

# OpenTheo

## Christ and the Law, Overview (Part 1)



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

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses Jesus' teachings on the law and how they relate to love and spirituality. Gregg emphasizes that Jesus was not simply concerned with outward conformity to the law, but with its spiritual essence. He cautions against legalism and the danger of applying Jesus' commands inflexibly without considering mitigating circumstances. Gregg emphasizes that Jesus fulfilled the law and the prophets by teaching about the importance of love, justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

### **Transcript**

We're turning now to Matthew chapter 5, continuing our study of the Sermon on the Mount. In the portion that we last covered, which included verses 17 through 20, where Jesus was talking about the law, and saying that he had not come to destroy the law, but rather to fulfill it, his statements have been greatly misunderstood, especially by people who have thought that what Jesus was saying is that he intended to prolong the validity of the law. He did not come to prolong the validity of the law in the sense that it was understood by the Jews.

Although the essence of the law, which is that you shall love God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength, and love your neighbors as yourself, of course, is something that can never change. Those things are always going to be important, and therefore the spirit of the law, the essence of it, is something that he did not come to do away with. He did come to do away with the Mosaic system, and the laws that were part of that system.

But the underlying principles of love for God and for neighbors are issues which could only be fulfilled by doing them. To fulfill those laws, you simply have to do it. Love.

And he that loves has fulfilled the law. Now, in the remainder of Matthew chapter 5, we have six examples that Jesus gives of what the current understanding of among the Jews was of the law, and what he felt they should understand about it differently than they did. He, in every case, all six times, says, you have heard that it was said to those of old.

And then he quotes something that they had heard said. And most of the things he quotes are actually things that the law itself says, like you shall not murder, or you shall

not commit adultery, or whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce, in verse 31. Or, in verse 33, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oath to the Lord.

Or in verse 38, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. All those things that they had heard, those are all actual scriptures from the Old Testament, and the law taught them. In verse 43, it says, you have heard that it was said you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

Well, certainly love your neighbor is in the Old Testament, but the part about hating your enemy is not. The Old Testament doesn't say you shall hate your enemy, but that doesn't mean they hadn't heard that you should, because, of course, the Jews had heard not only pure teaching from the Old Testament, but also the traditions of the rabbis mixed in. And some had interpreted some of the stuff in the Old Testament, especially probably those commands to leave nothing that breathes among the Canaanites, and stuff like that, as indicators that Jews should be hostile toward their enemies, bloodthirsty and vengeful toward their enemies, and that was not, of course, necessarily commanded, and not the intent of God's commands about killing off their enemies.

What I want to say is that all six of these times, where he says, you have heard that it was said to those of old, he gives some scripture, although in the case of the last one, he extends beyond what the scripture says to include things they had heard, which had more to do with the tradition of the rabbis, or their interpretations of things. Now, since he is quoting from the law in these cases, it's quite clear that we have in these six examples a continuation of what Jesus wanted to say about the law. The Sermon on the Mount is not entirely an exposition on the law.

Once you get to chapters 6 and 7, we're not talking about the law anymore. But it is obviously a major consideration in this early part, because Jesus' listeners, his disciples, were all Jewish, and they were not being converted from a spiritual vacuum. They had been raised with a tremendous respect for the law.

They may or may not have been good at keeping it. Some of them may not have... Well, like Matthew, the tax collector, in all likelihood, was very slack in his observance of the law. But that didn't change the fact that as a Jew, he had been taught that the law was good, and it was from God, and that he probably felt quite guilty about any infractions of it he had made.

But that was the case probably with most Jews. They knew what the law said, they revered it, just like most Americans used to be toward the Bible as a whole, or toward Jesus. Most people revere Jesus and think well of the Bible, but they don't follow him.

And that was probably the case with at least a number of Jesus' disciples. But it is not a question of their disobedience or obedience to the law that he's here addressing, but

their understanding of the law. They need to understand what is the essence of the law.

