

OpenTheo

Missionary Discourse (Part 4)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg discusses the topic of heaven and hell and how it relates to Christian beliefs. He explains that as Christians, we are disciplined to believe that death leads to glorification and that God is not someone who punishes and destroys souls. Instead, He values each one of us, even sparrows that are deemed worthless by humans. Gregg also delves into the topic of family division and how it pertains to Jesus' teachings of bringing the sword and causing divisions, but notes that it is not about war, and rather touches on the idea of polarization within society.

Transcript

...into heaven. And he says, we who have this, along with this comes a longing to go there, and a tendency to groan in this body. Now, you might say, boy, this almost makes it sound like the Christian life is a life of unrelieved grief and sorrow and pain and so forth.

Well, Paul, his life wasn't that way. When he writes to the Philippians, he writes about how much joy he has in the memory of them and in their presence and so forth, and what a joy they are to him. And, you know, we can see that Paul was a man who knew a great deal of enjoyment of godly people and of Jesus himself in this life.

But the fact of the matter is, once we realize what it is we're called to, to be in the immediate presence of Jesus Christ, unless we realize... See, we don't see him now. It says in 1 Peter 1, whom having not seen, you love. And that's to be normative.

We're supposed to love him even though we haven't seen him. The problem is, it's easier to love the world in one sense, because we see it, because it holds out its allure and its pleasures to us, and it's easier to see and believe in the pleasures of this world. Heaven is kind of an abstract thing, unless, of course, the Spirit of God, which Paul makes reference to in these passages, has come to reside in you and to create in you a homesickness for our heaven.

Which, you know, we groan in this tabernacle. We groan while we're here. It doesn't mean that our whole life is unbroken grief, although there is a burden that we bear every

day of our lives.

We know that as long as we're in this tabernacle, A, we're not totally free from sin. B, we are not totally exempt from sufferings, including some very terrible sufferings that may not have yet happened but could at any time. We could suffer any kind of loss.

I mean, in this world, anything is possible along those lines. And C, as long as we're in this world, history has not reached its culmination, and God's purposes are as yet unfulfilled, and therefore we cannot be fully satisfied until his purposes, at least for our life, are fulfilled. In this world, we groan.

When we die, however, we know that we've run our race. We've finished our course. It's time to go collect the gold medal and rest in the stands until the rest of the runners have made it to the end.

And, you know, that's what every runner runs for, for the finish line, not just for the joy of the race. Now, I realize that some runners get a high when they run. Maybe some of them do run just because they love to run.

But really, in the Olympic Games or in any kind of competition, the runner's out there not just because he gets a rush from running. He runs because he wants to win. He wants to finish.

And he'll persevere even when he hits the wall and when it seems like he can't take another step, he perseveres. He's not enjoying one step of the remainder of that race, but he keeps up because there's a finish line that he's after. And he looks forward to being able to stop running.

He looks forward to being able to relax and say, I finished the race. And that's supposedly what Christians think like. I say supposedly.

It's really truly what Christians think like. It's just not what everybody thinks like who calls themselves a Christian. This is normative Christian thinking.

Now, from the way I make my qualifying remarks, you might think that I don't believe that people can possibly be Christians, real Christians, who don't think this way. I don't want to say that. There are many Christians who simply have never been disciplined.

There are Christians who have been drawn into lukewarmness or lulled to sleep. They still are committed to Jesus, but their standards have been greatly lowered as far as their expectations, even of what God expects or wants, because of a corrupted form of Christianity that's taught widely in the popular sector. And those who are teachers have a stricter judgment, James said.

There are many teachers who are going to have much to fear in terms of the day of

judgment, because the standard is being greatly lowered from that which Jesus said by the public preaching of the word, by the ministers to a large extent. Not all ministers, of course, but to a large extent. And it is because of this that there is a low standard of holiness, a low level of commitment in the church.

In fact, so much so that I think the average Christian in the average evangelical church believes that there's two kinds of Christianity, the kind that they live, and the kind that the radical on-fire people live, and that both are Christianity, and one is a special calling. A few are maybe called to be radicals, and the rest of us are just called to be believers, and we're all going to be in heaven. But you heard that.

I think that's kind of the either spoken or unspoken assumption of the majority of pew warmers today, is that, well, you know, you're saved just by faith. Now, these other people who are really committed and going out on the mission field and forsaking all, I don't understand those people, but I guess that must be some kind of a special calling that a few people maybe have. And if that attitude goes uncorrected in the church, whoever is talking to them on Sunday morning is going to have something to answer for on the day of judgment, because they have a stricter judgment.

