

OpenTheo

Justice, Mercy and Faith



Charisma and Character - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg delivers a lecture on the topic of justice, mercy, and faith, focusing on the fruit of the Spirit and biblical teachings. He emphasizes that love for God and others should be accompanied by actions such as mercy, justice, and faithfulness. Gregg highlights the importance of treating others justly and not violating their rights, going beyond mercy towards others by giving them additional rights, and keeping promises and oaths as signs of faithfulness. Overall, Gregg encourages listeners to strive towards a life that reflects the teachings of the Bible and the fruit of the Spirit.

Transcript

We're very near the end of our series of lectures on the fruit of the Spirit. The series has been going on for several months. In fact, this is the 15th lecture in the series.

The series being actually called Charisma and Character because it's about the gifts and the fruit of the Holy Spirit. We finished talking about the gifts of the Spirit some time ago, and we've been now studying what the Bible says about the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is essentially a way that Paul speaks of the character traits of Christ as they are reproduced in us.

Many people never quite understand that Christianity isn't simply adhering to a set of ethics or rules or religious rituals. Christianity is a living thing, and its object is nothing less than that Christ Himself be reproduced in His people. That the life of Christ would be reproduced so that there's a different species of life exhibited in us, and that's the life of God.

Peter says in 2 Peter chapter 1 that we are partakers of the divine nature. 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 4, that God has made us to be partakers of His own divine nature. Now, when we partake of the nature of Christ, one of the results is that we begin to have a change in our character because the character of Christ is that which begins to manifest as the Spirit of Christ works within us and produces His produce, His fruit.

And the classic list of the fruit of the Spirit in the Scripture is Paul's list in Galatians chapter 5 verses 22 and 23. In that place Paul lists nine items that he calls the fruit of

the Spirit. But what we observed several weeks ago is that although that list contains nine items, there are really, a much fuller list can be made if we compare that list with other similar lists in the Bible, mostly from Paul but also from Peter.

There are a variety of places where lists of character traits are given. And where a few weeks ago I gave you a handout that had, I think, six passages from the New Testament, five of them from Paul and one from Peter, which list any number, five to ten, character traits, and each of these lists contained at least three items on them that belong to Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. And that made me conclude that those lists were lists of similar things, which Paul would have probably called fruit if you'd asked him, you know, well, is that also fruit of the Spirit? Of course. You know, when Paul listed the fruit of the Spirit, he didn't suggest that that's the complete list.

And by compiling the data from various other lists of what I think Paul would call fruit, we've gotten a fuller quantity than just the nine. Now, tonight we're going to talk about three of them. None of the three, well, I take that back, I was going to say none of the three are in the Galatians list, but one of them is.

These three are justice, mercy, and faith, or faithfulness. We'll find that the word faith in the Greek can be translated either as faith or as faithfulness. And in some passages, it clearly means faithfulness.

We'll talk about that in a bit. But the reason I'm taking these three together, by the way, it's the third of them that is found in Galatians 5.22 in the list of the fruit of the Spirit. The other two items, justice and mercy, are not in that list, but they are found, both of them are found in some of the other lists that I just mentioned a moment ago.

And we'll see that shortly. But these three items go together in a peculiar and a special way because of Jesus joining them and labeling these three things the weightier matters of the law. If you'll look with me at Matthew chapter 23, verses 23 and 24, Jesus said in Matthew 23, verses 23 and 24, Now, what he is saying is that the way they practice their religion is comparable to straining a gnat out of your drink before drinking it so that you don't take in the gnat as well as your drink.

On the one hand, but swallowing a camel on the other. Now, those who are not acquainted with the ceremonial laws of cleanliness and kosherness of food may not appreciate immediately how this statement impacted his Jewish heroes. But you see, a gnat was an unclean animal to the Jew, not kosher.

A camel was also an unclean animal. There were many animals that were clean that the Jews were allowed to eat, but most animals were not clean. Amazingly, some insects were on the list of kosher foods.

In Leviticus, it lists grasshoppers and locusts among the insects that could be eaten. But

most insects, including gnats, were unclean. And camels were among those animals that were distinctly said to be unclean also.

So a Jew would neither eat a gnat nor a camel if he was going to be scrupulous about staying ceremonially clean, that is, obeying the law. Now, when Jesus said, you strain a gnat, you might think that they would strain a gnat for the same reason you or I would. We would strain a gnat out of our drink because we'd find it loathsome.

We'd find it yucky. We wouldn't want to drink a bug, you know. But people who live in the third world, and back in biblical times, everyone lived in the third world.

People who live in the third world and grow up there don't have quite this squeamishness, especially about an almost microscopic bug. I mean, when we were in Honduras last year, people were eating rice that they found worms in. And they knew there were worms in it, some of them, and they ate the rest of it anyway.

You know, when you live in the jungle, you get over your squeamishness about certain things. They say that you can tell the difference between a first-year missionary, a second-year missionary, or a third missionary by this very thing. If a first-year missionary finds a bug in his drink, he throws out the drink.

A second-year missionary, if he finds a bug in his drink, he strains the bug out and then drinks the drink. A third-year missionary just drinks the drink with the bug and all. Because you lose your sensitivity about those things, after all.

The Pharisees in Jesus' time would not have strained a gnat out of their drink just to avoid the loathsomeness of it. It was because it was an unclean animal. That's the point.

They did it scrupulously. They did it for the purpose of not breaking the law and eating an unclean animal. So, if there was a gnat that had landed in their drink, they would strain it out.

Just so they would not break the law. But Jesus says, the way you live your lives, it's as if you strain out a very tiny, unclean animal. So, you're very careful about a minute infraction.

But, it's as if you turn around and swallow a huge, unclean animal. And that's what, of course, we said in verse 23, only a different way. He said, you've been very careful about little things, but you've been very careless and neglectful about the big things.

What he called the weightier matters of the law. Now, what they were careful about were things like paying their tithes. Now, Jesus considered that not to be one of the weightier matters.

Giving 10% of your income to the priest at the temple. That was required by the law. Just

like straining a gnat out of your drink was required by the law.

But it wasn't anywhere near as important as some other things in the law. And Jesus identified what those other things were. He said, you've neglected the weightier matters of the law.

You're becoming guilty of a greater act of uncleanness. You're avoiding a small act of uncleanness, far be it from you to neglect your tithes. But you're committing a greater uncleanness, like swallowing a camel, because you neglect the things that matter most to God.

The weightier matters of the law. And Jesus tells us what they are. And they are justice and mercy and faith.

Now, this word faith, the Greek word is *pistis*, which we'd spell P-I-S-T-I-S. It is the ordinary, regular word for faith in the Bible. But it is also a word that sometimes in the Bible means faithfulness.

We'll talk about that Greek word a little bit later on, because that's the last of the three things we're going to talk about here tonight. But it is the same word that Paul lists in Galatians 5.22 as a fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, and so forth and so forth, and faith.

Pistis, same word. Now, therefore, Jesus listed justice and mercy along with faith or faithfulness as sort of being in the same category. Paul has already told us that that third item is a fruit of the Spirit.

And there are other passages in Paul's writings that identify the other two as fruits of the Spirit. So these belong in our list. And they belong together, because Jesus called them the weightier matters of the law.

Now, Jesus, you know, he taught differently about the law than a lot of the teachers, the rabbis did in those days. Most of the rabbis in Jesus' day were pretty hung up on the ceremonial stuff, the minute ritual requirements of the law of Moses. And Jesus didn't, he wasn't as careful about those things and certainly didn't emphasize them in his teaching by any means.

What he did emphasize were the weightier matters of the law. Now, once he was asked, Master, what is the greatest commandment in the law? And he said, well, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, all your strength. That's the first and great commandment.

And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbors yourself. And he said, on these two commandments hang all the law and all the prophets.

So Jesus indicated that all the law, everything God ever commanded that means anything to him and that he would still wish to impose on anyone, can be distilled into these two commandments. To love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. Paul echoes Jesus in this when he says in Romans 13, verses 8 through 10, Romans 13, verses 8 through 10, Owe no one anything except to love one another.

