find a heavenly response? Or do you sink down into hell in your spirit and think horrible things about that person, making yourself miserable in the process? Evil spirits are constantly needling us, trying to annoy us into responding, to sinking to their level. So the Lord’s message is: Don’t compound injury done to you from the outside by also allowing damage to your soul by getting wrapped up in hate.

The Lord is telling us that if we rest in Him He can protect our spirits, whatever happens. Bad things may happen to us externally, and that will hurt. But if we can avoid sinking into hell in response, His presence and protection will carry us through. “Wait on Jehovah; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on Jehovah!” (Ps 27:14)

Lessons: Matthew 5:38-48; *Apocalypse Explained* 556; *Arcana Coelestia* 9049