It's inevitable that some Christians will get wrong ideas, but that's what the pulpit ministry is there to correct. The pulpit ministry is supposed to discern when those wrong ideas are present and preach the truth and correct them. Unfortunately, I think a lot of pulpit ministry is simply enforcing those wrong ideas.

Whenever you find people who are afraid to die, you know that you're looking at either someone who is not a Christian, or if they are a Christian, they're not thinking like a Christian. From earliest age, and some people might think this is morbid, but we don't have a morbid approach to it at all. We've taught our children about death, and we've taught them that death is nothing to be feared, and it's certainly nothing to compromise to avoid.

That for the Christian, death is glorification. Death is going to be with Jesus. Death is the end of all sorrow and all pain and all suffering and ushering into eternal joy and bliss and fulfillment and glory.

And as near as I can tell, of course none of my children have seen themselves as imminently facing death yet, but as near as I can tell, they don't have a morbid idea about death at all. And I think that since all of life is but a preparation for death, the parent or the pastor is remiss who doesn't spend a great deal of his emphasis preparing those under him to embrace it. Not in a morbid fashion.

Again, when people hear that I talk to my kids about death a lot, they might say, boy, what a morbid thing. I don't think of it as a morbid thing. I think of it as a glorious thing.

This life is probation, and death is graduation, or it's release. It's the glorious liberty of the children of God. And so Jesus says, don't fear death.

Don't fear those who can kill a body. Now, he doesn't say that you shouldn't have fear of anything. In verse 28, Matthew 10, 28 says, but fear him who is able to destroy both the soul and the body in hell.

Now, in the New King James, him is capitalized, which shows that the translators believe that he is God. I agree with them. There are some interpreters who think that him who can destroy the soul is a reference to the devil.

I don't know why they would see this, but there are some commentaries that feel like that's what Jesus is saying. Fear the devil, because he, unlike people who can just kill the body, the devil can kill the soul too. In my opinion, the devil can't kill your soul any more than people can.

The devil can tempt you to sin, so can people. But the devil can't make you sin any more than people can. The only one who has power over the soul ultimately is you and God, basically.

You have something to say about the fate of your soul, and God is the one who holds all the cards as far as that goes. He is the one who dishes out the retribution or the reward for the things you make decisions about in your soul. But the devil doesn't have any control over your soul.

He is like evil people. He can influence you. He can suggest to you.

He can tempt you. But he can't control you. It is not the devil who can destroy your soul in hell.

The devil is going to have his own problems in hell. He is not going to be running around with a pitchfork trying to destroy your soul down there if you are there. His own soul is going to be in a heap of trouble.

So it is talking about God. Fear God. And of course that is agreeable with the Old Testament emphasis throughout that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

And by the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil, it says in Proverbs. There are many Proverbs and Psalms and places in the prophets and even in the historical literature of the Old Testament that encourage the fear of God. Some people think that the fear of God is an Old Testament idea.

Like God in the Old Testament, He is a big meanie. And you read about God in the Old Testament, of course you would fear Him. But when you read about Jesus, gentle Jesus, meek and mild, He would never hurt a fly.

And therefore we must be dealing with a different God here. And to fear Him would seem really inappropriate. However, people who think that way obviously have not read the Bible.

Or if they have, they haven't read them with their eyes open. Because God and Jesus aren't any different from each other. And I don't care which characteristic of God you want to identify from the Old Testament, you'll find it in Jesus too.

The same characteristic in the same measure. It's true that grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. But I understand that to mean that Jesus brought greater insight into the truth than had been given prior to His coming.

And that He opened the floodgates of grace by His death and resurrection. He was able to give man more ready access to the grace of God. But He didn't change God's character in terms of grace.

He didn't make God a more gracious God than He was previously. He removed the obstacles. He released the grace of God to man through His atoning work.

But He didn't change anything about God. The God of the Old Testament was to be feared because He was a holy God who hates sin and punishes evil. The God in the New Testament is the same God and is to be feared for the same reason.

He still can kill the body and destroy the soul in hell. Now you might wonder about the expression destroy the soul. Don't we have an immortal soul? Well, I think we do.

But there's a lot of different views on that. The standard view is that we do have an immortal soul. And destroy there doesn't mean to obliterate.

But just it's more in the sense of ruin. The word destroy can mean ruin as opposed to annihilate, for example. But people like the general witnesses who don't believe that you have an immortal soul, they would point to a passage like this.