For he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, you shall not covet. And if there's any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. Paul said the same thing Jesus did.

All the law, he listed some of them, and said if there's any others too, they're all summed up in this one thing, love. Love your neighbor as yourself. So Jesus and Paul understood in this way, unfortunately a lot of Christians don't, but Jesus said the only thing that the law was trying to get at that's lasting and a value that you need to concentrate on is loving your neighbor as yourself.

Love God, of course, with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And if you do these things, all the other laws kind of come along for the ride. You know, I don't see television very often because we don't have one.

But from time to time, we stay in a motel, and I'm hardly ever around a television without turning it on, which is why we don't have one. I'm not too good to have a television. I'm not good enough to have one.

And when I have a TV around, I watch it. So we don't have one, never have had one in 25 years. But I sometimes go places where they are.

I remember once I was in a motel. We turned on the TV, and there was a commercial. And those of you who may watch TV may think it's very naive of me to be surprised by it.

I don't know whether it was a very common commercial. It was one of those kind of products you don't buy in stores. You have to call this 800 number to get it or something.

But it was an item for your closet for hanging your clothes up. And it looked like a whole bunch of coat hangers with different items on it. But if you picked up the coat hanger on the end, all the others were attached, and they all hung on it.

Now, of course, I've become aware of this kind of product since then before. This was some years ago. It was the first time I'd ever seen it.

And I was impressed by this concept that if you looked in the closet with all the clothes hanging out, you'd get the impression there's an awful lot of clothes and a lot of hangers. And if it was your duty to carry out all these clothes, you'd have to hold a lot of hangers. But in fact, you wouldn't have to.

If you could just pick up the right hanger, all the others hang on that one hanger. If you had to carry out all the hangers and all the clothes, you could do so by just picking up the right hanger. And all the others would come along with it.

Now, if you have to carry out all the commandments of God, that might look like a lot to do. If you read the Old Testament, there's 600 and something commands of God. How could I ever remember all this stuff? How could I ever know which I'm supposed to do and which things are maybe a passé and when I'm supposed to do it? How do I know how to obey God's commands? Well, if you know which hanger they all hang on, you only have to carry out that one thing.

And that is love. Jesus said, on these two commands, love God, love your neighbor, hang all the rest of the commandments and the law. In another place, in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew chapter 7, you might say, what's this got to do with justice, mercy, and faith? Everything.

In Matthew chapter 7 and verse 12, Jesus said, Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them. For this is the law and the prophets. Now, isn't that interesting? All the law and the prophets is this.

But that's what he also said about love your neighbors yourself, isn't it? All the law hangs on that. Now, he says it a different way. Whatever you want people to do to you, do that to them.

All the law and the prophets. Now, you'll find, I think, that those are the same thing. Love your neighbor as yourself.

And what you want people to do to you, do that to them. Those are just two ways of saying the same thing. What Jesus is saying is that everything in the law boils down to essentially one thing.

Now, if that is the case, why is it that Jesus, in Matthew 23, 23, listed three things? He said, the weightier matters the law. Why complicate it? You know, if love is all it is, why do these other three things come in? Are we now to remember four things? Namely, love and justice and mercy and faithfulness. Is the law getting more complicated now? How many things in the law are there, after all, for us to remember? These are the weightier matters.

Justice and mercy and faith, or faithfulness. How does that statement of Jesus tie in with his statement that it all boils down to one thing? And that is love. Well, simply it is.

I'm sure most of you are already way ahead of me and know what I'm going to say. It's simply that justice and mercy and faithfulness are what love is. They are the components of love.

And it's a good thing Jesus told us, because we have all kinds of other ideas about what love is. The world has given us all kinds of ideas. Of course, many people think of love in a sexual sense.

But even those of us who are aware, Christian enough, know that sex and love are not the same thing. We often do make some of the same mistakes the world does in saying, I don't love my wife. I don't love my husband anymore.

Because something called romance has gone out, or some feeling is no longer there in the same intensity as it once was, people sometimes think that the love is gone, as if love is something that just happens to you. It's kind of like a wave or a mist that comes upon you mysteriously, and you've got it or you don't. You see, anyone who thinks that way, well, I don't love my husband anymore.

I guess it's just over, you know. They don't know what love is. Not biblically.

Biblically, love is not a feeling that comes over you. Love is not something that happens to you. Love is something you do.

Love is a relational pattern that you adopt and maintain toward other people. It breaks down into some very practical parts. They are called justice and mercy and faithfulness.

Now, if loving your neighbor as yourself is essentially the same thing as doing to them what you want done to you, I think if you'll pause a moment to reflect about this, you'll know that all that you really want people to do to you is to be just toward you, to be merciful toward you when you have flaws, and to be honest and faithful and keep their word to you. There's really not much else that you would want from anyone. Unless you're an awakened person and want to steal some of theirs or something.

Of course, that goes beyond justice, mercy and faithfulness. But obviously, legitimately, all people desire to be loved. What's that mean? That I want someone to be infatuated with me, to have lust toward me, to have good vibes toward me? That's not what I mean when I mean love.

Some of those things may be desirable, but they're not what love is. Love isn't something that you feel. Love is something you do.

Now, believe me, I'm not denying that love is something that can be felt. There is such a thing as a feeling that we identify often with love. But love is, you see, if someone says, well, the love is gone from our relationship.

Well, only if you've stopped doing it. Many people say that because, well, I've stopped feeling it. So what? You think you're going to feel the same thing all the time the rest of your life? Let's be realistic.

How many of you can point to one emotion that you've had consistently every day of your life? There isn't one. Because emotions just don't act that way. And the emotion that most people identify as love doesn't act that way either.

It comes, it goes, it has its weak and strong moments. But that doesn't have anything to do with whether love is present. That has to do with whether good vibes are present.

Or really, whether like is present. Whether I'm enjoying this person or I like this person. That's a very different thing than whether I'm loving this person.

Loving someone means doing something. It means adopting a pattern of relating toward a person that is characterized by justice, by mercy, and by faithfulness. And when Jesus said, the weightier matters of the law are justice, mercy, and faithfulness, He's just in another way of saying, the weightiest thing in the law is love.

And this is what love breaks down into in its component parts. These things constitute love. And these are character traits that the Holy Spirit produces because the fruit of the Spirit is love.

That's the principal fruit of the Holy Spirit. And what we read here is the parts of what love is that the Holy Spirit works into our lives. As in some of us are stronger in one or another of them.

The goal is to be perfect in all of them. To have the love of God perfected in you, as the Bible says. And therefore, we want to learn what it means to be just, what it means to be merciful, what it means to be faithful, as well as how to get there from here if we're not already those things.

So I want to look at these three items. These are three of some of the most important of the fruits of the Spirit we've considered, obviously, for this very reason, that Jesus made them the weightier matters of the law. And I'd like to discuss them with you, define them for you.

And we're going to take as an outline some things Jesus said in Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5, in the course of this evening, we're going to look at verses 17 to the end of the chapter. But we're going to take it by pieces.

In chapter 5, verse 17 of Matthew, Jesus said, Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For assuredly I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Now, the righteousness that God expects and requires, because you'll by no means enter the kingdom of heaven if your righteousness doesn't exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, it is defined in terms of fulfilling the law. Jesus said, I didn't come to abolish the law, I came to fulfill it. Now, we might wonder whether Jesus means by this that we're still supposed to observe all the commandments in the Old Testament, since he said, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, will be called least in the kingdom if he gets in at all.

And he said in verse 18, not one jot or tittle from the law will pass until all is fulfilled. You might think, well, maybe then all the law, the dietary laws about unclean foods, the festival laws, the Sabbath laws, the tithing laws, all these laws are still binding, because Jesus didn't come to abolish them. But Jesus, fortunately, identifies for us what he means by the law.

