

OpenTheo

The Principled Life (Part 2)



Cultivating Christian Character - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses the principles of living a principled life as a Christian. He explains that there are two sets of desires that conflict with each other, one for eternal rewards and one for temporal rewards. Gregg emphasizes the importance of justice and mercy, surrendering one's rights for the benefit of others, and the notion of low self-worth in relation to God. He highlights the value of being honest and faithful in all dealings and living a life of integrity.

Transcript

Tonight I'm going to talk again, as I did last time, about the principled life. This is a portion of our series on Developing Christian Character, Cultivating Christian Character. And I had thought last time that I might conceivably cover the material I covered last time and this material.

I mean, I had it all in one page of notes at the time. But I think I had a pretty good idea before we started last time that I would only get through about half, which was exactly what happened. I'm beginning to learn how to better estimate how long it's going to take me to cover a certain material.

But what we have to talk about today is simply a continuation of what we talked about last time. And if you weren't here, I was talking about the cultivation of Christian character should result in a principled life. And a principled life is one where convenience is sacrificed to conviction or to principle.

A principled person has certain unmovable, unshakable convictions or principles by which they live their lives. Now, last time, as we were approaching this topic, I mentioned that we all, who are Christians, have at least two sets of desires that are in conflict. Paul speaks of this in Galatians, how that the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit lusts against the flesh.

These are contrary to each other. We have fleshly desires and we have our spiritual desires. Unbelievers simply have the fleshly desires, and that makes their life psychologically a lot easier in some ways.

Although they have other hardships because of their sin, the way of the transgressor is hard. There is a conflict that believers have that unbelievers are fairly free from, and that is that we desire to live a holy life. They don't.

But like them, we have these other sets of desires that war against this desire to live a holy life. And Christian character is developed by this subservience or the subordination of the desires of the flesh to the higher desires that a Christian has adopted by his loyalty to the word of God and the desire to be holy and righteous. This agrees with an editorial that A.W. Tozer wrote a very long time ago.

He doesn't make quite the same points I do, but it's quite agreeable with what I was sharing last time. This is from an editorial he wrote called Marks of the Spiritual Man. If you want to get a hold of this, it's in his book, That Incredible Christian.

There are many Tozer books out there, and the book That Incredible Christian has this as one of the editorials. I certainly will not read the whole thing, but let me just read a little of it because he says things so much better than I can. A.W. Tozer wrote, The concept of spirituality varies among different Christian groups.

In some circles, the highly vocal person who takes religion continually, excuse me, who talks religion continually is thought to be very spiritual. Others accept noisy exuberance as the mark of spirituality. And in some churches, the man who prays first, longest, and loudest gets a reputation for being the most spiritual man in the assembly.

Now, a vigorous testimony, frequent prayers, and loud praise may be entirely consistent with spirituality, but it is important that we understand that they do not in themselves constitute it, nor prove that it is present. True spirituality manifests itself in certain dominant desires. These are ever-present, deep-settled wants, sufficiently powerful to motivate and control the life.

For convenience, let me number them, though I make no effort to decide the order of their importance. And then he numbers several things that he considers to be the dominant desires of the spiritual man. These are not the same points as I made last time, and I'm not going to read these in their entirety, but I'll identify for you which dominant desires Tozer thinks are the marks of a spiritual person, and I certainly don't disagree with him.

He said, the first is a desire to be holy rather than happy. If you have a choice to be holy or happy, which do you choose? In another article that Tozer wrote in another book, I remember him saying, if I have a choice between happiness and truth, he said, let me have truth, I'll have eternity to be happy. And that is obviously manifesting a spiritual dominant desire, the desire to be holy rather than happy.

Now, he said another dominant desire of the spiritual person is a man may be considered

spiritual when he wants to see the honor of God advanced through his life, even if it means that he himself must suffer temporary dishonor or loss. So it would be a compelling desire for the honor of God. Third, he says the spiritual man wants to carry his cross.

He says many Christians accept adversity or tribulation with a sigh and call it their cross, forgetting that such things come alike to saint and sinner. The cross is that extra adversity that comes to us as a result of our obedience to Christ. I'll skip down some of the fourth.

He says, again, a Christian is spiritual when he sees everything from God's viewpoint. Looking at things through God's eyes, of course, we identify God's viewpoint when we immerse ourselves in the scripture and kind of pick up his values and his attitudes toward things. Fifth, he says another desire of the spiritual man is to die right rather than live wrong.

Six, I'm skipping over whole paragraphs here. The desire to see others advance at his expense is another mark of the spiritual man. And the last thing that Tozer identifies here, number seven, is the spiritual man habitually makes eternity judgments instead of time judgments.

That last one is very important because it really colors everything about our choices. If we are looking at eternity instead of time consequences, it makes all the difference in the world in the course we choose for our lives. Not only the larger course of our career, but also the issues of relationship patterns and expenditures of money and time and so forth.

Those things are greatly altered by having a passion to seek after eternal rewards as opposed to temporal rewards. Jesus said, don't seek that food that perishes, but seek that food that endures to everlasting life. So I only read Tozer there to show that he has some similar thoughts to what we were sharing last time.

I also said that there were dominant desires in, I didn't say the spiritual life, but in the principled life. And we identified some of the desires that are dominant in the life of unbelievers and that are unworthy of the believer. And then I also identified several things that a believer should have as dominant desires.

The desire for unbroken communion with God, the desire for the favor of God on his life, the desire for righteousness, the desire for the kingdom of God to be advanced, the desire for God's wisdom and simply the desire for the things of God in general as opposed to the things of man. Jesus said to Peter, you stumble me, Peter, you're a stumbling block to me because you desire or you have a mind for the things of man and not the things of God. And we talked about those things last time.

And that brings us to the point that I had to leave off last time. And I want to talk tonight about the principles of a principled life of a godly life. What are the principles that a godly person is by? Now, let me just say you might wonder what difference I'm making between what I'm calling here principles and what last time I called dominant desires.

I mean, aren't they kind of the same thing? Kind of, yes. But I would make this distinction. A Christian's dominant desires are not always followed.

I might want to be holy all the time and perfect all the time, and that's hopefully a dominating desire in my life. Let's hope it dominates me more than my desire to satisfy my flesh all the time. But I don't always live up to those things that are my dominant desires.

They may be dominant, but they're not seamlessly followed because of weakness. That's what Paul said. The lusts, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the spirit are contrary to each other so that you do not do the things you want.

Our desire is to be completely holy all the time. And yet, for most of us, I think we'd have to testify that we fall short of that. Principles, I believe, are dominant desires that have been elevated to the stage of convictions that will not be violated.

That a person would rather die than violate. Now, you might say, well, that's a little idealistic, isn't it, Steve? Not at all. There have been principled people in all generations until our own.

And there might even be a few around still, though we don't see them very often. Most people would rather do anything than resist temptation. And yet, Christians in the early centuries, certainly, and many, many Christians throughout history, have exhibited conviction or principles that were unbending, that they would not violate.

Now, in a sense, all those things that we call dominant desires, they should be principles to follow, but they are more like motivations. The desire to have fellowship with God, the desire to have God's pleasure, the desire for the things of God. These are more like motivations.

Now I want to talk about actual rules of life that the godly person has and will not break from. Now, I'm going to suggest that there's many of us, maybe most, maybe all of us, who do not yet have the strength of principle in these areas that is appropriate. And that is why we talk about the need to cultivate Christian character.

A cultivated Christian character, a mature Christian character, will be principled in these ways. There are principles that the Christian will stick to and will follow and will sacrifice any other desire, any other options to these principles. And I'd like to go through these and talk about them a little bit, sort of clarify what I understand them to mean.