They say the soul isn't immortal, it can be destroyed. But they're taking destroy to mean annihilated. But it doesn't necessarily have to mean that.

If you look at 2 Thessalonians, pretty soon I'm going to have to get to today's material. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, in verse 9, it says, These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power. Now, when Jesus comes back, this is the context, those who, as verse 8 says, do not obey the gospel and don't know God, they will be punished with everlasting destruction.

Now again, this is a verse that is thought sometimes to mean, well, there's no eternal torment. They're just destroyed. Eternally destroyed.

And there are, by the way, not only Jehovah's Witnesses, but also Seventh-day

Adventists, and even a number of evangelicals of more mainline denominations have felt that instead of eternal torment in hell, the Bible teaches destruction. Maybe a period of torment, followed by annihilation, or maybe instant annihilation. There are different views on this than some have held.

I personally feel that eternal torment is taught in the Bible, and therefore I'm not a follower of these other views. But those who hold to an annihilation view of judgment would point out that this verse says, these are punished with everlasting destruction. Well, but then it says, from the presence of the Lord.

Now, if annihilation is what is in view here, the expression, from the presence of the Lord, seems to be redundant. I mean, totally unnecessary. It sounds like what he's saying is they are going to be removed permanently from the presence of the Lord.

Not necessarily through annihilation. They will experience eternal ruin. And again, the word destroy or destruction can refer to ruin.

When we say that a city is destroyed by an earthquake, it doesn't mean that it doesn't necessarily exist anymore. But it's totally ruined. These people will experience eternal ruin, in that they are deprived of the presence of God.

All blessing and all joy and whatever else is now currently enjoyed, even by sinners, by God causing His Son to rise on the evil and the good, and the rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous. I mean, even unbelievers who hate God experience some of His mercies now. No one has yet experienced what it's like to be fully absent from God.

Christians are always trying to press in closer to God. Heathens are often trying to get as far away as they can. But no matter what point on the spectrum you are, no one has gotten fully away from the presence of the Lord.

Remember what David said in Psalm 137, was it? Or was it there somewhere else? He said that, where can I go to escape your presence? If I ascend into heaven, you're there. If I make my bed in hell, lo, you're there. If I take the wings of the morning and fly to the outermost islands of the sea, even there, your hand will guide me, you're there.

You can't really get away from the presence of the Lord, and that's just as well, even for the heathen. Jonah tried to flee from the presence of the Lord, we're told. It didn't work.

But the thing is, that's because you can't get anywhere where he isn't, except the lake of fire. And if the lake of fire has no other torments than this, it is the eternal separation, ultimate and total separation, from the presence of the Lord. And remember what it says about the presence of the Lord in the Old Testament.

In Psalm 16 it says, In your presence is fullness of joy, and at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. A lot of people think that the devil is the broker of pleasures, and

that God is the one who wants to deny people of pleasures. The fact is, the devil doesn't want to give anyone pleasure.

Pleasure is a good thing. God is the one who created pleasure in the Garden of Eden before the fall. He created the ability to enjoy beauty, good food, sex, whatever.

Whatever things are pleasurable to us, God invented pleasure, and the capacity to enjoy pleasure. The devil exploits pleasure to get us to do sinful things, because how else would he get us to do them? He makes sin, or advertises sin as pleasurable, not because the devil has the corner on the market in pleasure. Far from it.

The devil would love to get you to sin without giving you any pleasure in the deal, but you probably wouldn't take the bait. And you wouldn't take the hook without bait. Pleasure is the hook, is the bait.

If the devil could catch you without bait, he'd be glad to. But he is not the one who's got, you know, the patent on pleasure. God is the one in whose presence are pleasures forevermore.

And no one, as I say, has ever been totally absent from the presence of the Lord in this life. But ultimate destruction of the soul is not annihilation, but banishment from the presence of the Lord, and therefore from everything pleasurable. Because all pleasure really comes from God.

And even the unbeliever who doesn't acknowledge God one day of his life, he still enjoys good food, he enjoys friendships, he enjoys good weather, he enjoys certain things, there are certain pleasures in his life. The most miserable person has some compensations of some kinds of pleasures in their life. The judgment of God, ultimate in the lake of fire, is, if nothing else, the banishment from all pleasure of any kind.

And because it's a banishment from the presence of the Lord, and in the presence of the Lord there is pleasure. So this is what I think is destroying the soul. It's not annihilation of the soul, but it's the soul's ruin.

He says, fear God, because he can kill your body too. You know, some people would say, well, I don't want to lose my life, so I'll please men instead of God. They fear him who can kill only the body.