When he said he came to fulfill the law, he clarified later in this chapter, or in chapter 7 in the same sermon, what is the fulfillment of the law? And we saw that already in chapter 7, verse 12. Whatever you want men to do to you, do also them. This is the law and the prophets.

You do that and you fulfill this one, and you have fulfilled the law and the prophets. And we saw Paul, a moment ago, say in Romans 13, 10, Love does no injury to his neighbor, for love is the fulfillment of the law. So, Jesus came to fulfill the law.

Well, how is it fulfilled? But by love. Jesus is talking about bringing a new dynamic, a new life, a new pattern to living to his disciples, which will be the fulfillment of the law in their lives, and that is to love. Now, after this, we have verses 21 through 48.

And in these verses, we have six illustrations, six practical examples, of what he means by fulfilling the law. And each of them begins in a similar way. He says in verse 21, You have heard that it was said.

And he says in verse 27, You have heard that it was said to those of old. And in verse 31, he says, Furthermore, it has been said. In verse 33, he says, Again, you have heard that it was said.

In verse 38, he says, You have heard that it was said. And in verse 43, You have heard that it was said. Now, obviously, there are six times that he introduces his thoughts with the words, You have heard that it was said by them of old.

And then he tells them what they've heard, namely, something from the law. In the first instance, You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit murder. In the second case, You shall not commit adultery.

In the third case, You shall not, if you divorce your wife, you shall give her a writing of divorcement. In the fourth case, If you take an oath, keep your oath. In the fifth case, it's an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

And in the sixth case, it's love your neighbor, hate your enemy. These are the things they have heard said. But in each case, after saying to them what it is they heard said, he says, But I say to you.

Now, what they had heard said was what they understood to be the righteousness of the law. But remember, he's just said in verse 20, Your righteousness has to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Now, where did they hear these things said from but the scribes and Pharisees? The scribes and Pharisees had told them these things.

Don't kill, don't commit adultery, give your wife a writing of divorcement, if you divorce her, keep the oath. And these things they had said were from the scribes and Pharisees. But Jesus said, You've got to go further than they do.

Your righteousness has to exceed theirs, or you'll no way get in the kingdom of God. And so, Jesus says, You've heard them say this, but let me tell you what it really is. Let me tell you what the righteousness God really is looking for looks like.

And he gives six practical examples. Those we will look at tonight, but I want to point out to you, some of you have been here long enough, you've heard me say this before, because I love the Sermon on the Mount, and so I say this a lot, because I read the Sermon on the Mount and teach on it a lot. But I believe that two of these examples illustrate God's concern for justice.

Two of them, His concern for faithfulness. And two of them, His concern for mercy. These are the three things Jesus said elsewhere are the weightier measure of the law.

And He's saying, Listen, you want the righteousness that God's looking for in your life? You have to go beyond what the scribes and Pharisees do and say. They say don't kill, but I say don't be angry. They say don't commit adultery, but I say don't watch.

And He goes on and He tells them what it is that they must do that exceeds what the scribes and Pharisees have taught and what the scribes and Pharisees do. Now, I intend to show that each of these six items, two of them are about faithfulness, two about justice, two about mercy. Not in that order.

But these three things that are the weightier matters, Jesus expounds upon. And we're

going to look at that tonight. But let me first of all look at some other things.

Some other related things on each of these topics. Justice, mercy, and faith, or faithfulness. Justice, the Greek word justice is dikaiosune.

And it is the same word that the Bible translates as righteousness. Now, you and I might think of justice and righteousness as very different things. For example, justice is what we hope happens in the courts of law.

We hope that the judges will give justice to those crooks. But righteousness, we think of, well, that's more of a religious sounding word. It seems like being good or being obedient or something like that, that that's what righteousness is.

And in our own usage, I think we tend to make a difference between justice and righteousness. I'm just here to tell you the Bible doesn't make that distinction. The same Greek word is translated justice and is translated righteousness in different places.

When you find the word righteousness in your Bible, if you look in the Greek, it says dikaiosune. If you find the word justice in your Bible and look in the Greek, it says the same word, dikaiosune. They're just alternate translations of the same Greek word.

The concepts are interchangeable. Now, the reason I say that so emphatically is because dikaiosune in the New Testament is most often translated as righteousness. But I want you to be aware that the word in all those cases also means justice.

It's the meaning. Now, Jesus said justice is one of the weightier matters of the law. And therefore, some of the teaching we get on Scripture about justice is going to be in passages where we actually read in our translation righteousness, but it's the same word that could be translated justice.

Let me turn your attention to 1 Timothy 6.11. 1 Timothy chapter 6 and verse 11. Paul says to his younger protege Timothy, 1 Timothy 6.11, But you, O man of God, flee these things. In the context, these things refers to the love of money, which he's been discussing in the previous verses.

He says, But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue these things. Righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Now, if you look at that list, you'll note something.

Most of the things on that list are also in Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit. Gentleness, patience, love, faith. Everything except godliness, really.

And righteousness. Now, righteousness there is dikaiosune in the Greek. It could be translated justice.

So, justice or righteousness, one of the weightier matters of the law, is on the list of

items. So is faith, by the way, or faithfulness. On this list, that belongs in our exploded list, our expanded list, of the fruits of the Spirit.

Okay? Now, what is justice, anyway? You know, one thing, I think one difference that we often make, I don't know if everyone does, maybe it's just me, but I was raised in a fairly typical evangelical church. And I heard religious language and I had, I formed impressions of its meaning and so forth. And I assume other people did too, maybe I'm wrong.

But I know that I typically did not think justice and righteousness were exactly the same thing. Because justice seemed like a way of behaving. Righteousness seemed like something that was right-standing with God or something like that.

You know, I mean, I grew up in a good evangelical church where we learned that you're not saved by your own works of righteousness, but you're saved by imputation of righteousness. Jesus died for me. He who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

It says in 2 Corinthians 5.21. So, we in Christ become righteousness. It's something you are. It's something that you, it's a state of being.

And we are that not because we really behave righteously. The church I was raised in definitely never indicated we had to behave righteously to be righteous. We have to just believe.

This is imputed to us by faith, and Paul said that. And he had other scripture from Genesis and from Haggai to quote to prove that. And James says the same thing, that we're justified by faith.

We're declared righteous by faith. So, I always thought of righteousness as belonging to the concept of the state of being in right-standing with God. Being okay with God.

That when I stand before God, He's going to say, you're okay. But I never, I always thought of justice as more of a description of a certain way of behaving in certain conflicts or obligations that you had. But what I'm trying to say is that righteousness slash justice really means both.

It is in fact standing in a state of being declared just or right in the sight of God. Righteous or justice. Let me show you some places where our Bibles use the word righteousness.

But it seems clear that justice or at least behavior is what is in view in the passage. In 1 John 2, in 1 John, in chapter 2, verse 29. It says, if you know that He, I mean Christ, is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

Notice, practices righteousness. It's not something you just are, it's something you do too. You practice righteousness.

It's something that appears in your actions and in your behavior and your practices. Just a little bit later in the same book, 1 John 3 and verse 7. John said, little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous just as He is righteous.

Just as Christ is righteous. Now, check that out. Don't let anyone fool you.

Whoever practices righteousness is in fact righteous. And He implies that those who don't practice righteousness are not righteous. Now, I still believe, as I always did, that you are right in the sight of God because of your faith in Christ.

That faith is imputed to us for righteousness. And we're not made right or justified in the sight of God by our behavior. But I was wrongly taught that since that is true, since I'm justified by faith, and I'm righteous in the sight of God because I have faith, it doesn't really matter what I do.

Of course, God prefers I don't sin, but it doesn't make a whole lot of difference if I do, because it cannot impinge on my inviolate state of righteousness. It's something I have by faith, and it doesn't matter exactly how I live. Of course, everyone thinks that a Christian ought to live like a Christian more than like a pagan.