And I do so not in any sense to make anyone feel condemned. I'm not saying that if people ever violate these things that they're not Christians. I'm saying that if you ever violate these things, you are not principled in the degree that God calls us to become.

And that will define for you a goal. That will define for you what God wants you to become. In many of these, you may already be eminent, but unless you're much more perfect than most Christians, there will be some where we need a little work.

Now, I didn't want to just pick a list out of the top of my head. And so I went rather to the scriptures to identify what God's primary concerns are. And there is a scripture in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament that identifies more than other things what God is concerned about.

Now, when you read the Old Testament laws, you find that God has commanded hundreds of things. There are hundreds of commands that God gave to the Jews. And because there were so many, many of the Jews certainly did not quite know how to prioritize them.

And one of the biggest problems that the prophets complained about and that Jesus himself complained about when he came to the Jews is that they had the priorities wrong. They elevated to the highest priority certain things like washing their hands properly and observing festivals and abstaining from unclean things and paying their tithes. These were things that they became very careful about and would not violate.

These were principles in their lives, the Pharisees especially. But Jesus indicated, and so did the prophets, that you can do all of those things and still be greatly offensive to God. In fact, those very things can become an offense to God if you neglect what Jesus called the weightier matters of the law.

Now, God did not leave the Israelites in the dark about what the weightier matters were. If it was not at all clear to them from the law itself, certainly the prophets who came made no secret of the fact that God had certain things that were his priorities. And it's not so much that he wanted to sacrifice other things for them, but there were just certain things that mattered most to him.

And one of the passages in the Old Testament where this is made very clear, of course, is Micah 6.8. I hope that's a familiar verse to you. Micah 6.8. It is earlier in the passage. Micah is playing sort of the devil's advocate and speaking the words of the rebellious people.

I don't suppose it's correct to say he was playing the devil's advocate. It's probably more correct just to say he was mimicking the complaints and the cynicism of the rebellious Israelites. And asking the question that they are asking, basically saying, what does God want from me? Does he want me to offer thousands of rams? Does he want me to offer

rivers of oil and wine? These were things that were offered in the altar.

In other words, they were insinuating that God, you know, he's very demanding. If he's not pleased with what I'm doing now, what do I have to do? Offer more sacrifices? Offer more of this stuff? And the prophet then answers them for God in verse 8. Micah 6.8. He says, he has showed the old man what is good and what the Lord requires of you. And he boils it down to three things.

He said that you do justice. Or the King James says, do justly, which is as good a way to render it. That you love mercy.

And that you walk humbly with your God. Now, these are the things God wants. Now, they had suggested things like multitudes of sacrifices.

They had suggested, you know, the rituals of the law that the law commanded. You know, shall we increase our observance of these rituals? And the prophet said, no, that's not really what God is desiring from you. Now, this does not mean that God was abrogating the sacrificial system at this point.

It sounded like it sometime in some of the prophets. In Isaiah chapter 1, God said, I don't want any more of your sacrifices. They're an offense to me.

They're obnoxious to me. I can't stand them. They're a burden to me.

Sounds like he just wanted to call off the whole thing. And in Hosea 6.6. The prophet says for God. He says, I desire mercy and not sacrifice.

Which again sounds like God saying he doesn't want sacrifices anymore. But that's not what he's saying. He that can be and probably should be translated.

I desire mercy rather than sacrifice. God's priorities are different. The Jews always wanted to make the highest priority the religious ritual observance.

Because it's easier, believe it or not, to fulfill a religious regimen that only requires certain outward forms of religion. Than it is to really do the thing and be the person that God wants you to be. And being the kind of person that God wants you to be requires that you are a person who does justice.

Who loves mercy. And who walks humbly with God. So we're talking here about justice.

We're talking about mercy or compassion. We're talking about humility. Now, Jesus had a very similar statement.

In fact, it's so similar I'm surprised it wasn't identical. I'm surprised Jesus differed it in the small way that he did. But of course, he's whatever the father wanted to say, he said.

So we'll just give him the right to say it as differently as he wants to. But he was rebuking the scribes and the Pharisees and saying in that passage of Matthew 23. Where there were many rebukes of the scribes and Pharisees, always beginning with the words, woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees.

He said to them in verse 23. That's Matthew 23, 23. He said, woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you pay your tithes of mint and anise and cumin.

But you neglect the weightier matters of the law. And then, depending on the translation you're reading, it should say something like justice, mercy and faithfulness. Now, some translations say faith in the last position there.

Because the Greek word there can be translated faith or faithfulness. And almost all translators of modern translations, I think, understand it to mean faithfulness. And I think that is the correct rendering.

The weightier matters of the law, Jesus said, are justice and mercy. You see, those are the first two things Micah mentioned, too. To do justice, to love mercy.

And then where Micah said, and to walk humbly with your God, Jesus said, the third thing is faithfulness. Now, Jesus isn't trying to eliminate the humility thing. And he's not trying to give a comprehensive list.

What he is saying is the kinds of things that you observe are much less important to God than the kinds of things that you neglect. And he said, these you ought to have done without leaving the other undone. Which meant that they should have observed the weightier matters and they should also not have neglected the lighter matters.

They did very carefully observe the lesser things. But they neglected the greater things. And it's in that next verse that he says, his famous statement, you blind guides or you hypocrites.

He says, you strain at a gnat and you swallow a camel. Now, that imagery is based on the fact that certain animals were unclean to the Jew. A gnat was an unclean animal.

Not all insects were. Locusts were not. But gnats were.

A gnat was an unclean animal. A Jew could not eat one without defiling himself. Be like eating pork.

A camel was also an unclean animal. And what Jesus said is half of what he said was probably literal. He says, you strain at a gnat.

They probably really did that. If a gnat got in their drink, they were very conscientious about not eating unclean foods. And so they would make sure they wouldn't drink the drink until they strained the gnat out of it because they wouldn't want to consume an

unclean animal.

But the other part that Jesus said is, of course, a hyperbole. He said, but you swallow a camel, which is simply to say you're very conscientious about small matters, but you violate in a big way what God is actually calling you to do. So between Micah and Matthews, well, Jesus in Matthew, we have a pretty good beginning of a list of the principles that God really cares about, that God really wants to see functioning as convictions in our lives that we will not violate.

And both lists put justice and mercy at the beginning. And then, of course, we have faithfulness and humility also in those lists. And I like to talk about those four things because I believe those four are truly the weightier matters of the law and they are the principles of a righteous life.

Once you understand God's concern for these things and understand what these things are, it is entirely possible for you to adopt these as principles for life, which you will never violate. Now, when I say you will never violate, that's at best. That's very optimistic.

We all stumble in many ways, James said, and we all do a little less than we should in terms of obedience. But I believe that you can find mature Christians who do not violate these things. And I believe that that's what we need to aim at being.

Jesus certainly didn't violate them. And we're to walk as he walked through the same power. He did the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let's talk about justice for a moment. A lot of Christians think that justice is an undesirable quality because they see it as the polar opposite of mercy. This is probably a result of some of the preaching we've had.

I know that a lot of evangelists over the years I've heard have made this a strong point. When we stand before God, we don't want justice because if we get justice, we'll go to hell. So we want mercy from God.

And so justice and mercy are seen as like opposite things. And justice is the undesirable thing. And mercy is the desirable thing.

It's interesting, though, that both Micah and Jesus put justice on the list first of things that are more important, the most important things to God. In fact, as you read the prophets of the Old Testament, you come away with a very profound sense of God's passion that justice be followed. Now, justice and mercy are not opposites.

They are two parts of one kind of character. And I'll try to demonstrate how this is so. First of all, I'd like to define justice.

