

# OpenTheo

## Christ and the Law, Overview (Part 2)



### **The Life and Teachings of Christ** - Steve Gregg

In this overview by Steve Gregg, he explores the topic of Christ and the Law, specifically focusing on two illustrations of divorce and oaths. Gregg argues that it is important to be a person of integrity who keeps their word, regardless of whether additional affirmations or oaths are made. He also emphasizes the importance of showing love to others, even when they do not "deserve" it, and the importance of justice in our relationships. Gregg discusses the phrase "without cause" in relation to adultery and suggests that while it may be a fitting modification, it is unclear whether it belongs in the text.

### **Transcript**

There are people who you find likeable. I think the word likeable is a very good word. There are some persons who are able to be liked.

Not all persons are likeable. But all are lovable, if love is used in the biblical sense of the word. I cannot make myself feel warm, mushy feelings about everybody that comes to mind.

But I can make myself committed to doing for them, out of real concern for their happiness, and out of real concern for their well-being, doing what I would want them to do to me. And that is what love is measured in. Behavior, relational commitments, and patterns.

Now, the more of the emotional side there is to it, the better. Especially in terms of being in love. Of course, then you have not only, ideally, you have the love, what the Bible calls love, but you also have the like.

You also enjoy the person. You find them attractive and enjoyable to be with. It always makes it a lot nicer.

Because you're going to be with them whether you like them or not. It's always nicer if you like them. You're going to live with them.

But the fact is, we need to understand that love boils down to certain relational

commitments and patterns. And they, I believe, can be distilled into these three categories. Justice, and mercy, and faithfulness.

I don't know if there are any others. But Jesus said that justice, and mercy, and faithfulness are the weightier matters of the law, and they are so because they are what love is. They are what love amounts to.

What it distills down into. Now, getting back to Matthew 5. I mentioned that these six illustrative sections, all of them in their own way, are trying to tell us that love is what matters to God. And to illustrate that in various practical scenarios.

I'd like to be more specific. I believe some of them specifically are trying to illustrate what justice is, what mercy is, and what faithfulness is. These three things that really are what love is.

I think that some focus on one and some on another of these aspects of love. That's very clear in some of the cases. For example, in the matter of divorce and oaths.

Verses 31 through 37. Those two illustrations there. Verse 31 says, It has been said, whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.

But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery. Why? Because you're breaking your promise to her. You promised you wouldn't divorce her.

You promised that forsaking all others, you'd cleave only unto her. You promised that you'd stay with her for better and for worse. If you don't do that, you're unfaithful.

You're breaking your promise. You're not as good as your word. That is not loving.

To verbally commit to something and give people grounds to expect it of you, even in many cases to make sacrifices of their own freedoms and comforts, based upon your promise, and then you never meant to keep it. Or maybe you meant to, but you decide against it. Because you are not a faithful person.

Divorce is an act of unfaithfulness. Which is why Jesus said, even though the law allowed it in some cases, which it didn't specify the details of what cases, but the law did allow divorce, and it did require that a man do right by his wife if he divorced her, that he didn't just kind of put her on the street, but he gave her official writing of divorce, which would enable her to remarry. So it was very clear that she was not just a disenfranchised wife, that she was no longer a wife and free to remarry.

He had to do right by her that way. But Jesus says, you've got to go further than that. Real faithfulness would forbid you to even divorce her at all.

Except, of course, in the case of her being unfaithful herself. If she committed

fornication, that's another story, because then she's the one who's unfaithful, not you, in breaking off the marriage vows. But essentially, divorce for any cause other than fornication is an act of breaking a vow and being unfaithful to a covenant.

And being unfaithful is not love. It's very unloving. Furthermore, it says in verse 33, again, you've heard, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.

But I say, listen, just keep your word. Just be honest. Just say yes and mean it.

And say no and mean it. When you say yes or no, you shouldn't need to affix additional affirmations and vows and oaths and so forth in order to bind you to your word. You should be essentially faithful enough that if you said no, you mean no.

And you're going to live that no out. You're going to commit yourself and you're going to keep your commitment. And it won't take an oath to keep you honest.

Your word is honest enough because you're honest. Because you're faithful. That's in your character.