But the church I was raised in taught that even if you do live as a pagan, as long as you have faith, you're righteous before God. Now, the problem with this doctrine is it's hard to prove from anything experiential. I mean, a man stands here and says, I'm righteous by faith, even though I've got a mistress on the side, and I've robbed from my boss, and I do all these horrible things.

I use pornography. I'm getting drunk every weekend. But I'm righteous because I have faith and I'm imputed righteous.

Well, how could you test that? Well, fortunately, John clears this all up. He says, listen, don't let anyone fool you. Whoever practices righteousness is in fact righteous.

Now, that doesn't mean that we become righteous in the sight of God by practicing righteousness. It means that if you wonder who in fact has been made righteous by God through faith, you can tell, because what is in them comes out of their practice. If they have in fact been made righteous through faith, then that shows because they practice what they are.

They are righteous, and it shows in their behavior. So that, as James said, faith without works is dead. You're saved by faith, but if you've got it, and if you're righteous through faith, then the works will show it.

So John says, this is an easy, it's a no-brainer one. Don't let anyone fool you. Don't let anyone deceive you.

Whoever practices righteousness, he's righteous. It's that easy. In other words, righteousness is a state that we are imputed and given through faith in Christ, but it shows in righteous behavior.

And righteous means justice or just behavior. So behaving justly is more than a little bit incumbent. In fact, look in the same book, 1 John 3 and verse 10.

1 John 3, 10, In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. Now notice the progression thought there.

He doesn't say, you become a child of God by practicing righteousness. He says, you manifest whether you are a child of God by practicing righteousness. Here's how the children of God are manifested.

It's revealed. It shows who they are. How? Well, if they don't practice righteousness, they're not them.

Practicing justice is a mark that you are genuinely a child of God. The lack of such practice, apparently John gives the impression, is a proof that you're not a child of God. Now, what then is justice? If it is a mark of being truly regenerative, truly being in God's family, what does it mean, justice? Well, I'd like to put it down into just really easy terms that everyone can understand.

And that is, justice is observing people's rights. Now, there's some Christians who will cringe at the word rights, because some of us have been taught that it's not correct to speak about people having rights. Especially us.

We don't have any rights. We're Christians. We have died with Christ.

We've been crucified with Christ. A dead man has no rights. I can appreciate the sentiment there, but that's all it is.

It's sentiment. It's not biblical. It's true we have died with Christ, but the extension of that thought to saying we have no rights isn't quite correct.

It's close to correct. But it's not quite correct. There is a more biblically accurate way of putting that.

Let me suggest to you an alternate understanding. First of all, all human beings, until they forfeit them, have certain rights. Now, I'm not getting this doctrine from our Declaration of Independence, but we know that the Declaration observes that God has given men certain rights, including, they thought, the right to life and to liberty and the

pursuit of happiness.

I'm not sure that all those are really God-given rights. The pursuit of happiness, for example. I don't know if God ever gave us the right to do anything but to follow Him, but sometimes that's a different direction than we would pursue for our own happiness.

But the point is, it's basic. God has given people certain rights. These rights are found in Scripture.

They are the right to your life, the right to your property, the right to your good name, if you've deserved it, the right to your wife's faithfulness and to other men leaving her alone. Now, where do I get all that? Where do I get this idea that there's rights along these lines that people have? How about from the law of God? Thou shalt not murder. Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against your neighbor. What is this? If your neighbor has done nothing worthy of death, he's got the right to live.

Now, you might say, but everyone's done things worthy of death. He that sinneth, the soul that sinneth shall die. Yes, true, and God will exact that penalty on us all.

We'll all die someday. But not everyone has violated their right to live until God takes them out. If you take them out and they've done nothing that's not capital crime, then you are committing an injustice.

You're violating their basic right to life that God has given them, which is why abortion is wrong, because infants in the womb have not done anything worthy of death. And this is why, although those who are in darkness can't see the plain sense of this, but this is why it's not inconsistent for pro-life people who oppose abortion to at the same time be in favor of capital punishment. You know, people who are not believers say, this doesn't make sense.

How can you be pro-life and in favor of capital punishment? I thought you're pro-life. Isn't capital punishment killing? Doesn't your Bible say you should not kill? The Bible says you should not murder. And the difference between abortion and capital punishment is simply this, it's a matter of justice.

A person who does things worthy of death and the state executes him, that's a justice. God likes justice. He's for justice.

He's got a passion for justice. It's one of the weightier matters of the law is that we observe justice. If somebody does something worthy of death, then the state is authorized by God, according to both the Old and the New Testament, to execute that person.

However, an infant in the womb has, and I didn't say a fetus because it's an infant, has not done any crimes worthy of death. So to kill that infant is an injustice. That's murder.

And the difference between killing a man who's done something worthy of death and a person who has done nothing worthy of death is simply a matter of justice because one has the right to live. The other has given up his right to live by doing something that he deserves something else than to live. He deserves to die.

It's a matter of rights. When the Bible says you should not steal, it suggests that some people have more rights to a piece of property than others. If I come to your house and I take your life savings without your permission and spend them on myself, I have stolen.

Well, what's wrong with that? If you're a Christian, you have no rights, right? Wrong. If you had no rights to that property more than I do, then there'd be nothing wrong with me taking it. Stealing would be incapable.

There wouldn't be a concept. There'd be no concept of stealing. We all own everything.

No one has any more rights than anyone else. But we do, in fact. If you take what I rightfully own against my will, you have stolen.

Now, it's another issue. Maybe I should forgive you. That's a different issue.

Maybe I should lay down my rights. I can do that. That's a loving thing to do.

But the fact remains that there are some rights violated, or else there would be no crime. There'd be nothing wrong if there hasn't been a violation of a right. And the same thing with adultery is wrong because a man has the right to expect his wife to keep her vows to him.

And the wife has the same right to expect that of her husband. If someone moves in there and violates that situation, they're violating the rights of that couple to have their marriage un-intruded into. And likewise, to bear false witness violates a person's right to his good reputation.

You say something wrong about him, you're lying about him, you're gossiping, you're slandering, and it's wrong. He hasn't done it. He deserves better.

Because he has the right to his good name. The very laws that God gave are built upon the assumption that people have basic rights. Now, you might say, well, why do Christians so often say then that we Christians don't have any rights? Well, it's not quite correct.

Because if you as a Christian had no rights, then there'd be nothing wrong with me blowing you away because you don't have any right to live anyway. You don't have any rights. Nothing wrong with me lying about you because you don't have any right to keep

your reputation clean.

You don't have any right to your property, so I can just take it from you against your will. You have no rights. That is obviously plain stupid talk, and that's not either Biblical, New, or Old Testament.

What is Biblical in the New Testament and the Old is that if someone violates my rights, I can surrender them. I can choose not to retaliate. I can... we'll talk about that more in a moment.

And when people say we have no rights, really to be more Biblical, to be more accurate, we should say we have the power to give up our rights. We have rights like everybody else, and that is why it's wrong for people to do something bad to us. But we can surrender our rights, and it is a gracious thing to do and a loving thing to do in many cases to not stand for our rights.

That is really, I think, the Christian teaching, and we'll see more on that in a moment when we talk about mercy. But I believe, then, that just behavior, justice, is largely... it's little more than this, just observing people's rights and not violating them. If you contract with somebody to pay them for a piece of work that they do, they... at the end of the month, you're going to pay them for what they did, and you don't pay them.

You are... that's an injustice. Why? Why? Because they have done what was agreed to. They have the right to be paid.

That's a right they have. If you violate that right, you've done an injustice. If you lie about something, if you gossip about something, if you pass slander around, you've done an injustice.

You've ruined their reputation without warrant, without cause. That's unjust. Now, what I'd like to show you in Matthew chapter 5 is that the first two examples that Jesus gives of how to fulfill the law are about justice.

Now, that may not be obvious at first. In fact, it's so unobvious that I studied and taught the Sermon on the Mount for about 20 years before I noticed it. But once I noticed it, it's plain as the nose on your face.

At least it is to me. Maybe my nose is bigger than most. But I think you'll be able to see it too.