They forget, however, God can kill the body also. But he can also do more. It's not as if the devil can kill your body and God can only kill your soul.

God can kill your body too. And when we read in 1 Corinthians 11, that for this cause many are sick and weak among you, and some have even died because of abuse at the Lord's table, he goes on to say this is the chastening of the Lord. The Lord sometimes kills people too.

Now, the word of faith people don't believe that, but the Bible says that. The Lord gives life and he takes it away. He can kill the body.

But far more terrifying, he can kill the soul of those, or he can destroy or ruin the souls of those who do not obey him and do not obey the gospel as it says in 2 Thessalonians we just looked at. Now, again, in this passage Jesus is talking to the disciples about their need not to be intimidated by men. And he says in verse 29, Matthew 10, 29, Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will.

But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows. Now, what does this tell us about self-worth? Some people who say we should have a high self-esteem point out, well, Jesus said we're of great value.

Of more value than many sparrows. Well, how many would it take to be of great value since you can get two for a penny in the marketplace? Sparrows aren't worth much. If you were worth a buck, you'd be worth more than many sparrows.

Jesus said you can get two sparrows for a penny. In fact, they were so worthless. They were such a cheap commodity that in the parallel passage to this in Luke 12, 6, instead of saying are not two sparrows sold for a penny or a copper coin, Luke 12, 6 has it this way.

Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? Five for two cents. Now, that apparently reflects the going market rate for sparrows. You get two for a penny or five for two cents.

Now, if you get two for a penny of any item, you usually expect to get only four for two cents. When you can get five for two cents, it means that one is thrown in in the deal just to encourage you to buy more. Buy four and we'll throw in one for free.

And that fifth sparrow is, I mean, as far as the person selling it is, because we always treat it as if it has no value at all. We just throw this in as an incentive to buy the first four. Now, when Jesus says that, it tells us that sparrows were so worthless that a seller would just throw in an extra one as if it wasn't worth anything to him if he just would buy so many as four for two pennies.

Now, in that context, Jesus says, yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Not even that fifth sparrow that's treated by man as having no value whatsoever. That which man treats as valueless, God doesn't treat as valueless.

Even the sparrows that are so worthless in the eyes of man, God still values them and how much more than you. Now, God values sparrows, but that doesn't keep them from falling to the ground. God values them, but that doesn't mean they live forever.

In verse 29 it says, two sparrows are sold for a copper coin, but not one of them falls to the ground apart from your father's will, but in your father's will they do. Sparrows do die. We've all seen dead sparrows, so we know.

What Jesus tells us is that any sparrow you see that's dead didn't die without your father's will. And if that's true of sparrows, that is to say, if God doesn't even leave sparrows to fate to determine when they live or die, how much less will he leave you, who's worth more than many sparrows, to fate as to the question of whether you live or die. If a sparrow cannot even die, except it be the will of God for it to happen, how much less could you die apart from it being the will of God for it to happen? That's what he's saying.

Even the hairs of your head are numbered, which is to say, even apart from the issue of dying, any calamity, the loss of a single hair doesn't go unnoticed. Now, for some people the loss of a single hair is much more costly than others, much more of a calamity. But the fact of the matter is that God is keeping track of every detail of your life.

The slightest loss does not escape his notice, and how much less death, something as major as death. Now, this is all in the context of saying don't be afraid of those who kill you. People may in fact seem to have the power to kill you.

But you can't die unless God wants you to. Therefore, you needn't fear them. That's what he says in verse 26.

Therefore, don't fear them. It may seem that they have the power to kill the body. Now, on the one hand, that itself shouldn't be too scary because they can do no more than that.

And the soul they have no power over. But even if they could do more than that, they can't do even that much without the will of the Father. Not even a sparrow dies apart from his will.

How much less are you going to? Now, verse 32, Therefore, whoever confesses me before men, and this is in the context of opposition, you know, confessing Jesus before men may not be hard to do in a testimony meeting where there's a bunch of Christians present, but in the context of people who want to kill your body. And the only way you could avoid them doing so is by denying Jesus. And there have been many Christians from the first century on to the present time who are in exactly that situation.

They can either confess Christ and die or deny Christ and live. That's the choice that's put to them. And who knows, maybe that'll happen in the lands that we live in.

Or maybe we'll someday live as missionaries in lands where that's already happening. You know, there's no guarantees that the rest of our life will have the luxury of being able to confess Christ and live. Because many Christians at this present time and at

every time in history that you want to name have had not the option of confessing Christ and living.