Some people feel that what Jesus did in these passages is change the law. I don't find anything in these passages where Jesus actually changed the law. That is, where he said, well you've heard that the law said this, but this isn't true anymore.

What is really true is this, and you're going to have to stop believing what it said there. Now it is true that Jesus, I mean the whole effect of Jesus having come and establishing a new covenant, did bring about a change in the law. But what I'm saying is, I don't believe that's what he's doing here.

I don't think what he's saying is, okay, scrap this and replace it with that. So some people have understood him to be saying that, because he says, you've heard that it was said, then he quotes something from the law, and then he follows it with, but I say to you, and he tells them something different. The question is, what is the essence of the difference of the thing he's saying? Is it something altogether new? Is it something that is contrary to what the law said, and is replacing it because somehow God doesn't feel the same way anymore, and he wanted them to do it that way in those days, but now he has something entirely different in mind, so Jesus has to come and say, okay, at the end of that, we're replacing it with this.

That is how some people have mistakenly taken this. I believe it's a mistake. But you see, this is an expansion.

This section of these six illustrations is an expansion on what he said in verse 17. He didn't come to do away or destroy the law. He came to fulfill it.

And what he's doing is showing them what the spiritual fulfillment of these laws was. The problem the Jews had was not that they kept the law. The law was not a bad thing.

The law was a good thing. Paul even says that. Even though he says we're not saved by keeping the law, he mentions the law is spiritual.

The law is holy, just, and good. He says both those things in Romans 7. The law is a good thing. But the problem with the law is that people have understood it in a legalistic fashion, which might seem like a strange thing to say.

How else would you understand law but in a legalistic fashion? Law and legalism obviously are the same thing. But what I mean by that is in a religious externalistic fashion. It's one thing to be told that you should not kill.

It's another thing to realize that it wasn't just killing that God was concerned about. He was concerned about the whole state of heart, the whole spiritual attitude that is relevant to murder, that leads some people to murder. Not everyone will go so far as to express it as a murderer does, but they may have the same attitude, which is equally

abhorrent to God.

What Jesus is trying to point out here is that an externalistic approach to the law, seeing God as only concerned about outward conformity, is missing the point. Fulfilling the law means filling it full, filling it with its fullness. And the fullness of the law is spiritual in nature, not just regulatory of outward behavior.

I mentioned the verses in Romans 7. I want now to turn to them just so we'll get this straight, because Jesus did not come as an enemy to the law, nor did Paul, although both of them taught that the law was not a system that is the system that Christians live under. Excuse me. At least the law of Moses is not a system that Christians are confined to live under.

But he says in Romans 7, in verse 12, Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. He's talking about the Old Testament law. He also says in verse 14 of Romans 7, For we know that the law is spiritual.

That's good. The law is holy, it is just, it is good, and it is spiritual. All these positive things come from the mouth of the Apostle Paul, one who is accused of being against the law.

If anybody minimized a Christian's obligation to keep law, it was the Apostle Paul. And yet he and Jesus both have a high opinion of the basic holiness, righteousness, justice, and spirituality of the law. The problem is that when people relate to God in terms of law, it always degenerates into simply focusing on whether I'm doing it right outwardly, whether I'm doing the thing that the law commands me to do in my outward behavior.

And of course that in itself becomes forgetful of the fact that God looks on the heart. If we're in a religious community that judges our spirituality on the basis of our keeping of laws, then of course the only part of our keeping of laws that they can see and judge us by is the outward conduct. And so we're under pressure by the pressure of the religious community to conform to the outward requirements of the law.

Now we might be quite sincere in our heart also, but the pressure is on to conform outwardly more than inwardly. Unless of course our heart is really alive toward God, in which case the fear of God puts us under even greater pressure to conform inwardly to what God is seeing in our heart. But the Jews often didn't have the devotion to God that they had to the law.