Maybe. It may in some measure depend on what translation you're reading because there are some differences. But I'll stand by the one I'm using here because I have looked these things up in the original as well.

Okay. Matthew chapter 5. Let me read you verses 21 through 30 here. You have heard

that it was said to those of old, you should not murder.

And whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, Rock us, shall be in danger of the council.

But whoever says, You fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift.

Agree with your adversary quickly while you're on the way with him. Lest your adversary deliver you to the judge and the judge hand you over to the officer and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there until you have paid your last penny.

You have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. And if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell. Now, what do these two examples, murder and adultery, have to do with justice? Well, first of all, as I pointed out a moment ago, I believe those two and the rest of the Ten Commandments of the Second, everything from the Fifth to the Tenth Commandment are about justice. Honor your father and your mother.

Well, why? It is only right. It is only just. In fact, Paul said in 1 Timothy 5 that if a widow has any surviving offspring who could support her, let them show piety and repay their parents by supporting them.

Repay them? Sounds like there is a debt there. Paul says let them show piety at home, let them support their parents, he specifically says let them repay their parents. Your parents have done so much for you when you were helpless to do anything for yourself that you owe them something.

You may not necessarily discharge that debt until they are as needy as you were when you came into their lives. When they are old, when they are not able to care for themselves, when they are dependent, just like you were for the first decade or more of your life when they cared for you, then you are now obligated to repay them. It is a matter of justice.

Honor your parents. Why? It is only right. It is only just.

They have the right to expect it of you. They made sacrifices. They have the right to expect you to do that for them.

Now, if they give up their right, that may be a gracious thing. If you won't do it, they could say, well, I forgive you. But that doesn't change the fact that they have that right.

It is up to them to decide if they give up that right or not, but they have it, and for you to violate it is wrong. The next commandment in the Decalogue is the sixth commandment. You should not murder.

Jesus gives that one. The one after that is you should not commit adultery. Jesus gives that one.

Then you've got you should not steal, you should not bear false witness, you should not covet. All of these commands are about the need to not violate the basic rights of a person to respect their life, the inviolate nature of their marriage vows, their property, and their good name. This is all a matter of just justice.

Now, Jesus picks two of these commandments, and by the way, none of the other four in Chapter 5 are from the Decalogue. The first two he gives are the only ones that come from the Ten Commandments. The others are all from other parts of the law.

And I believe, because he wants to illustrate in this one, justice. Now, let me unpack it for you and show you why I think this is so. He says, you've heard that whoever murders, verse 21, will be in danger of the judgment.

But I say that whoever is angry at his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And he just says that again a couple of ways. Whoever says, which is a term of disdain and hatred for their brother shall be in danger of the counsel.

Whoever says, you fool, shall be in danger of hellfire. The point being that the Jews sometimes emphasize something by repeating it different ways. Jesus was a Jew.

He's speaking to Jews. He repeated the same thing. You're in trouble.

If you hate your brother without a cause, if you call him rock, if you call him fool, you're in big trouble with God. Just like if you murder. You know that if you murder, you're in danger of the counsel, but you didn't know maybe that you're in danger also if you hate your brother without a cause.

Now, I emphasize without a cause even though some translations don't have that phrase in there. If you're reading the NIV or the New American Standard or the Revised Standard, it may not have the words without a cause there. Those words are only found in the King James and the New King James.

And the reason for it is because those words are found in the manuscripts which are

called the Textus Receptus and they're not found in the Alexandrian text. And there's a great debate as to which text is more accurate. And I suppose that debate will never be solved unless we all become experts in Greek.

And even then, it won't be solved because there are experts in Greek who don't agree on the conclusion. So we can't settle ever probably until the Lord comes whether the Textus Receptus or the Alexandrian text is more correct to the original. And it is the question of without a cause that hangs in the balances in this verse over the choice of those two texts.

One text, the Alexandrian text, says, whoever is angry at his brother shall be in danger of the judgment. But that can't be correct because Jesus was angry. The Bible declares that Jesus got angry in the synagogue at Capernaum.

And he looked awfully angry when he drove the money changers out of the temple, too. More than once, Jesus got angry. Furthermore, Paul says in Ephesians 4, Be angry, but don't sin.

So it must be that some being angry isn't sin, and some is. Not all anger is sin. But if Jesus said, whoever is angry at his brother is in danger of the judgment, that broad-brushes all anger, which makes me believe that the Textus Receptus, which adds the phrase without a cause, either that is preserving the actual original statement or at least it is including something that is implied in the original.

That Jesus is not saying it's always wrong to be angry, but it's certainly wrong to be angry without just cause. Why? Because that's an injustice. If somebody maliciously damages your property or your children or whatever and you get angry at that, or if they blaspheme God or they violate your wife or something like that, I mean, for you to be angry about that, for you not to be angry, you'd have to be dead or without morals.

God is angry at sinners every day, it says in Psalm 11, I think it is. Yeah, there's plenty of wrath of God, and it's not for us to be acting in anger. The Bible says the wrath of man doesn't work the righteousness of God.

We're not supposed to act out our anger. But to feel emotions of anger is normal enough. But to get angry over nothing, to get angry over an accident someone has or over some failure in their human nature that they really didn't mean it or whatever, to get angry without a cause, that's not just.

There is a just time to be angry, but there's a time when it's not just to be angry. And what I think Jesus is saying, listen, yes, God doesn't want you to murder, but do you know why? It's because murder is an injustice, and there's other injustices God doesn't like either, even though you might not think of them as being as bad as murder. You know murder is bad, because that's really bad, but you may not know that there's other

things that are bad too, because they too are unjust.

Murder is unjust because it's the unjust taking of a life. Anger without a cause is unjust also, and for that reason it's in the same category as far as God's concerned. Both of them are acts that are unjust.

And then He illustrates further in verse 23 and 24. He says, if you bring your gift to the altar and you remember that your brother has something against you, that means you've done something against him and he's holding it against you. Now, certainly Jesus wouldn't assume that His disciples had ever done anything wrong to anybody.

He can't mean that they were actually guilty of something, can He? Of course He could. His disciples were every bit as human as we are, and I know a lot of Christians who do things to other people and people hold it against them. Now, if you've done something against somebody, you've wronged somebody, you've been guilty of an injustice, and you remember that that person who has it against you, don't even bother to worship God.

Leave your gift at the altar and you go make it right. Go pay restitution. Go do what you have to do to rectify the situation, to bring justice into the situation because if you walk in an unjust pattern toward your neighbor, you might as well not even offer your gift to the Lord because He's not interested.

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination of the Lord, it says in Proverbs. Now, He goes on with this a little further, verse 25 and 26, Agree with your adversary quickly while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer and you be thrown into prison. Now, obviously, He's got a picture here of you're really guilty of something.

You've done something punishable by law. You've been hoping not to be punished, but you could be. If your neighbor would come after you, he could take you to court and you'd be thrown into prison for it, whatever it is.

The scenario He has is where a Christian or a disciple of Jesus actually has done something unjust, something criminal, something punishable by law. He's wronged somebody. Somebody could take him to court and get him thrown to jail over it.

Now, He says, You'd better get right. This is an amplification on the previous verses. Go, leave your gift at the altar.

Go make it right to your brother. Come to a place of agreement with him. Do whatever he requires to rectify the situation.

Why? Well, because, here's what Jesus is saying, I think, because if He takes you to court and you're found guilty and you're thrown in jail, guess what? You don't pray that God

sends an angel to open the prison doors to let you out because God won't be listening. You could have done the just thing before it came to that. You could have settled out of court.

You could have gone and made it right. You should have, in fact, for you to be no more committed to justice than to let some wrong you've done to somebody go unredressed because you're getting away with it. If you don't get away with it, if you get thrown in jail, you'll rot there.

He says, I'm telling you, you'll be there until you've paid your last penny. In other words, don't expect God to pay your bail if you got yourself in there by your own actions. What Jesus is saying is Christians could be in danger of making the mistake the Pharisees made, that as long as I haven't murdered anyone, I'm not in trouble with God.