Their only option was to confess Christ and die or deny Christ and live. And in that context, he says, don't deny me. Whoever confesses me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven.

Whoever denies me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven. And that would be a terrible circumstance to find yourself in. When you stand before God on the Day of Judgment, you don't have any advocate other than Christ that can get you in.

And if you're looking to Him to be your advocate and says, I'm afraid I don't know you, then you've got nothing left. Before the Father and His angels, you have nothing but wrath to face. So, obviously denying Jesus, even under torture and under pressure and in the face of imminent death, no amount of pressure is justification for denying the Lord.

I read a story, I think it was from Fox's book of Martyrs, about a young man who was on the rack, a Christian who was being tortured and for a little while he held out, but finally he broke down and denied the Lord so that he'd be relieved and they let him off the rack and he collapsed and died as soon as they let him off the rack. He denied the Lord and then he died. The Lord can kill the body and the soul.

The guy was probably awfully near death before he reneged and he should have waited a little longer, just a little longer. The fact is, there's no excuse for denying Jesus. By the way, Jesus isn't the only one who said it.

Paul repeats Jesus' words in 2 Timothy 2 Our Bible has it set up in poetry form, so it is thought to be a saying, perhaps even a hymn or a creed of the early church because Paul introduces it in verse 11 saying this is a faithful saying and then he gives it to us. This is perhaps a creedal statement, a confessional statement of Christians at the time. 2 Timothy 2, 11-13 says This is a faithful saying.

If we died with him, we shall also live with him. If we endure, we shall also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us.

Where did they get that idea? From Jesus. If we are faithless, he remains faithful. He cannot deny himself.

It's interesting that some people will take verse 13 as a text for eternal security. They'll say, well, even if we are faithless, he's still faithful. True, he's faithful.

Whether you're faithful or not, he's faithful. But that doesn't mean that you're saved. God never ceases to be faithful.

You're not going to change God's character or anything. But if you're faithless, that doesn't mean that he's going to still be on your side. Especially since the previous verse says if we deny him, he'll deny us.

Sure, he remains faithful. He's faithful to keep his promises and his threats. If we endure, we'll reign with him.

He's faithful. He'll keep that promise. If we deny him, he'll deny us.

He's faithful. He'll keep that threat. His faithfulness is not changed by our unfaithfulness.

But our situation is. Our salvation is. Our salvation is based upon faith.

When we deny the faith or forsake the faith, then salvation is no longer in our hands. So apparently, it seems like it's a creedal statement of the early church based on what Jesus said here. Whoever denies me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven.

And no doubt that became a creedal affirmation of the early church because... Why? Because very early on they were facing death. And all they had to do was burn incense to the emperor and deny Christ. And so the church, it became a very conscious creedal reaffirmation that they made probably on a regular basis to remind themselves we're not allowed to deny Jesus, even if death is the only other option.

Boy oh boy. We will probably not get any further than to just finish Matthew 10 this time. So we'll put ourselves behind.

I'm sure we'll catch up in another session. Let's go on to verse 34. We've read it, but we haven't talked about it.

Verses 34 through 39. Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

He who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it.

And that would suggest whoever obtains an extension of his physical life by compromising, that is by denying Christ, they'll lose the very life they hoped to secure by compromise, will be lost then. And whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Now, verse 34 is one of the very few verses in the teachings of Jesus that have sometimes been pressed into service by those in opposition to pacifism.

Now those who are in opposition to pacifism are the majority of Christians. There are very few Christians who are pacifists. Relatively few.

Only, you know, Mennonites and Quakers and Amish and a very few others officially have taken an anti-participation-in-war stance. And a few other individuals, like I've never been of those denominations, but I've always been a pacifist even though I was in churches that didn't officially take that stance. There's always a remnant out there that thinks that Jesus told the truth.

Then there's the rest of the church. But those Christians who resist this particular position are always desperately combing the pages of Scripture to find something Jesus said that would justify war. They are madly wild about his statement in Luke 22 where he said, Now I say buy a sword.

If anyone doesn't have a sword, sell his cloak and buy one. Jesus said to buy a sword. He's obviously in favor of war.

Well, you need to look that up in its context. We'll do that on another occasion. It clearly cannot be used the way that they're trying to suggest.

Especially in view of the fact that that same night, after he said that, Peter actually took a sword and tried to defend himself and Jesus. And Jesus said, Peter, put away your sword. Those who live by the sword will die by the sword.