Judaism, that of the Pharisees and also that of the disciples before they were disciples, even though they were not Pharisees, they were still Jews, and they still interpreted religion in terms of outward conformity to the law. And they lived in a society that judged people on the basis of outward conformity. And therefore the main pressure upon them religiously was to do outwardly the right thing.

And when that becomes a person's focus, as it very naturally does in religion, it's easy to forget, I don't say it's inevitable or unavoidable, but it is easy to forget that there is the inward part that God is looking at. Day by day we don't see God, he's invisible. We see people though, and they see us.

And therefore we are under much greater constraints by what we take in through our senses. The attitudes of our neighbors toward us and so forth, or of our religious peers. We're under the greater stress to be outward in our conformity, even if we're not doing all that well inwardly.

Sometimes if we gain a reputation of being religious enough by outward conformity, we even convince ourselves that we're doing all right, even though at one time we realized that this was all outward, we suddenly cease to be concerned about the inward part, because no one else seems to know about it or care about it. And by stages our religion becomes something that's manward and external, rather than Godward and spiritual. Now the law is spiritual, but that doesn't mean that everybody who followed the law did so in a spiritual way.

The law of God was simply an expression of God's heart. And God's values. And God's heart and values are good.

And true. And just. That's why Paul said the law is holy and good and just.

It's good stuff. But, law can be taken ritualistically or spiritually. And what Jesus is saying is the core, the inward part of the law is spiritual.

To the Pharisees, the law had become an outward shell of outward behavior merely. But the inward part was the part that God was concerned about. David knew this when he wrote Psalm 51.

Repenting of his sin with Bathsheba, he said, you know, if you wanted outward sacrifices and stuff like that, I could offer that. I'm king of Israel. I've got no problem providing bulls and sheep and so forth, if that's what really mattered to you.

Now, actually, David lived in a time when those things were part of the law that he lived under. But he knew that that's not what God is really concerned about principally. In Psalm 51, he says in verse 16 and 17, For you do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it.

You do not delight in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart. These, O God, you will not despise.

He also said earlier in that psalm, But you desire truth in the inward parts. I'm not looking at that verse. I'm looking for it.

Though I know it's in the earlier part of the same psalm. Not very much earlier, I think. For some reason, it escapes me.

Do you see it? Six? Okay, thanks. Yeah, behold, you desire truth in the inward parts. In the hidden part, meaning in that part of me that's not visible to outsiders, you will make me to know wisdom.

In other words, God's relationship with me is based on what's going on inside of me. Remember Jesus complained to the Pharisees in Matthew 23 that they were like people who wash the outside of a cup, but inside it was full of swill. It was full of sewage.

It was full of all putrefaction and defilement. And it was such an anomaly that they would wash the outside of a cup and drink the foul stuff inside it. Now, of course, they didn't literally do that.

He was likening their religion to that. They cleaned up the outside of their lives by their outward behavior, their externalistic conformity to what the law required that they do. But inwardly, they were still as corrupt as ever before.

They were like whitewashed tombs, whitewashed and clean looking on the outside, but inwardly full of that which to a Jew was defiling, the remains of a dead body, dead men's bones. So inwardly defiled, outwardly clean. That was the description of the Pharisee.

But not only the Pharisee, but the whole mentality of the Jew in general toward their relationship with God. Conforming to the law as an outward thing was considered to be what was important. But David and others, there were others even in Jesus' own day, no doubt.

I'm sure old Simeon and Anna and those kinds of people, and Zechariah and Elizabeth, I imagine they would be exceptions to the norm, that they were part of the remnant who knew that faith and love toward God were really more important than mere outward conformity. But if you loved God and were faithful to Him, you would also conform outwardly to His laws when that was the code that He required obedience to. Now, what I understand Jesus to be doing here is not saying, the law said this, but we're scrapping the law.

From now on, we're going to do it my way. What I understand to be saying is, people think that I have come to destroy the law. What I am doing to the law is not destructive at all.