Now, this is not a dictionary definition, but I don't think you'd get a better one. Justice basically has to do with rights. And injustice is a violation of somebody's rights.

Therefore, justice, a commitment to to live under the principles of justice means you will not violate the rights of another person. Now, this raises another question that Christians get confused about. Isn't it the case that we don't have any rights? I mean, we've died with Christ.

Dead men have no rights. Right. So so how can we talk about rights in the context of Christian behavior? Well, first of all, there are rights.

It's true that we have forfeited all of our rights before God by sin. We don't even have the right to live. The wages of sin is death, and therefore we deserve to die.

By sinning, we have forfeited all of our rights before God. And whatever we receive from him is mere mercy. But horizontally, God wants us to observe that people do have rights.

He doesn't want us to focus on our own too much. As we shall see as we go along here, but he does want us to be aware of others. If it was the case that we had no rights, let me say, let's say I had no rights.

Then that would mean I have no right to my property. I have no right to my life. I have no right to my reputation.

Therefore, if you steal my property or if you take my life, if you kill me or if you destroy my reputation with false testimony against me, you've done no wrong because you violated no rights. If you come into my house and take everything out of my house and carry it off, I can't call that wrong unless I have more of an intrinsic right to those things than you do. The very fact that the Bible says do not steal presupposes the existence of property rights.

The very fact that the Bible says you should not commit murder presupposes the fact of a right to live. Unless, of course, a person forfeits that life by doing something worthy of death. And that's when capital punishment comes in.

But we do have rights. Now, the Christian is called to relate to his rights much differently than a non-Christian would be prone to do or even than we're likely to want to do. And that comes to where we show mercy.

But let me just say that justice, a life principled by justice, is a life that is observant of the rights of others and is determined not to violate them. That means that I will not violate your property rights. I will not violate your right to your life.

I will not violate the right to your reputation by bearing false witness against you. Actually, all of the ten commandments of the second table, actually the fifth, sixth,

seventh, and eighth and ninth commandments are all about this. They're all about justice.

Honor your father and your mother. Why? Because it's only right. It's only fair.

They have the right to be honored by those that they brought into the world and that they reared. To not honor them is to deprive them of a right. And that's an injustice.

It's to violate a right that they have. Thou shalt not murder. Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness. We've already brought up a few of these examples.

All of these have to do with the violation of someone's rights. The right to live. The right to have one's marriage.

Not violated by his neighbor. The right to his property. The right to his reputation.

These are rights that people have. And if I'm a just man, if I'm a person of justice, I will not violate these rights. And it is when those rights are violated that a wrong has been done.

A wrong is simply the violation of a right. And many people think that they have been wronged when they have not been wronged because they have not really had a real right violated. You know the story Jesus told in Matthew chapter 20 about the guy who had a vineyard and he needed some workers.

So he went out in the morning and hired some. He said, work all day, I'll give you a penny. That was denarius.

It was a normal wage for a laboring person in those days. And then he went out later in the day and there were some more people unemployed. He brought them in.

He says, come work for me for the rest of the day and I'll give you what I want to give you. And at four different points during the day, he hired others in to come to work in his vineyard. And he always just promised them vaguely he'll give them whatever is right.

Well, at the end of the day, he called those who had worked only one hour to be paid first. And those who had worked longest were the last in line to be paid. And when he paid those who had worked only one hour, he gave them a denarius.

The same amount he'd promised to the ones who'd worked all day. And so the ones who worked all day got it in their mind. Well, these guys worked only an hour.

They got a denarius. He's being very generous. He'll give us certainly more than that.

And when it came their turn, they got a denarius to the very thing he'd promised them. And they began to grumble. And they said, listen, we've endured the heat of the day and we get only the same pay that these guys who've only worked one hour.

And the owner said to him, to these grumblers, is it not within my rights to do what I want with what is mine? Are you greedy because I'm generous? He said, I gave you what was fair. I gave you what you agreed to. Now, they felt that they'd been wronged.

But they had not been wronged. Why? They had no right to the thing they were hoping for. They were hoping he'd give them more than he promised.

But he only owed them what he had promised. And so they took it as a wrong. When you feel that people have wronged you, many times you're probably wrong yourself.

You probably simply have imagined that you have certain rights that are not really yours. And people have not shared your imagination on that and have not acted like you have those rights. And you take up a grievance about it.

But you wrong somebody when you violate their rights. It's interesting, when Jesus had that man in peril say, is it not mine to do with that which is mine? Again, another affirmation of property rights. If a person has legal money that he got legally that's his, it's his to do with what he wants to do with it.

Now, of course, I'm speaking in terms of horizontal relationships. Before God, that's all different. Everything we have is God's and so forth.

We'll talk about that at another point in this discussion. Right now I'm talking about in terms of human relations. It's interesting that when Jesus pointed out justice and mercy and faithfulness as the way to manage the law, all of these have to do with human relationships.

They all have to do with relationship because relationship is what God cares most about. And relationships are damaged and destroyed by the failure to live by these principles. It is a great reproach to the gospel that Christians in churches have as many relationship problems as do unbelievers in many cases.

You find when I first came to this church that we're sitting in many years ago, a different church was meeting here than is here now. But I was here for a while and I later learned that two women who were sisters of each other were both members of this church. And they had not been on speaking terms for years.

One of them was offended by the other. Maybe they're both offended by each other. I never heard why.

All I know is both their families were here in church every Sunday, but neither was on

speaking terms with the other. I thought, what a reproach this is. Both of them were nice families.

Who knows what it was they were upset about. I don't know. But that's just like the pettiness of the world.

Jesus said, if you bring your gift to the altar and there you remember that someone has something against you, you leave your gift there. You don't go. You don't worship God yet.

It's too early for that. You go and make it right with your brother. Now, if someone has something against you, it's usually because you've wronged them.

And you need to have this concern for justice that you will not wrong your brother. And if you have wronged him, you're going to go back and make it right with him. You're not going to leave it outstanding.

So as far as God is concerned, he requires us to be just in our dealings and to right any wrongs that we have committed, even as a higher priority than offering a sacrifice of worship to him. It shows that our horizontal relationships are one of the, well, probably the top priority in God's list of concerns for us. Now, a person of justice.

There's a couple of features of justice I think I want to comment on. There's a lot more I could, but I want to cover some more area than just this. In Deuteronomy 16, in, of course, the law, God said through Moses this to the children of Israel.

In verse 20, this is Deuteronomy 16, 20. It says, You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the Lord your God has given you. Now, that could have been a summary of the whole law, almost.

You shall do what is altogether just. If you do that, of course, you won't commit adultery, you won't steal, you won't bear false witness, you won't kill, you won't dishonor your parents. There are other things besides justice, but not many.

Justice is a principal concern of God and one of the major convictions and principles that must govern a Christian's life. If somebody deserves to have you do a certain thing for them, then you must do it, no matter how painful or how costly it is to do it. In Matthew chapter 1, in verse 19, we read of Joseph when he learned that Mary was pregnant and he did not yet know by what means, but he had a theory.

It says he was a just man and he was minded to put her away privately so that he wouldn't make a big spectacle of it. Now, how is that just? It almost sounds merciful rather than just. It would seem she had violated their betrothal.

It would seem that justice would be to have her stoned. That's what the law would

require. But I think the reason it says he was a just man in being kind to her this way is that she had no doubt protested her innocence to him.

We don't read of it, but I doubt that she would leave him in the dark about this. And therefore, she no doubt was protesting innocence. And while he didn't know whether she was innocent or not, he seems to have been willing to give her the benefit of the doubt.