It was totally inappropriate to use a sword in self-defense. But anyway, we'll talk about that on another occasion. Here's another verse, one of the two or three.

I'll tell you, the three things in the teaching of Jesus that are usually brought up to try to say that Jesus favored war. One was, buy a sword in Luke 22. Again, we'll talk about that another time.

But it's clearly being abused when someone says that Jesus was there for telling the disciples to become militant and to use swords to defend themselves and to fight wars. Another one they use is where Jesus said in Matthew 24, there will be wars and rumors of wars. And any thinking person might say, well, how in the world can that be made to support war? And the answer is, well, Jesus was talking about the end days, the last days, and he said there will be wars and rumors of wars.

Therefore, pacifists are wrong to think that they can bring an end to war by pacifism because Jesus predicted there would be wars and rumors of war until the end of the age. Well, this fails on two points. One is that the passage isn't talking about the end of the age.

It's talking about the time before the destruction of Jerusalem, as the context clearly indicates. Anyone who reads it in context has to reach that conclusion, in my opinion. I

don't see how they could reach another.

So he's not talking about the end of the world. But another thing is, whoever said that we should be pacifists in order to bring an end to war? We're not pragmatic about this. The reason for pacifism isn't because we hope by pacifism that we'll be able to bring an end to wars.

Even if there were to be wars until Jesus returns, maybe that is the case. That is no argument against pacifism. You see, there are some liberals, both in the Mennonite denomination and just in the world, who are pacifists, but for the wrong reasons.

They're pacifists because they think war is a terrible thing and because they need to make a statement against war and they have a witness for peace. A lot of modern pacifistic churches, peace churches, they even call themselves peace churches and they say, well, you know, we have a witness for peace and so forth. I'm not with them.

You know, I'm for peace, no question about that, but that is not our message. Our message is not peace, that is absence of war. Our message is Jesus.

I'd rather have a witness for Jesus than a witness for some particular narrow agenda like let's bring an end to war. It is true that some more liberal-oriented pacifists do see pacifism as a pressure device to bring an end to war. They look at Gandhi and Martin Luther King and they say, well, you see, Gandhi liberated his country without firing a shot.

You know, he just laid down in front of the tanks. So peaceful resistance, this is how we bring an end to war. Ron Sider today, one of the leading Mennonite writers, you know, kind of liberal in his orientation, he feels like, you know, America should just, back when there was still problems with the Soviet Union, worse than now, he said America should just disarm and if the Russians come, we should just hold up signs and say we love you in the name of the Lord and that would bring an end to war.

I sure would. We'd be taken over and there'd be no war, no shots fired, and we'd be under communism. But the point is, I think Sider's idea was, you know, that would just touch their hearts, you know, they'd melt their hearts and their aggressiveness would just vanish and they'd just think, oh, look at these wonderful people, they love their enemies, therefore we won't shoot them, we'll go home and leave them alone.

That is liberalism and idealism. Jesus didn't intend to tell us that pacifism is going to bring an end to persecution and war. But the reason we are to not contribute to war is because we do love our enemies, not because we believe that by loving our enemies they'll necessarily stop hating us.

They may hate us to the day we die and they may even be the instruments of our death, but we're to love them to our death anyway. Not because of the psychological impact it'll

have upon them, but because loving is the right and godly thing to do. Whether it gets the results you'd prefer or not is not the issue, we're not pragmatists, we're obedient to Jesus Christ, we have the spirit of God, we do what Jesus did.

He loved his enemies, they got him killed. But it's still the right thing to do, even if you die doing it. Even if there are going to be wars at the end of the world, that's no argument against obeying Jesus.

But then the other one is this passage, Jesus said, I didn't come to bring peace on earth, I did not come to bring peace but a sword. You see, Jesus is not a pacifist, he's here to bring a sword. Well, several problems arise in interpreting it that way.

Because first of all, he's not talking about war. He says it's between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law, between a parent and a child. A man's foes would be those of his own household.

He's not talking about warfare, he's not even talking about armed resistance, he certainly isn't talking about literal swords. Because he's not advocating that Christians and non-Christian families take swords and lop off the heads of their non-Christian relatives. I mean, that would be equivalent to saying he's advocating war here.

He's talking about family strife. And just to clarify this, the very same statement is found in Luke, chapter 12 and verse 51, with the exception that the word sword in Luke is replaced with the word division. I did not come to bring peace, but division.

Okay, so here we see, sword is a metaphor for division. Matthew's version says, I came to bring a sword. Luke's version says, I came to bring division.