It's fulfilling of it. What I am doing may not conform to the outward conformity that some people think, like the way Jesus kept Sabbath, didn't please the Pharisees at all. He didn't keep Sabbath outwardly the way they wanted Him to.

But He says, what I am doing in teaching is in fact the fulfillment of what the law was

saying all the time and was missed by the Jews. He's not trying to say God has now changed His mind about these issues. He's saying that you people have never understood what His mind was about these issues.

When God said don't commit murder, you thought that just meant don't kill. And it does mean don't kill, but that's not all that God was concerned about. There's something more spiritual involved there, of which murder outwardly is only one kind of manifestation.

There are other manifestations of the same spiritual problem and God is as concerned about those as He is against murder. But the fact that He never condemned those verbally makes you think that you can commit those atrocities and get away with it, but you can't get away with murder because He said don't murder. He says, what I want you to understand is that the command not to murder had a principle behind it, which really gets at what is on God's heart and what God cares about.

And if you'll observe that in principle spiritually, you will not murder, but you'll also not do a lot of other things that He never specifically forbade in law. Though law, in other words, is just the tip of the iceberg. Thou shalt not murder, thou shalt not commit adultery.

That's just the tip of a great iceberg. It's just the visible part, an outward show of something that's deep within the heart of a person. It speaks of one manifestation of a particular kind of corruptness that God is appalled by, and in Jewish society, people thought as long as they hadn't committed murder that they were okay with God, although they were doing many of the other things that were violations of the same principle.

Though things that had not been specifically forbidden in the law. And this is what Jesus is doing by getting at the core of what God meant. Now let me read to you the passage.

It's lengthy, but I want you to see the whole thing because what we're doing today, we're going to talk holistically about this whole section of six illustrations. Then in the next three sessions in the life of Christ, we're going to take two of them in each session and look at them in more detail. What I want to do is give you the big picture of what these illustrations are saying and what their function is here.

So we'll start at verse 21. You have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you, that whoever is angry at his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.

And whoever says to his brother, Raka, shall be in danger of the council. And whoever says, you fool, shall be in danger of hellfire. 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 the 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 that your whole body be cast into hell. 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 oath to the Lord. But I say to you, do not swear at all, neither by heaven, for it is God's throne, nor by the earth, for it is His footstool, nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your yes be yes and your no, no, for whatever is more than these is from the evil one. 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 the evil person.

But whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other one to him also. 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 the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you should be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. There is a lot there, and we are going to take all together four sessions looking



at this.

As I said, we are going to talk about an overview of the whole section we just read today, and in the next three sessions we are going to break it into three segments and take it more specially and in more detail. Now, an understanding of this section is, I think, pivotal to our understanding of what God requires of us. And Christians are as prone to legalism as non-Christians are.

Now, most Christians, or as Jews are, most Christians do not fall into the trap of thinking we have to keep the Jewish law. In other words, I think we don't have the same problem they had in the first century in Galatia and places like that where there was some question, does a person have to become a Jew to become a Christian? Does a Gentile have to be circumcised and keep the Jewish law? Most of us are out of the woods there. Although there are still some, Seventh-day Adventists, for instance, who would still impose some of the Jewish laws on Christians.

Most Christians don't fall into the trap of Judaizing legalism. But there is another form of legalism that is very easy to fall into. In fact, I'm not sure that very many people at all have avoided it altogether.

I certainly have not avoided it. I've had times when I was very legalistic and it happens. But it's in our nature.

And that is that although we don't put ourselves under the Jewish law, we put ourselves under law of another sort, Christian law. Now, the purest form of this legalism is putting ourselves under Jesus' law, what he said we have to do. Less pure forms of this are the expectations and mores and traditional requirements of our group, our denomination.

It gets quite sacramental, it gets quite liturgical in some cases. There are just certain norms that become part of the way we think about being Christian. Christians don't smoke or drink or chew or run with girls who do, you see.

And don't go to movies, and don't go to dances. As far as I'm concerned, avoiding all those things is a good idea. There are some denominations that have codified those things into actual standards of law.