But Jesus says, hey, there's a lot of things short of murder that are in the same category because they are injustices. Whether even it's just being angry without a cause. Unprovoked.

Or whether it's, you know, you've done some slight to somebody and you haven't repaid it. You haven't gone and made restitution. Well, if you haven't, don't worship God and don't expect God to bail you out of jail either when you go to jail for it.

Because God's not on your side in this matter. God wants you to be just in all your deeds. And when it comes down to the next illustration, verse 27, you've heard that it was said, to those of old, you should not commit adultery.

But I tell you, whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Here's what I understand to be saying. It is wrong to commit adultery.

But the thing that makes it wrong to commit adultery also makes it wrong to mentally commit adultery with your neighbor's wife. Now, of course, Jesus said, with a woman. The word woman in the Greek is the same word for wife.

And it could be translated with a wife. Presumably it means someone else's wife. It's not adultery to lust after your own wife.

In fact, it's not even adultery to go all the way and sleep with your own wife, much less to look at her and have mental images. He's not talking about your relationship with your own wife. He's talking about your relationship with somebody that it would be wrong for you to sleep with.

It's also wrong for you to fantasize sleeping with. Now, why would that be? Because the husband has the right and the exclusive right over his wife's body. Both for bedtime and for enjoying visually and so forth her stimulating allures or whatever.

Now, maybe that doesn't sound like a preacher talking, but that's reality talking. A husband has the right to his wife's body. Do you know that? That's a right.

Paul established it. Actually, God established it. Paul affirmed it.

Look over at 1 Corinthians 7. 1 Corinthians 7, verse 4. It says, The wife does not have authority. The word there in the Greek, exousia, can be translated the right. The wife doesn't have the right over her own body, but the husband has it.

Likewise, the husband does not have the rights over his own body, but his wife has those. The wife has the right to her husband's body, and the husband has the right to his wife's body. No one else does.

And if it is a violation of that right for a man to sleep with his neighbor's wife and to use her body for himself in a way that really only belongs to her husband, it's also a violation of that husband's exclusive right to her body to use her body visually for that purpose. That's not anymore your business than sleeping with her is. Now, I want to make something clear.

Jesus isn't saying that being angry at your brother is exactly as bad as murdering your brother. He's not saying that lusting after a woman is exactly as bad as sleeping with her. It's obvious that if you have emotions that are sinful, they are sinful before God, and God's offended by them.

But if you act on them and injure other people too, that adds to the complexity of your guilt. Looking with lust isn't the same thing as committing the act of adultery, because in doing that you destroy marriages, you destroy families, you destroy yourself, you destroy everything. But of course you can slowly do the same thing through lust, but the point is, in principle, lusting after your neighbor's wife is wrong for the same reason that sleeping with her is.

And being angry at your brother without a cause is wrong for the same reason that killing him without a cause is. Because it is without a cause, it is a violation of some basic rights, and that's injustice. And those verses about cutting off your hand and cutting out your eye, those are just there for the emphasis, saying, now listen, this is how important this is.

I'm not just whistling Dixie here. What I'm saying here is that if you are violating in this area, you'd better take radical steps of separation from those things in your life that cause you, if your hand causes you to sin, your eye. Of course he's not suggesting that your hand or your eye would really be the actual cause of your sin.

It really is caused by more complicated factors than that. He's using that as sort of an example. That no matter how valuable to you the thing is that leads you into this sin, get rid of it, because it's better to be rid of it and go to heaven than to have that and go to

hell.

So justice is not a small matter with God. And it's not only important in the big things. It doesn't just matter that you don't kill your brother or sleep with his wife.

It matters that you don't intrude into the area of injustice even in the steps that lead that direction. Or in any way, if you've done any injustice to your brother, you'd better go make it right. You'd better pay him back.

You'd better redress that injustice because he may throw you in jail and God won't listen to your prayers, won't receive your worship. Justice is that important to God. Now, we're talking about justice and mercy and faithfulness.

And while I'd like to talk more about justice tonight, I don't have time. We need to talk about mercy a little bit here. Mercy belongs in our list of fruits of the Spirit because of its appearance in Colossians 3.12. In Colossians 3 and verse 12, Paul said, Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering.

Almost everything in that list is in Paul's list of fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5.22 and 23. However, mercies, actually, it says here, tender mercies. In the Greek, it actually says bowels of mercies.

In the King James, it says bowels of mercies. I don't know why the new translation has removed the bowels, but they've disemboweled the phrase, I guess. But the word bowels, the word bowels in the Greek is simply the ordinary word for intestines or the spleen.

It's the Greek word for which our English word spleen comes, but it really is used of the intestines. It's the same word that speaks of Judas' bowels gushing out when he fell forward after he died. And yet, it is used mostly figuratively in Scripture.

The Jews spoke of the bowels being like their inward affections. Paul used this word three times in the short book of Philemon. Our new King James translates it as my heart.

Refresh my heart. In the Greek, it says refresh my bowels. He says to Philemon, the bowels of the saints are refreshed by your brother.

I think the guy runs a colonic clinic or something. Actually, the bowels were a figure, just like we speak of our heart. It's really a figure.

We know that we don't really love from our blood pump. We love from something else, but it's a figure of speech. So the Jews spoke of their bowels as the seat of their deep affections.

In the Greek here, Colossians 3.12 says, put on bowels of mercies. And the word mercy

there is plural, but it's the same word used in the singular elsewhere. It means pity or compassion or mercy.

This, as we know, is joined with justice and faith by Jesus as one of the weightier matters of the law. And mercy is something that is related to justice, believe it or not. And it's related in this manner.

I'll be brief about this because of our shortage of time. But it's related in this way. If justice is the commitment to not violate somebody else's rights, mercy goes beyond that and is willing to give up some of my own rights.

That's the relationship between justice and mercy. I must be just and merciful. In fact, I can't be merciful until I've been at least just.

Justice is a prerequisite for mercy. Jesus said, if a man compels you to walk one mile with him, go two. Now, the law under the Romans required the Jews to carry a soldier's bags for one mile.

A Jew had no recourse about that. The law required it. If a soldier said, you, carry my bags for a mile, he had the right to that.

And if you carried his bags for a mile, that was justice. You were just giving him what was his right. But he had no right to make you carry it two miles.

And if you did that, you're giving up some of your own rights then. And that's mercy. But you can't carry a second mile until you've carried the first.

You can't be merciful until you've been at least just. You can't be mercifully giving away your rights if you're trampling on someone else's rights at the same time. Justice is step one toward righteousness and love.

Mercy is a step further. And both have to do with the way you think about rights. I will not violate another person's rights.

That's because I'm committed to justice. But I will give up my own because I'm committed to mercy. Okay? Now, when you give up your own, actually you're doing more than just giving up your rights.

You're giving them away. Jesus gave some examples of this in Matthew chapter 5. And I'll read it and then I'll explain what I mean by giving away your rights rather than simply giving them up. I'd like to skip a couple of these examples and go down to Matthew 5, 38.

Jesus said, You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also.

And if anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him too. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you, do not turn away.

You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies. Bless those who curse you.

Do good to those who hate you. And pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. That you may be the sons of your Father in heaven.

For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good. And sends rain on the just and on the unjust. Now, these are examples of mercy.

How so? Well, someone strikes you on one cheek. You have the right under the law to strike them on one cheek. They struck you.

The law says an eye and an eye, two for two, stroke for stroke, stripe for stripe, life for life, burn for burn. That's what the law actually said in the Old Testament. Whatever they do to you, that wrongs you.

You are entitled to do the same back to them. That's justice. You have that right.

But if you don't take that right, you surrender your right. That's mercy. You struck me.

I have the right to strike you, but I'm not going to. In fact, you know what else? I'm not only going to not strike you, I'm going to let you strike me again. Even though you don't have any more right to do that than you did the first time.