In the exact same statement, Luke 12, 51. So, sword is a metaphor. It's not talking about physical swords, he's talking about bringing division in families.

And he certainly does that. He's not talking about his disciples arming themselves to fight and kill people. He's talking about the fact that they should expect not to have the support of their families if they follow Jesus and their families do not.

There will be a division made in humanity between those who are for him and those who are against him. That division might cut right through certain family lines. Whereas ordinarily a man's nationality, or more particularly his family, is his principal loyalty and his principal solidarity, it is no longer to be expected to be so.

The principal solidarity in the life of a Christian is with other believers. And if those of his own household are not in that solidarity, there will no longer be family solidarity. There will be division even in families.

Because identity and loyalty are not going to be interpreted in the kingdom of God in

terms of what family or nation you're part of, but whether you're in the kingdom of God or out of it. And there will be divisions that go right down the middle of family lines. That's why I said anyone who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

You're going to have problems here because some of your fathers and mothers aren't going to approve of you obeying Jesus. Some of your sons and daughters won't. Some of your wives or husbands won't.

And in cases like that, there's a choice to be made. And I'm not suggesting that I know of any cases. I don't know of any cases where God has called a man to leave his wife or children to obey God.

Because obeying God means he's supposed to love and cherish his wife and raise his children. Sometimes people get hyper-spiritual ideas and say, God's calling me to be a missionary, but my wife and children won't go, so I'll just leave them. Unfortunately, Wesley was that way.

Wesley was a great man of God in most respects, but like every other Christian leader, he had feet of clay in some respects. John Wesley got married and left his wife and hardly ever saw her again. She was not easy to be with, but I'm not sure that he made it easy for her either.

He was married to his work. We won't go into the reported shenanigans of his wife at this point. She apparently was hell on two feet from the way the reports go.

But let's face it, I don't think he did enough to win her back. He just found her to be difficult and spent most of his time on the road and hardly ever saw her. In fact, they were separated many times deliberately, not just because he was on the road.

They separated as a couple many times. In fact, they were separated at the time of her death, and he didn't even go to her funeral. They didn't have a great marriage.

But I'm sure that Wesley must have felt, since he was doing God's work, that he can't love life more than Jesus, or else he's not worthy of Him. Unfortunately, a lot of times people think of preaching and missionary work and itinerancy as the only thing that's God's work, or work that takes precedent over God's work of raising your family, or God's work of loving your wife as Christ loved the church, or God's work, you know, there's domestic work that's God's work too, as well as foreign work and itinerant work. So anyway, it's clear that if it ever did come down to that, if you had to make a choice between your spouse and Jesus, if Jesus clearly was telling you to do something, and your spouse said, well, you can do it, but you're doing it without me, then I guess you have to do it without that person.

I imagine there probably are a few cases in history that may have been in that situation, especially in times where believers had unbelieving spouses, no doubt. But I think a lot

of people who don't much love their spouses often use this as an excuse to neglect family responsibilities and say, well, I'm doing the work of God, this is more important than family responsibilities. Anyway, the statement he makes in verse 35 and 36, I come to set a man against his father, etc., etc., that's actually a quote from Micah 7.6. The meaning is somewhat different in Micah than the way Jesus is using it here.

In Micah, Micah is simply talking about how evil society has been, that treachery is at every level in society. You can't trust anybody, even your own wife, even your parents, even your children will betray you. And he's not saying that they'll do so for righteousness sake.

In Micah, he's just saying this is what society has come to, this is how bad things have become in Israel, that nobody can trust anybody, everybody's treacherous, everybody's evil. Even man's own household can't be trusted, you can't turn your back on them or they'll stab you in the back. And Jesus is obviously taking practically the exact words from Micah, it's Micah 7.6, and saying that's what it's going to be like for you guys.

He's putting a little bit of a different spin on it than Micah has, because he's saying the reason that these people will divide is over me, because you love me and they don't. Now that's not even in the picture in Micah's passage. Micah's not saying, well, the righteous and the unrighteous in the household are going to be against each other.

He's just saying everyone's unrighteous in society, and everyone's out to get whatever they can at the expense of anybody, including their own wife, children, or whoever. Everybody's just treacherous and unreliable and untrustworthy. But what Jesus may be saying is that that's exactly what his generation is like too.

And it'll particularly become clear when his disciples take a stand for him. Their own families will show themselves to be treacherous and unloyal to them, and will deliver them up to be killed and so forth. And Jesus said at one place, well, in verse 21, which is taken from the Olivet Discourse, Matthew 10, 21 says, Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and father his child, and children will rise up against their parents and cause them to be put to death.