One preacher told me that he met a pastor who, before baptizing anyone, they had to go through a checklist. You know, do you wear skirts above the knee, do you wear makeup, do you wear jewelry, do you smoke, do you, you know, chew tobacco, do you do these things? And a person had to check no on them before they'd be baptized. And this pastor said it seemed so strange to him to see this list this other pastor had because he said, as far as he knows, there's only one question that was asked in the Bible before a person was baptized, and that's when Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch, do you believe in Jesus Christ with all your heart? And the guy did, and so he baptized him.

But that's the legalism we incline toward. Now, I've always been, and you can tell this from the way I am, and the way I teach, I've always been a very non-traditional kind of person. That has not kept me from being legalistic, though.

I don't think of myself as legalistic now, and I strive very hard not to be, but I can think of times in my life where I was just as untraditional as I am now, but much more legalistic. The difference being that traditionalists are legalistic about things that aren't in the Bible, or things that are church traditional standards that they establish extra-biblically. That's one form of legalism, traditionalism.

The Pharisees did that with their traditions of the rabbis, things that weren't in the Bible, but which the rabbis taught and become normative, and therefore they judge people, even judging Jesus and the disciples, by whether they washed their hands properly according to the rabbis' teaching on these subjects. That is traditionalism, a form of legalism that's not uncommon at all in any religion, Christianity or otherwise. You find it.

I think I never really succumbed to that kind of legalism. I had a much purer form of legalism. I felt like the teachings of Jesus are the law for us.

The Jew had to keep the teachings of Moses, we have to keep the teachings of Jesus. Now, that really sounds right, does it not? I mean, doesn't Jesus say, if you continue in my words, you're my disciples? Doesn't the Bible say, go make disciples, teaching them to observe whatever things I've commanded you? It was quite a natural thing for me to fall into a legalistic approach on this, saying, well, read the Sermon on the Mount, things Jesus commanded there, do those things. That's what Christians are supposed to do.

Now, there's a sense which I still think that's true, and there's a fine line between a spiritual and a legalistic approach to things. For example, a legalistic approach to some of the things said here would be, as, for example, when Jesus said, in verse 38, or verse 39, to turn the other cheek, or in verse 40, if someone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, give them your cloak also. Or in verse 41, if someone makes you go one mile, go two.

Or in verse 42, give to everyone who asks you. If you're going to apply the commands of Jesus in the same legalistic fashion that the laws of Moses were applied in Judaism, then you're going to have to do these exact things inflexibly, regardless of any mitigating circumstances. Someone strikes you on one cheek, there's nothing for it but to turn the other one to him.

Running away is not an option. Avoiding the confrontation, resisting in any form, never an option, because Jesus just said, turn the other cheek. And if Jesus said it, that's law.

You're supposed to abide in everything he commanded. If someone sues you for something, you're supposed to give it to them and more. If someone asks you for money,

you should give it to them.

I have known of Christians who took this so literally that they felt they could not refuse to give something to anyone who asked them, even if they knew that the person was going to be abusive of the thing given to them. Now, maybe I shouldn't call that legalistic. Maybe I should just call it conscientious.

But that is what I'm calling legalistic. And that is interpreting the commands of Christ, in a passage like this, as a new form of legalism. There are just so many rules to keep.

That's how the Jews approached the law of Moses and eventually the traditions of the elders as well. They became just so many rules, hundreds of rules to memorize and keep. And it's like a rule for every season, a rule for every situation.

You had to almost become a legal expert. In fact, there were. The scribes, that's what they were.

The scribes and Pharisees, the scribes in particular, were legal experts. They spent their whole life, like lawyers do, looking at the case law and saying, well, how does this law apply in this situation, this situation. That's how some people would have us learn Christianity.

It's, okay, Jesus said to do this. Okay, I'm facing this situation. Where's some direct command from Christ about this, and what should I do? Okay, I'm supposed to turn the other cheek here.