I'm going to give you my other cheek. And what that means is, I'm extending to you a right that you did not possess. I'm giving up my own and giving it over to you.

You see, if someone strikes you on one cheek and that was unproven, they didn't have the right to do that. But if you say, go ahead, take this one too, they have the right to then. You've given it to them.

You are giving away your rights. You are surrendering your rights for somebody else. That's what mercy is.

The other examples are the same. He says, if a man wants to take your tunic in a court of law, give him your cloak also. Well, listen, if you owe him the tunic, he may win it in court.

And it is just for you to give him the tunic. But he doesn't have the right to your cloak. Know how I know that? Because if he did, he would have sued you for it.

He's suing you for your tunic, he's not after your cloak. But I've never met anyone who

sued for less than they thought had come in. I've met people who sued for more than what they really legitimately had come in.

I've never known anyone to take someone to court to sue for less than what they had come in. And if they're suing you for your tunic but not for your cloak, it's because they even don't think they deserve your cloak. They don't have any right to that, just your tunic.

But you give them what they have the right to, and you give them what they don't have the right to, your cloak also. You give away your right to your cloak to them. Jesus said, if a man compels you to go one mile, go two.

Same thing. I said that a moment ago. Give to him that asks you.

What happens if someone asks me for my money, and I give it to them? Well, this is money that's mine. I have the right to use this money to buy things I want, for me, to feed myself, to house myself, to enjoy myself. That's my money.

I have the right to use it that way. Don't confound me if I use it that way. But if I give it to him, I'm giving up my right to use that money for those things, and I'm giving him the right to use it for his things.

I'm giving away my right, not just giving it up. I'm giving him a right he didn't possess before, the right to use my money for whatever he wants. All these illustrations Jesus gives are illustrations of what mercy really is.

Justice means I honor other people's rights. Mercy means I'm not necessarily going to honor my own. I'll surrender mine, and by doing so, I'll extend further rights.

So justice and mercy are both the extension of rights to another person. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. You give him his acknowledged innate rights.

That's justice. And you give him additional rights that he didn't have. That's mercy.

Mercy is just the next step past justice. And both are weighty matters of the law as far as Jesus is concerned. Now, mercy, by the way, is something you must do.

If you feel pity for someone, it's no big deal. James said, if a man says he has faith and he has not works, what does it profit? If a brother be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say to him, be warmed and filled, but you don't give them the things needful for the body, what does it profit? James said in James 2. Or as John said in 1 John 3, verse 17, if anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother hath need, and shuts up his bowels, there it is again, of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? Obviously, if you have bowels of compassion, and you see someone need, and you do nothing for them, you shut up the bowels, you don't extend mercy, what have you

done? You haven't extended mercy. You see, mercy, compassion, is something that's supposed to move you.

We read in the scripture more than once that Jesus was moved with compassion. Seeing the multitudes, he was moved with compassion. And so he fed them.

And seeing the people who were sick, he was moved with compassion, and he fed them. We see this, for example, in Matthew 9, verse 36, and again in Matthew 14, verse 14, it says, Jesus was moved with compassion. Notice he had compassion, but he didn't stay there.

It moved him. He didn't just stay stationary as a container of compassion. He didn't contain it.

It motivated him. It moved him. It animated him.

His actions were governed by, sparked by, and animated by his mercy, his compassion for people. And Christians are to be that way. You know, the parable of the good Samaritan tells about a man who was beat up, and two guys passed him up, a priest and a Levite wouldn't help him, and the Samaritan helped him.

He bound him up. He gave him a ride to town. He paid his needs.

He said he'd pay more if it came to that. And when Jesus finished telling the story, he said, who do you think was a neighbor to that man? And the listener said, he who had mercy on him. You see, that's how the word mercy was used in the Bible.

The one who had mercy was the one who did something for him. He didn't just look and say, oh, the poor man. Don't you think the priest and the Levite had pity on him too? I'll bet they did.

I'll bet the priest and the Levite thought, oh, the poor wretch. I'm getting out of here, you know. They had some kind of pity, I would imagine, unless they were just totally inhuman.

How could anyone see a person in that condition and have no compassion? But they weren't moved with compassion. To have mercy on someone is to be moved, to let that compassion activate you into actions. And there's two kinds of manifestations of mercy the Bible talks about.

And that is when you have mercy on somebody who is in need. And that's the examples we've just given. Someone's in need.

You've got something to help them, but you couldn't care less about their need, and you don't do anything for them. That's absence of mercy. So that one manifestation of mercy is by relieving a person's misery, by helping somebody in need.

That's one expression of mercy, and the Bible frequently speaks of it. Another is your reaction to somebody who is guilty of something. And that is you forgive them.

Forgiveness is an act of mercy. Why? Because you have the right to hold a grudge, but you won't. You'll give up that right.

I mean, you might say, well, are you sure, Steve, we have a right to hold a grudge? Didn't God tell us not to? Of course God told us not to. I'm not talking about what God has told us to do. I'm talking about innate rights.

An eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. I mean, when it comes down to basic justice, if somebody does a sin against me, I have the right to do something to them. But if I decide not to, but instead I forgive them, I say, it's all over, I'm not going to hold anything against you.

No grudge here, no penalties. That's forgiveness. That's mercy.

And we extend mercy to others because we want God to extend mercy to us. Jesus said, Blessed are the merciful, they shall obtain mercy. And he said, If you forgive men their trespasses against you, then your Father in heaven will forgive you your trespasses.

But if you do not forgive men their trespasses against you, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses. Forgiveness of those who are guilty and practical measures of relief to those who are in need and in misery, these are the ways that mercy is expressed. If you have compassion, you must let it move you, and it will move you in that direction.

One last point we need to talk about, and that is faith or faithfulness. I will not go into an extensive discussion of why I think it's faithfulness here. The word *pistis* in the Greek can mean faith, like believing, or it can mean faithfulness, like trustworthiness, reliability, integrity.

And different translators have different opinions. For example, the King James Version and the New King James Version translate this as faith, and so do some other translations. Some translations, like the Revised Version and some others, translate it as faithfulness.

Now, the Greek word usually does mean faith, but on occasion it does mean faithfulness. An example of that would be in Titus 2.10, where it says that servants should show all good faith or faithfulness toward their masters. It's not talking about faith as we usually think of it.

It's talking about faithfulness. Titus 2.10 is one of those places. It says fidelity in the King James.

I think the New King James too. Titus 2.10, I believe it is. Good fidelity.

That word fidelity is pistis, faith. But obviously it means faithfulness in that context. Likewise, in Romans 3, and I think it's also in verse 3, Romans 3.3, I think the King James translates pistis, faith, in Romans 3.3, but the New King James, does it go for faithfulness? Yes.

For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Faithfulness is clearly the word that Paul means here, but it's the word pistis, faith. Now, there is some remnant of this in our English language still. When we talk about someone doing something in good faith, it means they did it in honesty.

They did it in integrity, in faithfulness. They weren't doing something bad on purpose. They may have made a mistake, but what they did, they did in good faith.

Good faith really means good fidelity or good integrity or honesty. And when Jesus says the three weightier matters of the law are justice, mercy, and pistis, most translators believe that pistis should be translated faithfulness there, and I'm convinced that it should also. And it connects well with what we've been doing with Matthew 5, because the two remaining examples that Jesus gives are examples that tell of God's concern that we be faithful.

In Matthew 5, verses 31 through 37, Matthew 5, 31 through 37, Jesus says, Furthermore, it has been said, Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce. But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery. Again, you have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.

But I say to you, do not swear at all, neither by heaven, for it is God's throne, nor by earth, for it is his footstool, nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king, nor shall you swear by your own head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. This is before Lady Clare was around. But let your yes be yes, and your no, no, for whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

Now, there are two examples here. Divorce and the taking of oaths. He said, If you divorce your wife for any cause short of immorality on her part, if she has been faithful and you divorce her, then you are committing a grave crime and sin against God.