That's a pretty awful thing for people to do to their family members. If that happened in most ordinary situations, that'd be just an atrocity. And it is an atrocity whenever that happens.

But what he's saying is this is not just going to be a general nastiness on the part of human beings. It's going to be particularly focused at you, because you take your stand for me. And that stand threatens these people who are taking their stand against me.

And therefore, I will be the great polarizer of society, he says. And he was, and is still. We've talked about verses 37 through 39 already.

And they're parallel to Luke 14. Let's take the last thing. Verses 40 through 42.

He who receives you, receives me. Who receives me, receives him who sent me. That is basically said also in John 13, 20.

It's also in the Upper Room Discourse. A little different, but very similar. In John 13, 20, Jesus said, He that receives him who I send, receives me.

And he who receives me, receives him who sent me. So it's exactly like this statement, with the exception that in John 13, 20, he says, He that receives him who I send. Whereas in this passage, he identifies him who I send as you.

He who receives you, receives me. Now remember, he's talking to the Twelve, in all likelihood, here. And the Twelve did have a special apostolic commission.

To receive an apostle is no different than receiving Jesus. To receive the authority of Paul or Peter or any apostle is no different than receiving the authority of Jesus. That's not necessarily true of everyone who is a Christian.

Me, for example. I can't claim that this statement that Jesus made to the disciples applies to me the way it applies to them. Because you could reject me, or at least you could reject something I say.

You could reject my authority without rejecting Christ. But you can't do that to the apostles. You can't reject the apostles' authority or what they say without in that very act rejecting Christ.

Because he has authorized them, they're his special agents. Just as to receive Jesus is the same as receiving him who sent him. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward.

And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward. Now, there's three categories mentioned here.

They may be clear-cut categories, or they may be just three ways of saying kind of the same thing. Just, you know, Hebrew parallelism. There's the prophet, there's the righteous man, and there's these little ones who are a disciple.

So you've got reference to a prophet, to a righteous man, and to a disciple. Some would say there's a distinction here. There's reference to the prophet's reward, the righteous man's reward, and the reward of the one who blesses a disciple, a little one who's a disciple.

I don't really know if Jesus is intending to draw clear distinctions between the reward a

prophet receives on the one hand and that which a righteous man receives on the other. I mean, what is the difference between a prophet and a righteous man? A prophet is a righteous man. Perhaps if there is a difference implied, it is simply in this, that the prophet was the one who is a full-time spokesman for God, at least in the Jewish society that would be the case.

The prophet would be God's spokesman, whereas a righteous man might not be a public speaker or a messenger of God, but he's a man of God. A righteous man still is a man who is one of God's people. The average, you know, righteous citizen is not necessarily a prophet.

And therefore, you know, one might say, well, a person who's a prophet, that's a person in ministry, as opposed to a person who's just a righteous man. Both of them are Christians, but there might be a different reward for them. However, I'm not sure there would be a different reward for them.

I don't believe there's a different reward, for example, to the foreign missionary than there is to the faithful Christian who stays home and supports the foreign missionary. In the stories of David, there's a story of how David and his men, some of them, were tired and the others went out in pursuit of enemies. And the ones who were tired stayed at the camp with the stuff.

And they went out and they conquered their enemies and they brought back the spoil. And among David's men there was some contention. I realize the time, I'm watching the clock here.

As to, you know, how the loot should be divided. And some didn't want to give the loot, any share of it, to those who stayed behind. But David said, no, the one who stayed by the stuff is going to have the same share with those who went out in the battle.

And it's a principle, I think, that those who stay home by the stuff and, you know, guard the fort and support those who are out at the battle and so forth, that they're as valuable as the people who are out there on the line. So that the prophet or God's spokesman, the preacher, the teacher, the missionary, that person has the same reward as a righteous person who's not called to those things, as long as they're doing what they should. The main point of these verses is that you may not be called to be a prophet, but you won't get a lesser reward than a prophet does, as long as you receive those who are prophets.

If you honor those who are God's messengers, if you honor those who are God's people, God's disciples, even the least important, even one of these little ones who's a disciple, if you honor them, you show hospitality to them, you're doing it to Christ himself and you'll get the same reward that they're getting, even though you don't have the same calling, your reception of them in the name of Christ is receiving Christ and you will therefore share the same kind of reward they have, even though your calling may be different.

Well, we have run out of time, not only on the clock, but also on the tape machine, so we'll...