If there is a doubt, the just thing is to give some of the benefit of the doubt. The benefit of the doubt means that you're not sure that someone has done something wrong. You may suspect that they have.

You may even have some reason to believe they have. But there's also some reason to believe they may not have. Therefore, there's doubt.

And giving the benefit of the doubt simply means that you make a judgment of charity in the matter, that you choose to treat them as if the more favorable story is true. And so, since there is some doubt, there is a benefit to that doubt for them that would not accrue to them if all the evidence was against them and there was no doubt. Now, that means, of course, that when you pass along information about other people, many times an issue of justice may be necessary to observe.

We sometimes probably are involved in gossip or passing along a rumor that may hurt somebody's reputation in the eyes of another. When we don't really know for sure. I think Joseph didn't really know for sure.

I really believe that most men would know for sure the wrong thing in that situation, would certainly not listen to her story. But Joseph was a just man. He was willing to hear her out, willing to let her say what she did.

And though he wasn't sure, he'd give her the benefit of the doubt and just put her away privately and not try to bring any great reproach upon her. What this means is that we are to be seamlessly fair and just in all of our dealings with people. In dealing with our children.

In dealing with all of our obligations. Our employers. Our neighbors.

Our husbands and wives, of course. And there are rights that exist. Do you know husbands and wives have rights that they have to honor with each other? Paul said that in 1 Corinthians chapter 7. He said, let the wife show due benevolence toward her husband and likewise the husband toward his wife because he says the wife doesn't have the right over her own body, but her husband does.

Likewise, the husband does not have the right over his own body, but his wife does. Now, the word he uses is actually authority. Exousia, you know, they have authority over the body.

But the word authority just means right. You have the right to your wife's body, to your husband's body. More than they do.

And therefore, to not honor that right is to deprive and is to do an injustice. Injustices can be done at many levels in many relationships, but the person who is principled will want to make sure that those injustices are not done by him or her. Because it matters to God more than many think.

A person who's passionate about justice will be outspoken about it as well. John the Baptist is a good example. There was an injustice done by Herod to his brother.

He'd stolen his wife. And John the Baptist pestered him ceaselessly. In fact, so much so that John eventually was martyred because of his making a pest of himself.

But in Luke chapter three, 19, it tells us that that's not the only issue that John complained about when he went to Herod. It says he rebuked Herod for every evil thing Herod did. That must have been time consuming.

But he was he was outspoken against injustice. And I believe that Christians not only need to make sure that they are not violators of others rights, but they care about justice like God does and become outspoken advocates of those who cannot defend their own rights. I mean, the obvious example that comes to mind in our current evangelical society would be speaking out for the rights of the unborn.

Because they are human, they have a right to live and to kill them is wrong. It's a violation of their rights and they can't speak up for themselves. And so many Christians, fortunately, have taken it upon themselves to be very vocal about the need for justice in this matter and to speak up for the rights of others.

There are other cases, too. When you see a violation of somebody's rights taking place and they seem to be incapable of defending their own rights. Then for you to speak up on their behalf is legitimate.

In Jeremiah, one of the complaints God registered against the people of Israel whom he was going to judge throughout the book is that they were not just, that they were guilty of injustice. A lot of times this is manifest in the courts because the judges would take bribes and therefore the poorer people, especially widows and orphans, were not always able to get justice on their side. Because the judges would rule in favor of whoever could grease their palms, not whoever really had justice on their side.

And in that context, Jeremiah complains in Jeremiah chapter five, verse 20 says, run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem. See now and know and seek in her open places. If you can find a man, if there is anyone who executes justice.

Who seeks the truth and I will pardon her. Now, executing justice is equated with seeking

the truth in this case, being concerned that true justice is done. In Jeremiah nine, in verse three, there's an interesting phrase that God uses, says in their bow, speaking of the wicked, they have bent their tongue for lies.

They are not valiant for the truth on the earth, for they proceed from evil to evil and they do not know me, says the Lord. These people were not valiant for the truth. They weren't outspoken and zealous to see that right prevail.

And therefore, they were unlike God, because God is passionate about justice. And so is the believer who is becoming like Christ. Christ spoke out against injustice a great deal.

It's interesting because he didn't speak out so much against people who were persecuting him. But he certainly got angry when he saw other injustices done to others. At the same time, he was willing to lay down his own rights without complaining.

And that brings us to the second principle of a godly and principled life. And that is the principle of mercy or compassion. What I said that mercy and justice are not opposites.

Some people think they are, but I do not believe they are. Both justice and mercy relate to the issue of rights. And here's how they do so.

As I said, justice is a commitment. If you have justice in your character, if you're a just person. Justice is the commitment not to violate the rights of another.

Mercy is the willingness to let somebody else violate yours. So that mercy is not the opposite of justice, it's just another step beyond it. In the same direction.

You not only will not violate another's rights, but you will allow another, if necessary, to violate yours. You'll surrender yours. And the surrender of rights is not simply a loss on your part, but a gain on their part.

You're not just giving up your rights, you're giving away your rights. Jesus said, give to everyone that asks you. If a man sues you at law and wants to take away your coat, give him your cloak also.

He said, if a man strikes you on one cheek, turn the other cheek also. He said, if a man compels you to go one mile, go two. All of these statements are found in rapid succession in Matthew chapter 5. And they all have one thing in common.

They all have to do with giving up your rights. But not just giving up, but giving away your rights. Under the Roman law, as you probably know, a Roman soldier was entitled to press any civilian into service to carry his gear for one mile.

That was the limitation of what the law allowed. A soldier could make a man carry his gear for a mile. But if he had to go more than a mile, he had to find another guy to carry it the next mile.

Because the man was free to walk away after he carried the gear for one mile. Well, Jesus said, if someone compels you to carry his stuff for one mile, carry it two. Now, this not only gives up your own right to be free after carrying it one mile, it gives the man who's compelling you a right he didn't already have.

He didn't have the right to make you carry it a second mile. You just give him that right. You benefit him.

God doesn't call us to give up our rights just as an ascetic exercise. It's out of love for others so that others might benefit. We give up our rights.

We do it out of compassion for them, out of mercy. When Jesus said, give to everyone that asks you, of course, he's talking in terms of beggars. The money you have is rightfully yours.

You have the right to spend it on yourself or your family or your stuff, or at least at your discretion. Someone says, could you give me some money? He doesn't have any right to that money. When you give him the money, what do you do? You give away your right to spend that money and you give it to him.

And now he has the right to spend the money how he wants to. You've given him a right he didn't have at your own expense. When someone strikes you on one cheek, and the assumption here, of course, is you're innocent of anything.

You haven't provoked this. They have done an injustice to you. They violated your rights.

And you actually, under the law, had the right and justice would agree with this. You have the right to strike him back on the cheek. That's what pure justice would allow.

He struck you on the cheek. You strike him on the cheek. Everything squared away.

But Jesus said, if a man strikes you on one cheek, turn the other cheek to him too. In other words, offer him the other. He didn't have the right to strike you the first time.

And now you have a right to retaliate. You give up that right to retaliate and give him permission to do it again. He doesn't have the right to do it, but now you're giving him the right to do it.

I doubt if very often it will happen. I've only had the opportunity one time to test this. When I was struck once and I turned the other cheek and the guy didn't hit me.

I suspect it would be that way more often than not. But the fact is, by turning the other cheek, you are giving away your right so that he now has a right he didn't have before. If someone wants to sue you at court and take away your garment, give him more than just your garment.

Now you can be sure there's someone suing you. They're suing you for as much as they think they have come. I never heard of anyone suing for less than what they thought they could get or what they thought they deserved.

So if he's asking for your coat, that's what he thinks he deserves. He doesn't deserve more. He doesn't even claim to deserve more.