Because you don't want to let someone down because you love them. When people make promises to you, you don't want them to break their promises. And you're going to do to others as you have done to them because that's what love is.

You're going to be faithful and do what you said. Divorce and oaths, the teaching of Jesus on this, we're going to look at it more in detail, of course, in a later session. But what I want to say in general about it is that that is talking about what God's concerned about here is not just whether you give your wife a right of divorcement.

It's not just whether you use the right oath that was appropriately binding and kept it. It's whether you're honest altogether. Whether you're a person who can be counted on to keep your word.

Whether you're a faithful person, in other words, or an unfaithful person. That's what love is in these kinds of situations. It calls you to be faithful.

That's part of being loving. Now, also, in verses 38 through 48, it seems obvious, if you think about it, that he's talking about mercy there. Another of the weightier matters of the law.

Faithfulness and mercy and justice are the three. Mercy is very clearly what he's talking about when in verse 38 it says, you've heard it was said an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. That's vengeance.

That's just, but it's vengeance. And it's not being merciful. I say, if the guy hits you, don't take your option, which is to hit him back, but forgive him.

Absorb the injury. Extend mercy rather than justice to him. And the same is true if the guy wants to sue you and take your cloak, or if a person makes you go a mile, or someone who's begging for money.

In no case are you obliged to go beyond what the law requires you to do, but I'm suggesting you do so out of mercy to them. Go beyond what the law requires. Go beyond what the rules say.

And just be overabundantly and overflowingly merciful toward people. And he also is making that point in verse 43, and Paul says, you've heard you should love your neighbor and hate your enemy. Well, loving your neighbor is only appropriate.

If he's a good neighbor, if you love those who love you, big deal. They deserve it. But if you love your enemies, they don't deserve it, but you do it anyway.

That's mercy. Don't just love the people who deserve to be loved. Don't just salute those who salute you and love those who love you.

Love those who don't love you. Salute those who don't salute you. Bless those who curse you.

Love your enemies. That's mercy. That's giving them what they don't deserve.

Everybody can love those who love them. That's just plain, you know, you scratch my back, I'll scratch your back. That's just repayment of a debt, as it were.

But when what you owe a person is retaliation, because they're hating you and doing wrong by you, but what you give them is kindness and blessing, that's mercy. He is illustrating in these last two illustrations that love calls us to be merciful as well as faithful. Now you might wonder why I saved the first two for last to discuss.

You can probably deduce that I'm going to say that the first two illustrations Jesus gives are about justice, since that's the last of the weightier matters to identify here. And I believe this is the case. Though I think it's not as clear in the portion about adultery as it is in the portion about murder.

See, I consider that the teaching about adultery in verses 27 through 30 is sort of marginal. It could be about justice, but it could also be about faithfulness. Because he goes on to talk about faithfulness in marriage and divorce.

You know, you actually end up committing adultery if you divorce your wife for any cause other than fornication. It may be linked with the later teaching about divorce, but like I say, it's marginal. There's a sense in which the adultery issue falls into two categories, that of justice and that of faithfulness.

If you cheat on your wife, that's unfaithfulness. But it's also, if you sleep with your

neighbor's wife, that's an act of injustice. Now, injustice, as I think I've told you on previous occasions, injustice is simply violating somebody's rights.

If you do something to someone, but it violates no right of theirs, you've not done any injustice. You might not have done the loving thing, but you've done no injustice. Justice is defined as making sure that people get what's theirs, and that you don't violate what's theirs.

Whether it's their right to life, their right to their property, their right to the sanctity of their marriage, their right to their good name. You may get tired of hearing me say this because I've said this on many occasions, but that's what those later laws in the Decalogue are about. Honor your father and mother.

Why? They've got a right to it. You owe them. Don't murder.

Why? Because a man has a right to his life, unless he has forfeited his right, in which case capital punishment is the recourse of governments to execute a man, and that too is justice because he has forfeited his right to live. But murder is different than capital punishment. Murder is killing someone who's done nothing to forfeit his right to live.