I'm supposed to give my cloak also. I'm supposed to give to everyone who asks me. Well, that might seem like a very faithful way to be as a disciple.

I follow the teachings of Jesus, because that's what discipleship is, is obeying the commands of Christ. The thing is, though, Jesus said, a new commandment I give unto you, over in John chapter 13, in verse 34, John 13, 34, Jesus said, a new commandment I give to you that you love one another as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this, all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have loved one for another.

Now, notice, obeying the commands of Jesus is what disciples do. You make disciples by teaching them to observe all things he commanded. You are a disciple indeed if you continue in his words, but his command here is said to be, at least in this place, to love one another and if you do that, everyone will know you're a disciple.

Now, that's a whole lot simpler than memorizing hundreds of individual little rules, whether they come from the mouth of Jesus or from Moses. Still, memorizing a lot of little rules and govern your life by this rule, okay, this situation has arisen, that is the stimulus, automatically calls forth this response because the rule says that's what you do

in this situation. That is a legalistic way to understand the Sermon on the Mount, and I think an incorrect way.

The correct thing is that the command of Christ is simple. He told Martha in John chapter 10 there's only one thing needful and it's really quite simple. Remember when they asked Jesus what is the great command? He said, well, there's two parts of it.

One command, but two parts of it. The first is you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and the other part, the other thing like it, is love your neighbors yourself. He said on this hang all the law and all the prophets.

Later on, in Matthew 6, I believe, or maybe it's actually Matthew 7, later in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7, 12, he says, therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also the same to them, for this is the law and the prophets. Now Jesus came to fulfill the law and the prophets, and he did so by saying what it's all about. It's essentially this, whatever you would have men do to you, do that to them.

Another way of saying that is love your neighbors yourself. Both things are said to be the whole law and the whole prophets. Whatever you would like done to you, do to other people.

That's loving your neighbors yourself. He said, this is a new commandment I'm giving you and I want you to keep it and it'll be the mark that you are my disciples if you keep this commandment. By this all men will know that you're my disciples if you have loved one for another, John 13, 35 says.

Now, what I'd like to suggest to you is that this portion of the Sermon on the Mount is not so much Jesus' way of saying well, we don't have enough laws yet, let me give you a few more. It's his way of saying that everything God has ever been concerned about or is still concerned about is really one thing, and that is love. It's the only thing that has ever mattered.

All the law, all the prophets, hang on this, if you just do to others what you have them to do, that is the whole law of the prophets. Let me illustrate. And then he illustrates by giving specific scenarios, specific situations.

How do you love your neighbors yourself if he strikes you? Well, in a case like that there might be any number of options, but certainly one of them is not to be hostile and retaliate. Turning the other cheek is much more of a loving response. It may not be the only response that love would permit, but it's the most striking, no pun intended, it's the most it's the most it's the most radical in one sense.

I mean there is a sense in which you could not retaliate and still not offer the other cheek. I mean, going as far as to offer the other cheek is the most radical expression of this principle that he could give, but it's not necessary it can be in one sense a

hyperbole. Now when I say a hyperbole, I don't mean to say that it's because it's a hyperbole it's really okay in real life to hit back.

A hyperbole is an emphatic point that is made to the point of an exaggeration almost. There's no reason why it would be wrong for you to turn the other cheek, but that might not be the only loving response, it is just a loving response instead of an unloving one to somebody doing you harm. If people ask you for money, it's a loving thing to give them money instead of being greedy and holding on to your money selfishly.

But there may be some times when love would dictate that you don't give a particular person something that they're asking for even though Jesus' statement is spoken of as an absolute, give to everyone that asks you. Yet Paul says a person who doesn't work should not eat. There are some cases where giving to someone may not be the loving thing to do.

In most cases it is and it's generally a loving thing to give and what Jesus is doing I think is simply expounding on the fact that what God has always wanted, what all these laws that he taught them before that mattered were about is loving. And he's simply in these ways illustrating what love is like in certain situations what love would do instead of selfishness and carnality and sinfulness would do. A godly response would be a loving response.