You give him more. This is mercy. When you give up your right so someone else can have more rights.

Now, what if somebody wrongs you? Let's say a Christian brother or sister wrongs you and violates your rights. Is it most Christian and most merciful to just grin and bear it, take it and say nothing? Not necessarily. Because Jesus said, if your brother sins against you, rebuke him.

And if he repents, forgive him. And he indicated in another place in Matthew 18 that if he doesn't repent, you should take further witnesses. You should take him before the whole church and try to get him to repent.

Well, isn't that kind of hanging on to a grievance? No. This is an attempt at restoration. That's merciful, too.

Discipline of a rebellious child is not unmerciful. And rebuking a rebellious Christian who is in sin is not unmerciful. That person needs to be brought to repentance and they need nothing more than they need that at that moment.

And it can be a merciful thing for you to actually hold somebody's feet to the fire, at least up to a point, to get them to repent. At the same time, though, it should not be because you're concerned about getting your rights back. You should in your heart be prepared to give up your rights out of compassion and mercy to somebody who doesn't deserve them.

But out of equal compassion and mercy for that person, you need to be prepared to restore them. Because by sinning against you, they sin against God and that damages their relationship with God. And if they're not confronted about that, their relationship with God may suffer permanently.

And since relationship with God matters more than anything else, it's an act of kindness and love to not let somebody go. Just like it's an act of kindness to discipline your child. The Bible says if you discipline your child, you'll save his soul from hell.

Now, does a child like to be disciplined? Not generally. The Bible says no discipline seems joyous at the present, but grievous. But afterwards, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised by it.

It's never pleasant to the person being disciplined, but it can be the most loving thing. He that spares the rod hates his son, the Bible says. So being merciful doesn't always mean you just let someone off and never confront their misbehavior.

Being merciful means that you seek their good and you don't concern yourself too much as to whether you get all your rights observed. In fact, you're willing to lose them if necessary. Now, when Christians say we don't have any rights, what they're grasping at is this truth.

They're just getting it wrong. We do have rights, and that's why it's wrong for someone to steal from us, because we have rights. But when Christians say we don't have any rights, they're trying to balance out this teaching.

That if someone takes something from you, let them have it as if you didn't have rights. It's not that we don't have rights, but we are called upon to act as if we had no rights at times. Because before God, we really have given up all our rights when we sinned.

We deserve to die, and once you die, you don't have any more rights anyway. But as far as our life of conscience before God and relating to others, we must act as if we have no rights. But we must act toward others as if they have rights.

That's where justice and mercy must both be in our character. Mercy in our character means we act like we don't have rights at times. Justice means we make sure we don't act like they don't have rights.

We observe their rights, we honor their rights. Mercy is exhibited scripturally in two ways principally. Both of them are found in one portion of the Sermon on the Mount, in the version of that sermon, if it is the same sermon, which is found in Luke.

Luke doesn't call it the Sermon on the Mount, and some people think it's actually a different sermon, which it may be, but it has many of the same components as the Sermon on the Mount, and there's some dispute as to whether it's the same one or not. The Sermon on the Mount is found in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. This one is found in Luke chapter 6. And in verses 35 through 38, we see both aspects of mercy expressed by Jesus here as something required of us. Verses 35, did I say? I'm looking now for the notes here.

Yeah, 35 through 38. This print is too small for me. I'm getting too old.

Here we go. But love your enemies and do good and lend, hoping for nothing in return. And your reward will be great.

And you will be the sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the unthankful and the evil. Therefore, be merciful, just as your father also is merciful. And here's how he expands on that.

How do you be merciful like he is? He says, judge not and you shall not be judged. Condemn not and you shall not be condemned. Forgive and you'll be forgiven.

Give and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be given to your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

You want mercy shown to you by God? You better show mercy to others. How is this mercy shown? Judge not, condemn not, forgive, give. Now, judge not, condemn not, forgive.

Those are all kind of in the same category. When someone sins against you, rather than condemn them, you forgive them. Why? Because you want God to forgive you.

And the Bible makes it very clear that he will if you forgive and he won't if you don't. There's many places that God said that. Jesus said that in Mark 11, 25 and 26.

He said, when you stand praying, forgive if you have ought against anyone, that your Heavenly Father also may forgive your trespasses. But if you will not forgive, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses. Jesus said the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, excuse me, Matthew 6. After he gave the Sermon on the Mount, he gave the same teaching.

And even gave a lengthy parable to make the same point in Matthew chapter 18. The story of the man who was forgiven a great amount but wouldn't forgive his fellow servant of a small amount. The man had his forgiveness revoked and was thrown into prison by the king.

And Jesus said, so shall my father do to you if you do not from the heart forgive every man his brother. In Ephesians chapter 4, Paul says that we should forgive others even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us. If we have been forgiven, we should forgive.

If we hope to continue to be forgiven, we must forgive. Forgiveness of others is part of being merciful. That's the kind of mercy we really hope for from God.

The other part of mercy is more tangible. The Bible uses the word mercy of the act of tangibly helping those who are in need. In the famous story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus made the comment, love your neighbors, you love yourself.

And a Pharisee standing by said, well, who's my neighbor? Hoping that the definition would not be too broad. And he was told this story of the Good Samaritan. And we know the story so I don't have to tell it.

But the point is that two men found a man in great need and avoided helping him. Another man went to great pains to be sure the man was safe and cared for and met his

needs in tangible ways. At the end of that story, Jesus said to the man who had asked him the original question, who then was a neighbor to the man who fell among thieves? And the man answered, he that had mercy upon him.

That's the biblical concept of mercy, especially in the Old Testament. Showing mercy on someone was actually helping somebody who didn't particularly have a claim on your assistance, but needed it. Especially the poor.

In the Old Testament, mercy is often associated with assistance to the poor, meaning giving them stuff. In Proverbs, just a couple of examples, you could find many more in the Old Testament. But just to illustrate the need to help the poor as something that a merciful person is expected to do and will do if indeed they are merciful.

In Proverbs 22, 9, it says, he who has a generous eye will be blessed for he gives his bread to the poor. A generous eye, actually the literal in the Hebrew says a good eye. The New King James, but there's another edition of the New King James is a bountiful eye.

But the idea here is a person who's generous, a person who's merciful. He sees the poor in need and he helps them. He gives his bread to the poor.

In Proverbs also, chapter 28 and verse 27, it says, he who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses. The need to show mercy to the poor is a great one. I don't know which verse it is in Proverbs.

There's one in Proverbs that says he that has mercy on the poor lends to the Lord. And the Lord will repay him. But having mercy on the poor is helping the poor, doing something for them.

And also in the New Testament, we have the same obligations laid upon us everywhere, really. But a couple of very classic passages where this is underscored is in James. One of them is in James chapter two, verses 15 through 17.

Where James said, if a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food and one of you says to them, depart in peace, be warmed and filled. But you do not give them the things which are needed for the body. What does that profit? Thus also faith by itself is dead if it does not have works.

You may say you have faith, but if you see people who are destitute and poor and don't have food or clothing and all you can do is say, be warmed and filled. And yet you have that which you can help them with. Your faith is empty and empty faith doesn't save anyone, sadly.

Another passage very much like it is in First John, chapter three. And there John says in verse 17, but whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother in need and shuts up

his heart from him. How does the love of God abide in him? If you do not help a person who is in desperate need, although you have that which you could help him with.

How does the love of God dwell in you? Of course, it's rhetorical. It doesn't. You're not merciful.

A godly person will be committed to mercy. It means that even though I really had plans for this money for something I was hoping to do with it, this person clearly has more need than I. I will give up my rights to use the money the way I prefer it in order that this person who has no innate right to it may have the right to feed his family or himself or whatever. And this is what mercy really amounts to.