Therefore it's a violation of his right to his life. Thou shalt not commit adultery. It's a violation of a man's right to have his wife to himself, and not share her with others.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7 that a woman doesn't have a right over her own body, but her husband has that right, and a husband doesn't have a right to his own body, but his wife has that right. Husbands and wives have exclusive rights to each other's bodies. Adultery violates the right of the spouse, of the person that you're committing adultery with.

You shall not steal is based upon the assumption that people have rights to property. Some people have more rights to that property than others. The person who earned the money, the person who came by it lawfully, that person has the right to spend it and dispose of it as he sees fit under God.

If you didn't earn it, you don't have as much right to it. If you go into someone's house and take money that's theirs, it's wrong, it's stealing. Why? Because you don't have the right to it, and they do have the right to that money.

That's a violation of their property rights. To bear false witness against your neighbor is a violation of his rights. Because the fact that it's a false witness and a negative one, means that he doesn't deserve to be talked about that way.

The witness isn't true against him. He's lived on or bullied, but you're talking about him as if he hasn't. He's got a right to a good reputation based on his actual conduct.

But you're depriving him of that right by perverting his reputation by false rumors and slanders and false reports against him. That's why it's wrong to bear false witness against your neighbor. It's a violation of his right to his reputation that he's earned by his conduct.

Now, I'm not speaking humanistically here. I'm just speaking in terms of the principles of justice that the law embodies. Now, when Jesus gives these two examples about murder and adultery, these happen to be the only two examples in the whole list of six that he gives from the Ten Commandments.

The part about giving a writing of divorcement, keeping your oaths, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, love your neighbor, none of those are found in the Ten Commandments. But, you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, those are in the Ten Commandments. So, the first two examples Jesus gives are right from the Decalogue.

And from that portion of the Decalogue, which, as I've been saying, shows God's concern about justice. About the upholding of your neighbor's rights rather than the violation of them. Now, in the case of murder, murder is a violation of a man's right to his life, and adultery is a violation of a man's right to his wife.

And, both of them are therefore violations of rights and injustices. They are unfair, they're a violation of the principle of justice, and therefore they're unloving. Nobody that I know has ever wanted anyone to treat them unjustly.

If you earn money and someone doesn't pay you what they owe, you're upset about that. And, justly so. Because you justly deserve something and didn't get it.

Your rights have been violated. Justice has been violated. And you don't like it, therefore you shouldn't do that kind of thing to other people either.

You must do justly if you're going to love your neighbors yourself. Now, how do I know that justice is involved as God, as Jesus' principle focus in these first two illustrations? Well, let me just say it's not at all that clear in the second one about adultery. The issues he raises are not as clearly issues of justice.

And it's rather an extrapolation from my assumptions about the structure of the passage that would include it with the first illustration about murder and say they're both about justice. But it is very clear in the first one. Clear to me anyway.

He says in verse 22, But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. Now, if you're not reading the New King James or the King James, the expression without a cause will be omitted. The NIV, the New American Standard and most new translations do not have it because the Alexandrian text omits that particular phrase, without a cause.

It would simply say in a modern translation that uses the Alexandrian text, whoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment. Now, of course, we do not know for sure whether the Alexandrian text or the Textus Receptus, which is followed by the King James and the New King James, is more accurate because we don't have the original documents and there are people who advocate one and people who advocate the other. There seem to be scholars on both sides of the debate and I don't know that we'll ever solve it.

On this particular case, however, I am inclined to go with the Textus Receptus, that is the King James and the New King James, in including this expression without a cause for two reasons. One is that if you omit it, you make an absurd statement in light of what is taught elsewhere in Scripture. If Jesus is simply saying whoever is angry at his brother is in danger of the judgment.

He's making all anger evil and subject to God's wrath. Yet Jesus himself had flashes of anger that are mentioned in Scripture and Paul himself in Ephesians 4 said, be angry and do not sin. Which, notwithstanding the ambiguity of what he means by that, makes at least one thing clear, is that it's possible to have some forms of anger without sinning.

Not every kind of anger is sin. Else it would make no sense to say be angry but don't sin. That Jesus could experience anger, and we would have to say justifiably, because Jesus never sinned, and that Paul could make actually a distinction between some forms of anger and sin, makes it clear that for Jesus to just say anyone who's angry is in danger of the judgment, that makes Jesus himself in danger of the judgment when he got angry.