However, life is so complex that there's not only one loving thing to do in some circumstances. In some there might only be one loving thing to do. I can't think of any off the top of my head but I could imagine there'd be some circumstances where the only loving thing to do is this and everything else would be unloving.

But I understand Jesus to be saying what God wants you to be is loving, not unloving. Murder, that's unloving. But so is being angry at your brother without a cause, that's unloving too.

Adultery is unloving. But so is craving to have a sexual relationship with your neighbor's wife, that's unloving too. Your neighbor may never find out about it but it's just as unloving of you to desire his wife as it is to take her.

Divorcing your wife without giving her a bill of divorcement would be an unloving thing. But actually, divorcing her for any cause other than fornication is unloving. Anything that's unloving is what God's concerned about.

Not just the few things that he commanded you not to do. The reason he commanded you not to do them is because they are unloving things to do. And I want to tell you some other unloving things that violate the same principle.

And what I'm trying to tell you is, love is what God was concerned about when he gave these commands. And that's what he continues to be concerned about. The fulfillment of

the law is that you love one another.

And therefore, if you are only avoiding doing the things that the law says not to do, and that's all you're doing, you're just avoiding doing those things, you've got a shell of legalistic Christianity, or in that case, Judaism. But the inner part of the shell is absent. And I want to fill it full.

I'm fulfilling the law, bringing the spiritual side to light, because that is what we live by. We don't live by laws, we live by the Spirit. The flesh profits nothing.

We walk in the Spirit, and that causes us to fulfill the law. Christianity is not defined in terms of memorizing the commands of Jesus, every one of them, and legalistically applying them. What is more, I think, true to Christianity is reading the commands of Jesus and saying, what was he getting at here? I mean, there certainly are times when doing the exact thing that Jesus suggests probably is the right thing.

Though things like cutting off your hand and plucking out your eye, which he recommended in certain cases, I can't think of any case where that would be really the right thing to do, nor do I think he intended for us to take that as a literal command. But if we want to be legalistic about it, and there are people who have, by the way, I've known at least two or three who have attempted or succeeded in cutting off their hand or doing other damage to their bodies because the portion of their body that they were attacking had given them problems. And, you know, that is, in my opinion, a wrong approach to just take the teachings of Jesus and say, this is a new legalism to replace the old Mosaic legalism.

No, the thing that is new is the Spirit. The Spirit is to love your neighbors yourself. And because that is so unfamiliar, so seldom modeled among religious people, Jesus gives an extended description of what that looks like.

And giving examples. But the examples, I think, are simply that, examples of loving kinds of things to do rather than unloving things to do that we'd more naturally be inclined to do. I'd be more inclined to strike someone back if they hit me, or to defend my property in court if someone wants to sue me, or to thumb my nose at the soldier who wants me to go more than one mile but he can't enforce it, or to, you know, to ignore the beggar who wants to spend my money, wants me to give him my money to spend.

My natural carnal self-centeredness would call forth a certain reaction, but love would call out, in most cases, a definitely opposite reaction, and Jesus is trying to illustrate that difference. And while turning the other cheek, I think is a literal right thing to do in many cases, and I have done it myself. I've only once been struck by somebody who I could say was persecuting me in my life, and I was wearing glasses at the time, I saw him come, and I took off my glasses, and I knew he was going to hit me, and he hit me, and I

turned the other cheek, and I hit the other one.

It wasn't that much to it. It didn't turn out to be that big a deal, but what I'm saying is, some of you might get the impression that I'm making this disclaimer about this because I'm not willing to turn the other cheek, or something like that, or I'm not willing to give to everyone, or I'm trying to water down the demands of discipleship. Not at all.

I'm not willing to follow these things to the letter. But what I'm saying is, missing the Spirit is the big mistake in Judaism and in Christianity too often. Saying, okay, I do the things Jesus said to do.