So justice and mercy are important things. Now, notice there is a good example in the scripture that I read in Luke six, verse thirty five of both of these things, because Jesus said lend expecting nothing in return. Now, if I am a just person and you lend me money, I will do anything I have to to make sure that I pay it back because you deserve to have it paid back.

That's a right you have. But you lend it without acting as if you don't have a right to be paid back, expecting nothing in return. So if somebody borrows from me, I have to act as if I have no right to be repaid.

But if I borrow from someone else, I must commit myself to their right to be repaid. I must make sure that I pay back what I have borrowed. It is incumbent on me because of justice.

It is incumbent on me because of mercy that I don't require someone to pay me back. But justice demands that I pay back any loan that I ever incur any debt that I incur. OK, let's go on to talk a little bit about humility.

I'd like to talk about more things than these, but we have limited time. What is humility? Well, essentially, humility is a low self-image. Now, that's ironic because many people, many Christians teach that having a low self-image is to be avoided at all costs, that having a low self-image is the cause of all of our personal problems.

James Dobson in one of his books said low self-image is the cause of all criminal activity. In fact, in the same book, which was, I think, Hide or Seek, Dr. Dobson said, he said, if I could write out a prescription for all the women in the world and hand it to them, he says, I would write out a high dosage of self-worth. He says, I have no doubt this is what they need most.

With evangelical leaders talking that way, it's no wonder that Christians think that that's true. It sounds very much a defection from Christianity, however, to say that what women in the world need most is self-image, self-worth, since the Bible seems to teach that what they need most is God and righteousness and holiness and Jesus, and they

need to be saved. But there is a new gospel, and it's taught within evangelical churches.

It's the gospel of self-worth and self-image. In fact, Reverend Schuller at the Crystal Cathedral wrote a book called *Self-Esteem, the New Reformation*, in which he suggests that just like the gospel had to be reclaimed in the days of Luther, in the days of the Reformation, because it had been lost and Luther helped to restore knowledge of the true gospel, he says we're in need of another similar reformation of the church. We have to recover the true gospel of self-esteem.

Well, I don't know about you, but that makes me very uncomfortable when Christians or professing Christians preach another gospel than that in the Bible, because there are strong words against that in Scripture. It is, of course, the gospel of the world, the feel-good gospel, the make-sure-that-you're-not-too-humble gospel. It's the gospel that really makes Jesus an offender, and Paul too, because it's the gospel that says you should never be a doormat, but Jesus acted like a doormat.

So did Paul. It's the gospel that says you should never run yourself down. But Paul said, Christ came to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

And he said in 2 Corinthians 12-11, he says, I'm not a wit behind the super-apostles, though I am nothing. Now, the new gospel of self-esteem tells you you'd never say that you were nothing. Paul said he was nothing.

In fact, he said in another place, if anyone thinks he's something when he's nothing, he deceives himself. And yet many Christians believe that we need to convince ourselves that we are something, when in fact we can't be any better than Paul and he was nothing, he said. Now, let me make something very clear.

There is some truth in some angles of what is said currently about self-image and self-worth, because it is possible for you to deny the truth in order to be overly humble. We are warned in Colossians 2 to beware of those that would advocate a false humility. And it is possible to have a lower view of yourself than the Bible allows you to have, than God declares.

In which case, to grovel in a false humility is not real humility at all. It's simply lack of lack of willingness to believe what the Bible says. Our self-worth needs to be determined and defined with reference to our relationship to God.

There was once a man, he's dead now, but he was a friend of mine many years ago who was a very seemingly very humble Christian. I observed him over a period of months, years even. I was very impressed that he seemed to be the picture of Christian humility.

And I asked him once, you know, how it was that he managed to be as humble as he was. And he said, well, so if you compare yourself with other Christians, it'd be a little hard to be humble sometimes, because other Christians often are more carnal and, you

know, have more failures, you know, than you and I do. But he said, if you compare yourself with Jesus, it's very easy to be humble.

You see, if my older son and my younger son, who are different in age by seven years, and one is a child and one is a young man, if they decide to have a contest to see who could jump the highest, there's no question but that my older son could jump higher than my younger son could. And he might feel tempted to congratulate himself for that. However, if the goal that both were jumping toward was that they jump over a skyscraper, they would both fall equally short.

If we're comparing ourselves with one another, we may find something in which to boast. But if we're comparing ourselves with God, even the best of us is hopelessly, miserably worthless, really. Now, humility comes from seeing ourselves with reference to what we are required to be, and that is be like Jesus.

If we look at ourselves in light of what most Christians are, some of us might feel rather good about ourselves. I see a lot of failure over there. I see a lot of compromise over there.

I'm not failing like that. I'm not compromising in those ways. And I can feel pretty good about myself, but that's not legitimate.

For two reasons, at least. One is that on the day of judgment, God isn't going to stand me up next to those people and say, well, you know, you did better than them, I guess, lots into heaven. He's going to stand me up against the standard of his perfect holiness of his own character.

In which case, it's like trying to jump over a skyscraper. Nothing to be proud of there. And there's another thing, too, and that is that whatever there is of which you or I might be tempted to boast in ourselves, to do so is to ignore the plain fact that these things are not of ourselves.

Paul put it this way in First Corinthians four, seven. He said, who makes you to differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? In other words, whatever you have that makes you different or superior to someone else, you don't really have it. You don't own it.

It's a gift. You didn't earn it. You didn't deserve it.

Humility looks itself in a proper perspective. Now, a false humility would actually go so far as to deny one's genuinely commendable attributes. If someone commends you because you're talented in a certain area and you really are, but you feel the need to deny that you have any talent in that area.

That is that's not that's not genuine humility. That's a false humility. That's that's just not going with the truth.

Now, you might say, well, how am I supposed to respond to a compliment if it's a true compliment? Well, I don't know. But what if you're really humble? You're not going to be glorying in things that you don't have any legitimate right to glory in. Perhaps you'd say, you know, I have, in fact, been blessed in that area.

I've been very fortunate. God has given me that gift, but it's his. It's only on loan to me.

I don't I can't take any credit for it. I didn't I was born this way, you know, or I may have even developed it. But God has given me all the opportunities that I had.

I don't deserve any of the credit for anything that I possess. What do I have that I did not receive? The answer is nothing. Everything I have, I received every breath I take.

I have received from God. And therefore, God is jealous over his glory, by the way, and he doesn't like us taking it for ourselves. It's very important that we keep ourselves in proper perspective and that we're not assessing ourselves by some standard that isn't the standard God's going to use, because then we'll be deceiving ourselves.

If any man thinks he's something when he has nothing, he deceives himself. Paul said, well, what what is humility like in the character? What does it do? What's a humble person going to be doing regularly and consistently? Well, humility is self effacing, but self effacing doesn't mean running oneself down all the time. It's more simply not trying to be prominent.

Not trying to think more of yourself than you really legitimately are to be thought of. If you're thinking about yourself all the time, you're acting like you're important enough to think about all the time. And you're wrong.

You're not that important. Now, you have value to God and he's got a wonderful destiny for you. But in this broad scheme of things, you're not all that important.

I'm not all that important. I'm dispensable. I'm expendable.

If I died, the kingdom of God would go on. God could have these stones raise up replacements for any of us, John implied. And that being so, it means that I don't I don't think to I don't consider myself important enough to be thinking about and talking about and comparing others with and so forth all the time.

Self effacing means kind of self forgetful. And and when someone compliments you, it's not so much that you're there to deny the compliment. You're just amazed that anyone would.