And therefore the expression without a cause seems to be a fitting modification, and of course it exists in many of the manuscripts, though not all. Another reason that I believe it's a legitimate clause to include is because of what I understand to be the whole drift of the passage. If I'm correct in my suggestion that Jesus here is trying to illustrate that God isn't only concerned about the act of murder, but all injustice.

Murder is an extreme act of injustice, but there are other injustices too, including just being angry at your brother without cause. That makes sense. Being angry with your brother when there is a cause, it might not be the highest road to take, but it's not an injustice.

If a person does something wrong that invites your anger, and you are angry, that is not an injustice in itself. I would suggest to you in such a case, mercy is a better route than justice. I mean, if a person does something to invite your anger, you don't have to get angry.

You can, in fact, forgive. You can show mercy. You can turn the other cheek.

But the point is while there may be something better to do than get angry, it's not

always an injustice to get angry. And if justice and injustice are the issue in this passage, and I'm going to try to demonstrate further than I have already that that is what's at issue here, then to say whoever is angry at his brother without a cause is the right way of expressing the point that Jesus is trying to get across. Namely, that it's not every case of anger.

Not every instance of anger is an injustice, but it certainly is an injustice if your brother has done nothing deliberately to irritate you, but you get angry at him. It's causeless. It's not because of anything he's done.

It's just because of your own ill temper. Just because you're having a bad day and you're getting mad at everybody. And, you know, he says an innocuous, harmless statement, and you end up flying off the handle.

That's anger without a cause, and that's not right. You make him feel bad, you treat him badly and so forth, and he didn't deserve it. That's an injustice on your part.

Just like killing a man who has done nothing to deserve it is an injustice. Killing a man who deserves to die is not an injustice, and that is why capital punishment can be mandated in the same law that said you should not murder. Because murder is taking a life unjustly.

Capital punishment is taking a life justly. Because the person whose life is taken in that case has forfeited his right to live. So the issue I think in this matter that Jesus is discussing is it's not just extreme forms of injustice like murder and adultery, but even other, any form of injustice, even as slight as just getting angry at somebody who's done nothing to rightly provoke your anger.

Just being ill tempered towards somebody and flying off the handle and ruining their day when they had done nothing to deserve that. That's not really right. That's not just to treat your brother that way if it was without a cause.

If he caused it, that's another story. And that's why I would say that in the question over the text of this and whether that phrase belongs there or not, I don't know whether it was originally part of what Jesus said, but it must be a modification that is implied either stated or not stated. It is, it must clearly be part of what is implied in what he's saying is that unjust anger unprovoked anger anger without a cause is what puts a person in the same class as a murderer in that both of them are doing something unrighteous unjust to his neighbor and therefore similar judgments need.

Now we'll talk more in detail about what he said there and try to sort out some of the difficulties of the rock and fool stuff he says there, but I'm just trying to illustrate that what Jesus is trying to expand on here is the issue of justice look at verse 23 and 24. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has



something against you now how does somebody come to have something against you? Only if you've wronged them. Now conceivably some people might have something against you if you haven't wronged them, but that's seldom the case and I mean that would be an extreme exception.

Certainly the case that's more normative is you remember somebody you've wronged and they're holding it against you it has not ever been squared away between you and them it's a continuing rift in the relationship he says leave your gift at the altar, in such a case as that and go your way and first be reconciled to your brother. Now if your brother has something against you it's because he perceives you as having wronged him you owe him there's some unsettled score there between you and him making reconciliation is going to mean that you do whatever is right in his eyes if you've robbed him you're going to have to pay him restitution if you've done something that you can't make restitution for you're going to have to humble yourself and do what's just and right and repent or whatever has to be done but you're going to have to get that that injustice that wrong that you've done to your brother you've got to get that squared away before God will listen to your prayers and then he says in verse 25 and 26 agree with your adversary quickly while you're on the way with him lest your adversary deliver you to the judge. Now why should that be a problem unless you've done something unlawful or unjust a judge is not a terror to people who are doing the right thing.

