

Rights or Relationship

I continue to struggle with the practical limits of **Matthew 5:38-48**. You know; the passage that says to turn the other cheek and love your enemies. I imagine the struggle among brethren about self-defense or war will continue until Jesus returns. However, I do think I have finally figured something out about this text. An author of a parenting book offhandedly commented about dealing with our children. She pointed out that we should not spend so much time in defending our child's right to a toy his sister has taken as we should helping him see the importance of the relationship he is to have with her (though I do believe every child who has taken a toy should be taught principles of ownership as well).

It hit me. That is exactly what Jesus was talking about in His Sermon. We stand up for our rights. We fight tooth and toenail when somebody has wronged us. But what is that doing to our relationship with them? Is it helping us bring them to Jesus or helping them grow in Him?

When this hit me, I thought of an occurrence at Best Buy several years ago. I was standing in the customer service line. Ahead of me, a middle-aged couple complained. They complained about the line length. They complained about the number of people working at the counter. They complained about the number of people not working at the counter. When they finally got to the desk, they wanted to return an item. I don't remember all the issues, but there was something about a restocking fee because they didn't have the box even though the item didn't work. The man and wife went ballistic. The customer service rep explained the policy. The man and wife jumped all over him. The rep called the manager, who explained the policy again. The man and wife pitched a fit. At one point, they even stopped looking at the manager and started looking at the people in line as they yelled, indicating to me that they were no longer intent on persuading the manager but causing a scene and encouraging other customers to shop at the nearest competitor.

How many times have I been that couple, arguing vehemently for my rights and self-defense? A question popped in my head. Let's assume the couple were Christians and the manager happened to attend an assembly with them the next Sunday. What would happen when he looked up to see whose outstretched hand was greeting him and found the face of the man who had humiliated him just days earlier?

Before defending our rights, let's think about the relationships we want to maintain. Let's ask ourselves what we want this person to think when we invite them to Bible class or an assembly. Let's ask ourselves what we want them to think when they see us praying, reading our Bible, or attending an assembly. What is more important? Getting to return the broken equipment without a restocking fee or having set an example that glorifies God and keeps the doors open to talk about Jesus with someone?

—Edwin L. Crozier