Actually, when when you're most humble. I'm not always very humble, but but when I'm

when I am most humble compliments embarrass me. They don't puff me up.

They embarrass me because of the awareness of how really inappropriate they are. How undeserved they are. It's kind of embarrassing to be complimented when you know yourself better than the person is complimenting, you know, if they knew you as well as you do.

They'd withhold the compliment and give it to someone more worthy of it. Self effacing just means you're not making a big deal about you. There's good examples of that in Scripture.

When Moses was before the burning bush and God announced the noble purpose that he had for Moses to perform. Moses answer in Exodus 311 was who am I that I should stand before Pharaoh? Who am I that I should deliver the people of Israel out of Egypt? Now, the answer that could have been Moses, don't you know, you're mighty in word and deed. You're educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.

You're of noble birth. You're a natural born leader. That's who you are.

And all those things were true, by the way. They were true. But they were unimportant.

Moses felt totally inadequate and unqualified to do something so great. Now, it's interesting that God, when Moses said, who am I to do this? God didn't say, now, Moses, what's wrong with you? You've got a problem with your self esteem here. You need to realize that you're a highly educated man, a natural born leader.

You're a strong man. Your natural strength is not abated, though you're 80 years old and it won't even be 40 years from now when you're 120. You're an incredible specimen.

A brilliant literary guy, you know. A good preacher. Miracle worker.

That's who you are. God didn't answer that way. When Moses said, who am I? God said, I will be with you.

Moses said, I can't talk. Well, God says, I'll be with your mouth. The issue is not who are you? The issue is who's with you.

Who is God? That's the issue. And Moses did not think highly of himself. Nor did David in 2 Samuel.

Chapter seven. When Nathan, the prophet, told David that he would be that God was going to raise up of his seed, essentially the Messiah, following a long line of dynastic kings from David's loins. David was overwhelmed by the mercy of God to him in this.

And David said this in 2 Samuel 7. And verse 18. So then King David went in and sat before the Lord and he said, who am I? Oh, Lord, God. And what is my house that you

have brought me this far? He just he didn't he didn't think, well, of course, of course, God, of course, you'd make me the leader.

I'm a man after your own heart. Always have been for my youth. I write great music, too.

And and I'm a good warrior. Naturally, you'd want a good warrior as a leader. I'm a really a good figurehead for this nation.

I can rally the support of these people. He says, who am I that you would do this kindness to me? Saul before him had had that kind of humility initially. When Samuel had told Saul that he would be king of Israel, Saul said, what? I'm of the most insignificant tribe in Israel.

My family is the most insignificant family in the tribe. And Sam said, nevertheless, God has chosen you. Well, later on, of course, Saul got a big head about himself, thought he was pretty important, intruded into the priest's function wrongly and so forth.

And Samuel came to him and said, when you were little in your own eyes, God called you to be the shepherd of Israel. But now. Now that you reject the word of the Lord, God is rejecting you from being king.

Being little in your own eyes is a good thing because it's realistic. To see yourself as of small significance is a very healthy. Attitude and it's it's healthy because it's appropriate.

It's healthy because it's true. And to think otherwise is to be self-deceived and to be proud. There's few qualities that are more lovely in a person when they are present than humility.

True humility, that person isn't spending their whole time running themselves down because they're just not thinking about themselves enough to do that all the time. They don't spend their time thinking about whether they're great or small or anything. They just they just assume themselves to be of little significance and go on with the business of serving others and serving God.

That's what humility must be. The apostle Paul said that he was the least of the apostles. He said he wasn't even worthy to be an apostle because he persecuted the church.

There were other things Paul said like that. But the point is. Low self-esteem of the proper sort is an essential.

To Christian character. And God gives grace to the humble. But he resists the proud.

Oh, there are many, many things we could say about this because the Bible has many things to say about it. But let me just say that there's some some evidences of humility. One is that a person is really humble, will be contented and thankful.

The simple reason for that is. They're not thinking about all the ways that they've been deprived, how many things they deserve that they're not getting. They're amazed they're getting anything.

They don't think themselves more important than others and they can't understand why they receive more mercies than others. If you are discontented, it is because you suspect that you deserve something more than you got. But why should you? Why would you deserve better than what you've got? You deserve worse than what you've got.

A humble person knows that a humble person takes that into account. A humble person knows that he deserves nothing but hell, really. As far as what I have earned by my own conduct, I've earned hell.

That's all I deserve. If I did not go to hell but had no other benefits given to me ever, I'd be getting far better than what I deserve. Infinitely better than what I deserve.

But if I don't go to hell and I also have some measure of comfort, some measure of blessing in my life, that's astounding. That's not that's not occasion for contentedness. That's occasion for thankfulness.

A contented person believes that he is not being wronged. He doesn't deserve better than what he's got. And therefore, he's contented.

A thankful person goes further than that and says, not only do I not have it worse than I deserve, I have it way better than I deserve. That's what thankfulness is. It's an appreciation for mercy in God and others.

A humble person will be contented and will be thankful. And when you are not contented or thankful, count on it. It is because you are thinking too highly of yourself.

You're thinking you deserve better. Than what you got that either God or somebody else is depriving you of something you justly deserve. You're not thinking right.

You're not thinking truth. And you're certainly not humble. The fact that almost everyone you meet is also discontented and unthankful doesn't change the fact that it's absence of humility to be discontented and to be unthankful.

Because the humble person says, how can I? I mean, I don't deserve these good things. I mean, if I don't have any money at all, but I also don't, I'm not crippled. I know people who are crippled.

Am I better than them? Not at all. I know people who are blind. I'm not blind.

Am I better than them? No. Well, do I deserve to have eyesight and they don't? No, that would be hardly true. I don't deserve anything but in touch with reality.

Humility says, who am I that I should have things any better than anyone else? It doesn't mean we reject gifts and mercies and benefits from God. It just means we're astonished by them. And we never would dream of thinking we deserve better.

Discontent and unthankfulness is pride. There's another manifestation of humility that we need to be aware of. And that is true humility manifests in submission to God.

And also to God ordained authority. Submission to God in the sense of resignation to his will. Embracing his will as good for me, even if it's not what I would have preferred.

It's a total recognition of my wormishness before God. Even Jesus in Psalm 22, David speaking, but as in the place of Jesus says, I am a worm and not a man. Some decades ago, some great theologian decided that worm theology, as they called it, was inappropriate.

We need some self-esteem. This idea of thinking of yourself as a worm, it's got to go out the window. Well, David said, I'm a worm.

Jesus said, I'm a worm. I'm not better than they. I'm a worm.

And if I realize that, then I won't consider that I have any rights to protest if God calls me to do something that's unpleasant. Or gives me a lot that is not in pleasant places. And that happens sometimes in 2 Samuel 16.

We have a remarkable instance of this in David, because David was being driven out of his home and out of his kingdom by his son Absalom. Who was also going to seek to kill him. And David knew that things were going pretty badly.

In fact, many of the people that had been on David's side who really owed him a great deal had sided with his enemy Absalom. And were going to fight against him. Even some of his generals and advisors who owed David everything because he'd given them their position and all.

They turned against him and were going to try to kill him along with Absalom. And there was one guy out there throwing dirt at him and rocks, a guy named Shimei, a Benjamite, like Saul had been. And he was saying to David, you're a bloody man, you're getting what you deserve, this is God's judgment on you and blah, blah, blah.

He said, because of the wicked things you did to Saul and his house. Well, that wasn't true at all. David hadn't done anything bad to Saul or Saul's house.

But one of David's generals said, why should this dead dog curse my lord, the king? Shall I go over and take his head off? And David said to him, how long must I bear with you, you sons of Zeruah? He said, if God has told him to curse David, then let him curse. Now, David knew that he was being falsely accused. But he just, he said, listen, God may

have sent him to do this.