The assumption here is that if you have done something against your brother and he's holding it against you, you better go make it right quick because if you don't, you know what, he may take you to court about it. Now the assumption in all of this is that you're vulnerable you've done something sufficiently unjust to make you vulnerable to litigation to court action if that assumption was not underlying this there would be no sense in even making these statements agree with your adversary quickly meaning what he was saying earlier, go reconcile with the one that has something against you lest your adversary deliver you to the judge and the judge hands you over to the officer obviously finding you guilty and you'll be thrown into prison assuredly I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you've paid the last penny now I've heard some people including Catholic apologist Scott Hahn use this scripture in favor of purgatory because he says assuredly you're not going to get out of there till you've paid your last penny as if this is talking about eternal judgment you know, you're going to be turned over to the judge that's God and God's going to turn you over to the guy who's going to throw you in jail that's purgatory and you're going to stay there until you've paid your debt there which is getting prayed out of purgatory or whatever now that over spiritualizes what Jesus is saying Jesus isn't talking about eternal judgment here he's talking about relationships between you and your brother he's talking about real court and real jail and real judges and real policemen and real crimes and if you have violated your neighbor's right and you have not gone and made it right if you've done an injustice that he still holds against you you are vulnerable to it may be depending on the nature of the

injustice you may be vulnerable to court action and if you suffer for your injustice if you get thrown in jail because you didn't make this right and he took you to court and you get thrown in jail don't expect God to spring you don't think God's going to send an angel and make the shackles fall off and open the prison door so you can walk out because you're a Christian and you're in there because you deserve it you're going to be in there until you've made it right until you've paid the last penny you owe in other words he's saying God is going to hold you to the standard of justice that the courts themselves would hold you to what God's looking for is people who are committed to justice now you might not be so unjust as to take a man's life you might not be a murderer but there may be many areas of infraction of other people's rights that you tolerate that you allow yourself if it's even just having an irritated attitude towards somebody who really doesn't deserve that kind of reaction from you or if it's having done anything that is legally a violation of somebody's rights you better get that right, God cares about that just like he cares about murder these things are lesser things that aren't maybe delineated in the law of Moses but they are implied not because they are murder in themselves but because they have something in common with murder and the thing they have in common with it is the very thing that makes murder objectionable namely the injustice of it but there are lesser forms of injustice that are just as much injustice and God doesn't like injustice whether it's in major manifestations like murder and adultery or in lesser manifestations like wanting to commit adultery using your wife your neighbor's wife as a visual stimulator, maybe not physically doing anything with her but using your wife's your neighbor's wife's body visually for gratification which only he should be permitted to do he has a right not only to his wife having people keep their hands off his wife but their eyes off her too that's what Jesus is implying so the idea here is the law was holy and righteous and good and just and spiritual Jesus didn't come to trash it he came to fulfill it and the fulfillment of it is simply catching the fullness of it he that loves fulfills the law and therefore what he's trying to expound on here is not just trying to give us another list of do's and don'ts as if we needed more rules the law had plenty of them and if we just lived by those it would be good enough if people would just do all the things the law of Moses said we wouldn't need any of these, in fact most of the things Jesus said are found in the law anyway things about looking at a woman to lust, you find that back in Job Job said I've made a covenant with my eyes why should I look at a maid talks about loving your enemies and forgiving people who do you wrong, you find all those things modeled and taught in the Old Testament Jesus wasn't bringing a new law a new legalism, a new set of rules he was bringing out what God's heart is in the law and while the law of Moses as a system of legal code is not any more binding on people yet the things that God has always cared about are still the things that God cares about and those who wish to be disciples of Christ will concern themselves with the things that God cares about, namely being consistently loving consistently doing to others as you'd have them do to you and to make it more explicit more down to earth, that means being just being merciful, being faithful in your dealings with people, that's what love is and that's what all the laws were aimed at and concerned themselves with, doing the right thing in

terms of justice and mercy and faithfulness towards your neighbor and so Jesus I think unpacks those thoughts if I read correctly, giving two illustrations for each concept, two on justice, two on faithfulness two on mercy, all together making six, which means that in the next three sessions we'll look at one of these segments in each session and look a little more in detail at the specific things Jesus said okay we'll stop there