He said to do this, I did it. He said to do that, I did it. I did it.

I'm doing pretty good. I'm doing the things he said. But what he really said is to love your neighbors yourself.

And even doing these things without love is no good. Paul said that in 1 Corinthians 13, if I bestow all my goods and feed the poor but have not love, I'm nothing. It profits me nothing.

It's not doing these specific things. It's being animated by the Spirit of God and the love for your neighbor that puts your neighbor before yourself at all times, and doing always for your neighbor what you would wish to be done to yourself in a like situation. That is what the commandment of Christ is.

The new commandment. And the way that we know we're disciples. Now, in a sense, that doesn't make too much of a difference in behavior.

We will keep these commands probably to the letter most of the time if we have the right spirit. But I'm trying to say that we can make the same mistake about the Sermon on the Mount as the Jews made about the law, and that is simply interpretive. So many rules to obey and missed the point.

The point Jesus is making here is the law was good and is good. But what was good about it, you're missing. It's not just to keep you from sleeping with your neighbor's wife and killing your neighbor.

It's an entirely different spirit that God has after. It's a spirit called love. The Spirit of God whose fruit is love.

This is what God has desired. This is what was at the core of all the commands of God. And this is what will continue to be God's concern and interest and demand upon man is that we behave in a loving fashion.

And here's some examples of how that would be done differently than you're doing it. That's what he's saying in these ways. Now let me go a step further with this

examination.

Turning to Matthew 23. Some of what I'm going to say has come up in some of our topical teachings I think, earlier in the year. So it may sound vaguely familiar to you.

But it needs to be made again at this point in treating this material. Matthew 23, 23. Jesus said, Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith.

And that Greek word for faith, *pistis*, can also be translated faithfulness. There's only one word in the Greek that is translated either faith or faithfulness. Which is kind of interesting because those concepts are not identical, though they're related, yet there's only one Greek word for either one and only context can really determine which is meant.

Many translators, unlike the King James and the New King James, feel like instead of faith it should be translated faithfulness. I am with them. That is, I'm not going to stand with the King James and the New King James in this particular case.

I think faithfulness is what Jesus has in mind there. It works out well for what I'm going to say, but I don't make that choice because it works out well and it's convenient to translate it that way. I've always felt that those translators that take it that way are making the point better.

I suppose there's something subjective about that, but it has to do with what I understand Jesus to be getting at. He's not here advocating faith, although faith is an important thing, but faithfulness, integrity, reliability, dependability. That's what faithfulness amounts to.

Truthfulness. Now, there are three things here that he says are the weightier matters of the law. Justice, mercy, and, as I understand it, faithfulness.

These are the weightier matters of the law. Now, I thought that law was all one thing, just love. You know, if you just love, you fulfill the whole law.

Now, why are we getting into more complexity here? Is it love and justice and mercy and faithfulness? Is the law getting more, you know, more technical, more demanding now? I thought love was all that was needed, but now Jesus says there's some weightier matters of the law. Justice and mercy and faithfulness. Now, you may recall my having raised this question before and answering it.

You probably know where I go in answering that. I believe justice, mercy, and faithfulness are love. They're not something else in addition to love.



They are what love is. And that would be obvious to us if we had not come to think of love in cultural romantic slash erotic terms. When we speak of being in love, that expression itself almost always calls to mind something of a romantic notion, of which there is nothing necessarily wrong.

I'm not trying to criticize that, but it is certainly much too narrow a view of love. In fact, romantic love may not be love at all. I'm not sure I understand romantic love.

I'm not as romantic as some people are, but I've certainly known the phenomenon, and it's very confusing. And I really don't know what is at its basis. I don't know how much of it's hormonal, how much of it's just possessiveness, if you see someone who's beautiful to you and attractive and pleasant to be around and you just want to have them.

I mean, that isn't love. If that's what's at the root of what we call a romantic love or falling in love with someone, then I guess