This may be something God wants me to go through. If he doesn't, God will vindicate me, he said. If God wants him to stop cursing, God can judge him.

But I'm going to receive this from God's hand. You know why he did? Because he knew that he did deserve this. He didn't deserve it for the reason Shimei was saying.

It had nothing to do with what he'd done to Saul, it had to do with what he'd done to Uriah and Bathsheba. And Nathan the prophet had told him that these kinds of things would happen. The sword will not depart from your house all the days of your life.

And this was simply the fulfillment of that. And David knew he didn't deserve better than this. And he was humbled by his sin.

And he was willing to be resigned to whatever God gave him. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is a remarkable example of this, too, because the angel told her she was going to have a son, of course. And we might think, oh, well, that's great news.

Well, it is great news if circumstances were different than they were. Fact of the matter, she was going to turn up pregnant while unmarried. Now, this could be very embarrassing, to say the least.

I mean, even in our modern society, it's embarrassing if a woman is pregnant, unmarried, but not quite so much as it used to be. But in that society, she could be stoned to death for it. And even if she didn't get stoned, she may wish she had been, because everyone would think she had done criminal things against her fiance.

And certainly she couldn't expect her fiance to stick with her. I mean, by accepting this pregnancy, she was facing possible death, almost certain loss of her marriage and possibly the loss of the respect and trust of all her family and friends. She was facing the possibility of being the laughingstock or a byword on the mouths of everyone in her village.

I mean, this was not an unmixed blessing for her. And yet her answer when she heard it was, behold, the handmaiden of the Lord, be it unto me according to your word. In other words, I'm God's slave.

If that's what he wants from me, so be it. That's what I'll do. Remember Esther? When her uncle Mordecai said, this is what you were brought here to the kingdom for, to go in and and save your people.

But she's got to go into this situation where she could be put to death if she if she hasn't received right. And she says, well, I'll do it. If I perish, I perish.

Just resign to the will of God. This is what God wants me to do. I'll do it if I die.

Then I die. It's just the way you just got to accept that. Humility sees oneself as expendable and sees that obeying God and resigning to his will is what's called for.

But not only to God, but to God ordained authority. We have examples of this in many places in scripture. One place where there's a high concentration of these examples is in first Peter, chapter two and three.

And in particular, first Peter, chapter two. Beginning at verse. Thirteen.

Peter said, therefore, submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake. Whether the king is supreme or to governors as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God that by doing good, you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice.

But as bond servants of God honor, all people love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king's servants. Be submissive to your masters with all fear and not only to the good and gentle ones, but also to the harsh ones. For this is commendable.

If because of conscience toward God, you endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it? When you are beaten for your faults, if you take it patiently. But when you do good and suffer for it and take it patiently, this is commendable before God.

For to this, you were called. Because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow his steps, who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in his mouth, who, when he was reviled, he did not revile again. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but he committed himself to him who judges rightfully.

He just resigned himself to the hands of God. Likewise, in chapter three, wives likewise be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they without a word may be won by the conduct of the wives while they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. And it goes on.

The point here is that we are told to submit to government authorities. Servants are told to submit to their masters, even harsh ones, even unsaved ones. Wives are told to submit to husbands.

In another place where Paul is giving similar instructions, he speaks to children to obey their parents. In other places, we're told to submit to authorities in other spheres like the church. God ordains authorities.

In Romans 13, Paul said that there is no authority but that which God has ordained and he that resists the authority resist the ordinance of God. Now, there are things that certain authorities might say that we must resist because of God, because not all authorities carry out their ordination function as they should. They were ordained to do

good.

Sometimes they do evil. And when they command you do something that's contrary to God, you must resist them. But except in such circumstances, submission to a God ordained authority is submission to God.

Which does not mean that you mistake that person for God. It means you submit to that person as unto the Lord because God has ordained that person to be an authority. You accept that person's authority not for not because of who that person is, but because of who ordained them because of God.

And by accepting and submitting to the authority that God has ordained, you are submitting to God. And the only time that this is not so is when submitting that authority would be the opposite of submitting to God. Obviously, when God is said to do something and that authority is said to do something opposite, then, of course, you cannot submit that person.

You must submit to God instead. So Peter said to the Sanhedrin, we must obey God rather than men, although ordinarily he would have submitted to that authority, but not when they were telling him to do what. God said not to do.

Let's move along now from humility to faithfulness, which is. Faithfulness is integrity, honesty. And first of all, we are called to be loyal to God, faithful to God, even to death.

A faithful person is one who keeps his commitment. A person who has made a promise and can be counted on a person who is as good as their word. You don't need to get them to sign a contract.

They'll keep their word anyway. That's what Jesus was talking about when he said, don't swear at all. Just let your yes be yes.

No, no. But you use oaths or not. You should be as honest.

The Jews used various oaths to keep themselves honest. Jesus said you should be as honest without an oath as you would be if you're under oath. You should be your words should be your bond.

Everything you say you will do, it should be as if you're swearing under oath that you'll do it without having uttered the oath. Because why you because you're honest, because you're faithful, you're a character that can be trusted. Faithfulness means you don't back down when it gets hard to keep your commitments.

We have a commitment to God. We have made a promise to God when we turn to him and repent of our sins and and pledge our lives to him. We have to keep that pledge.

In Revelation 2, 10, Jesus told the church of Smyrna to be faithful unto death. Be faithful

to God unto death and I'll give you the crown of life. In Revelation 17, 14, it says that those who come with Christ.

And who wore on his side in the spiritual battle are those who were said to be called and chosen and faithful. Now, Jesus said, once many are called, fewer chosen. These people are both called and chosen.

And more than that, they're faithful. Those that win God's battles, those that fight on the side of Christ in the spiritual warfare. Those that are honored to be with him are faithful people, people who do not fall away from him.

When a person becomes a Christian, they basically pledge their life to Christ. And he pledges himself to them. It's like a covenant.

It's like a marriage. It's like a covenant. And God never breaks his covenant.

Jesus never breaks his promise. But many times Christians do. And that's unfaithful.

That's departing from faith. And the Bible says if we deny him, he'll deny us. If we're unfaithful to him, then he will be faithful to himself.

And he will deny those who have made themselves enemies when they had, in fact, pledged to be his friends. Faithfulness is manifested in all human affairs as well because we're continually making commitments. We can hardly live our lives without making some kind of commitments.

And these commitments we are required to keep, of course, because we are to be faithful people. In Proverbs chapter 25, verse 19, it says confidence in an unfaithful man is like having a broken foot, a broken tooth or a foot out of joint. Oh, those are great illustrations.

You count on your teeth. Ever been chewing something and suddenly you bit down in your tooth? You found out it had a crack in it or something. There's something wrong with it and it hurt and you didn't expect it to.

You expect your teeth to kind of chew things routinely without ever causing any problems. You got a broken tooth, you find out that it's a tooth you can't rely on. You usually can rely on those molars to crunch stuff up without giving you much pain about it.

But you get a broken one and you rely on them. You don't do it very much longer. You do it one time.

Then you keep your foot on the other side of your mouth. You don't trust it again. You got a foot out of joint.

I don't know if I've had a foot out of joint. I guess sprained ankle would be the same kind of thing. If you have a sprained ankle and you try to walk on it, you find that you go down.

You usually can count on your feet and your ankles. But when you can't, it's a great inconvenience for one thing. And to have confidence in an unfaithful man is like having a broken tooth or a foot out of joint, it says in Proverbs 25.

It also says in Psalms 15.4 that God will dwell in the land of Israel.