Why? What are you doing? What is so wrong with what you are doing? You are breaking your promise. That is unfaithful. A faithful person is known by keeping his pledge, keeping his promise, keeping his oaths.

A man of integrity will not be moved from his principles, even when pressed, even when it is inconvenient to keep his promises. It is innately the quality of faithfulness that

causes a person to stand by his promises. Now, many people, when they get married, think they are marrying someone better than they actually are marrying.

And they discover only afterward that what they married was not what they thought they married. This happens all the time. Of course, during courtship, people always put on their best face.

They always put on their most attractive face. You never see a person in the more compromising or unattractive form. Somehow, when you are courting and you are infatuated and so forth, you somehow think that that is the one person in the world that does not ever have an unsightly wart or blemish or bad breath in the morning or whatever.

You have just got this dreamy thing. But once you marry the person, you find, oh, they are just like everyone else. They are not the most perfect person on the planet.

And you did get something a little less than what you thought you were getting in many cases. But you still made a promise. That is what marriage is.

That is the difference between marriage and shacking up. Married people made a promise. People who shacked up do not make any promises.

And the promise is, I will stay with you for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and health, in forsaking all others, keep myself only unto you as long as we both shall live. That is a big promise. And a person who breaks that promise is unfaithful.

And God is offended, deeply, strongly offended by unfaithfulness. Now Jesus specifies whoever divorces his wife except for the cause of sexual immorality does this. Why? Because if the wife commits unfaithfulness first, then the husband giving up the marriage is not him being guilty of unfaithfulness.

She did it. Not him. But if she has not done it, then he is the perpetrator of an unfaithful act.

He is breaking the promise. If she has already broken it, the promise is broken. He is at liberty.

He can divorce her, Jesus implies. But if she has not, then he cannot do that. Why? Because he is breaking a promise.

God does not countenance people breaking promises. Covenant breakers and liars. All liars will have their place in the lake of fire.

It says in Revelation chapter 22. All liars will have their place in the lake burning with fire and medicine. Do not lie.

You say something, you keep your word. That is faithfulness. You pay your bills on time.

You said you would do it. You keep your appointments. You be prompt.

You do what you say you would do. You keep your vows. You stay with your wife or your husband until you die or they do.

Because you said you would. And even if you find it inconvenient or even torturous, you keep your word. Now this idea of keeping your word even if it is torturous is foreign to any modern thinking.

I mean hardly even in the church do you ever hear people feeling obligated to keep their vows even if they are in misery. I mean people are leaving their, in a church in town I am aware of, people have been allowed to leave their wives on the basis, or the wives have been able to leave their husbands on the basis that they were experiencing emotional abuse or whatever that means. Now I do not deny there is such a thing as maybe emotional abuse.

I think Jesus suffered emotional abuse and Paul did and so did I and so does probably everybody. If emotional abuse means someone treats us really bad, makes us feel really bad, hurts our self esteem, now I guess that is emotional abuse. Leaving a husband is not justified in those cases.

In fact nothing justifies leaving a husband or a wife except adultery. Because you promise. And if anything can make you break your promise, then you are, your word is not worth anything.

Jesus said, He that is faithful in that which is least will be faithful in that which is much. Faithfulness runs through the character. You are either faithful all the way or you are not faithful at all.

If you would break your promise to your spouse, why should anyone believe you about anything? I would never extend credit to you. You are an unfaithful person. And that is sin.

But God intends for you to be faithful in all things. And you need to keep track of what you promise and make sure you do it. If you forget, you need to apologize and repent and try to make it right.

Because you are expected to keep your word and not just talk without any intention of keeping it. There are people who do that. They make a lifestyle of it.

But that is not acceptable. That is unfaithful. Likewise, Jesus talks about oaths.

He says, You have heard that if you take an oath, you have to keep it. Jesus said, Hey, just keep your word whether you make an oath or not. Be honest.

Just be faithful. Be the kind of person that if you say yes, everyone knows you mean yes. You don't have to qualify it with all kinds of oaths.

Forget the oaths. Just be honest. Just tell the truth.

Now, I don't think Jesus is forbidding oaths. As some people take Him to say it is a sin to take an oath. I don't think the Bible anywhere teaches that it is a sin to take an oath.

And Paul and Jesus both took oaths after this. Without it being regarded as a sin. And oaths were completely okay in the Old Testament.

And Jesus didn't come and change morality. He just came and expounded on it. It is not a sin to take an oath.

But His point is, don't bother. Why do you need them? You have no reason to resort to oaths if you keep your word all the time. People won't require you to take an oath.

Be a person whose integrity is seamless. Whose faithfulness is beyond question. And then you won't need to try to convince people that you are telling the truth on some occasion by appealing to oaths.

I swear I am telling the truth. Well, why should you have to say that? Unless maybe your integrity is in question. Just be an honest person.

Just be a person of consistent integrity and faithfulness. Why? Because you can't love God and love your neighbor without that. You are supposed to be faithful unto death to God.

You made certain promises to God too. Anyone who falls away from the Lord. In fact, I shouldn't even make it that extreme.

Anyone who disobeys God. Who has at one time earlier said, God, I am going to follow you all the days of my life. If you take one step of not following Him, that is unfaithfulness.

I am not saying you are going to hell for it. I am saying you are wrong though. I think it is a terrible sin.

We are called to be faithful unto death. Keep your vows that you made to the Lord. Keep your vows that you made to your wife.

Keep your word even if you didn't make any vows. Just be honest. Just be the kind of person that breaking your word would be as hard for you as swimming the English Channel.

Because it is against your nature. You are not a fish and you are not a liar. And these

character traits, one thing that is wonderful about them, unlike some of them, is these traits are simply things you choose to do.

Some of the traits like long suffering or gentleness and stuff are traits that some people really have to struggle. Because they have to do with temperament. But to do the just thing, to do the merciful thing, to keep your word, these are not temperament.

These are just bare choices you make. I will or I will not. I will observe that person's rights or I will trample on those rights.

That is a choice I make. I will forgive or I will not forgive. That is a choice I make.

I will keep my word or I will break my word. This doesn't have to do with having the right kind of temperament. Actually, the others don't either.

The Holy Spirit works all these fruits. But a lot of people struggle with some of these things like gentleness and meekness and self-control and long suffering and patience. Because there are temperamental differences.

But I don't think anyone is born with a temperament that requires them to rob or to kill or to gossip. Those are just things you choose to do or you choose not to do. And that is what love is.

Love is these things. Think about it. I can't think of any unloving act I could do or that someone could do to me that does not violate either justice, mercy or faithfulness.

When I have property, I just assume people didn't destroy my property or steal it. If they did, they are doing something unkind to me. That is not loving.

I don't want them to do that to me, so I won't do it to them. If I fail, if I sin, I want people to forgive me. If I am in need, I would like it if someone would be generous to help me.

I would like that. And if I would like that done to me, then I should do the same to others in the same situation. When people have given me reason to trust them and I have inconvenienced myself, I have cancelled all of their appointments to keep my appointment with them and they don't show up, I don't like that very much.

Therefore, I shouldn't do that to anyone else. If I don't like it when it is done to me, I shouldn't do it to them. Every wrong that could ever be done to you, everything you would not want someone to do to you would be a violation of either justice or mercy or faithfulness as near as I can tell.

Therefore, love, which is simply doing to others what you would want done to you, is perfected by consistently walking in the patterns of justice toward your neighbor, mercy toward your neighbor, and faithfulness toward your neighbor. And these three traits, I think, on these things hang all the law and the prophets. Because this is what it means

to love your neighbors yourself.

And they are fruits that the Holy Spirit produces and which we have to cultivate by obedience. Well, there is only one more lecture in this series. Next week, we will be talking about humility and godliness.

And that will cap off a 16-part series. We will be done with it and we will be doing something else after that on Friday night. We are glad that you came if you are new here.

It is a long Bible study you may have discovered. Those who go to school here were not surprised.