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Mercy vs Sacrifice (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg continues his discussion on "Mercy vs Sacrifice" in this segment, focusing on the idea that religious rituals and man-made customs should not be grounds for judging one's spiritual worth. He portrays Jesus as dismissing old Jewish customs and traditions, as well as discussing the difficulties of reconciling the old and new covenants in Christianity. Gregg also touches on the concept of work on the Sabbath, emphasizing that doing good work on any day is not sinful and that people should focus on doing what God wants them to do.

Transcript

While I'm with them, my disciples just don't have any reason to grieve, but they will have reason to grieve later. And when they do, no doubt, they'll miss meals. No doubt fasting will happen then.

Because that's what fasting originally was. When it wasn't... Well, even on the Day of Atonement, the only day that God commanded the Jews to fast on the Day of Atonement, no doubt the fasting was to commemorate their mourning over their sins. It was part of their seeking mercy and grace from God on that particular day of the year for their sins.

It was a sign of mourning. I think John's living continuously in a partial fast, eating nothing but locusts and wild honey, was another way that he depicted the call to repentance and mourning over sin. Just as the sackcloth he wore seemed to suggest it.

Mourning and fasting went together, as prayer and fasting now do. And of course, it's when we have occasion to mourn that we most... our most desire is to pray. Because the circumstances over which we mourn are the things that we seek to remedy by prayer.

Therefore, mourning and prayer and fasting are mostly connected in biblical thought. Jesus is not suggesting that it will become appropriate for the disciples after his departure to lay aside one or two days a week for routine fasts. But rather, that as they walk in the Spirit, and as they have circumstances greatly changed in Jesus' absence, there will be a number of occasions when they will, of course, fast.

Everyone who does the will of God misses meals. And there's going to be great grief that they'll experience too, especially after his departure, which will be occasion for them to fast. But the religious fast, I personally suspect, has no place in the Christian life.

Spiritual, yes. Spiritual fasting, yes. If God says, okay, I want you to put aside today to just pray.

And don't eat, just pray. That's not a religious thing. Walking in the Spirit is never a religious thing.

You know, going to church because that's the thing to do, that's a religious thing. If you go to church on Sunday because that's the thing to do, that's religious. If you go to church on Sunday because that's what God is leading you to do, that's not religious.

That's spiritual. Walking in the Spirit is different than religion. And you can, in fact, be led by the Spirit to fast.

Conceivably, although I doubt it, but conceivably you might be led by the Spirit to set aside one day a week to fast, or two days a week to fast. I mean, I can't say what the Holy Spirit will or will not tell you, and I certainly, if he's telling you to do that, don't let anything I say, you know, dissuade you. I seriously, just knowing the way that Jesus talked about religious ritual and so forth, and the way Paul talked about how denying the flesh is really just a man-made way of trying to subdue the fleshly impulses, it doesn't really have any effect in subduing the flesh, Paul said.

I would suspect that any impressions you get about fasting on a regular weekly basis or something might not really be the Spirit's leading, but I mean, again, if he does tell you that, I don't want to dissuade you from obeying God. But I will say this, it's easy to find times, or to picture times, and they do occur, when fasting would be the most appropriate thing. When you're called to do something in ministry or in the will of God that calls you away from a meal, perhaps a meal that you had not decided to give up that day, but you now realize you have to if you're going to continue doing what God has you doing.

Or when there's a burden that God lays upon you that calls for you to give your undivided attention to prayer over an extended period of time and to neglect meals for that. All of those could easily be times when the Holy Spirit would lead you or where you simply find yourself, by necessity, involved in fasting. And when you do, Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, don't disfigure faces and try to impress people with all the sacrifice you're making.

Although he didn't say that here, he said that in the Sermon on the Mount. Now, as a tag to that statement, in verses 16 and 17, he gave two sort of similar parables, similar to each other. He doesn't always do this, but it's not uncommon for Jesus to put two

parables together that mean essentially the same thing.

Like when he talked about the parable of the mustard seed growing into a grape tree and the parable of the leaven permeating the lump, those two short parables were put right next to each other, both making similar points. Likewise, when he gave the parable of the treasure buried in a field and the treasure of the pearl of great price, in both cases making the same point, that a person will wisely forsake all that he has to obtain them. Those parables, short as they are, put right next to each other in the narrative.

So also here, there are two parables that are saying essentially the same thing twice. In the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word should be established, just like Pharaoh's dream. It was twofold, but it was one dream.

Here's the message. No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch pulls away from the garment and the tear is made worse. And Luke's version adds, and besides, the material doesn't match.

It does say that it would be a terrible fashion statement. And verse 17, nor do people put new wine into old wineskins or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins and both are preserved.

Now, what do these two statements have in common? Well, they have this in common. Both of them talk about some element, some entity, some substance, which at a time in its former history was pliable, flexible, changeable, but which no longer is. An old garment that's been washed and dried has shrunk, but it's not going to shrink anymore.

When you got it new, it was capable of change. It was going to change. But when it's old and been washed many times, it's changed, and it's not going to change anymore.

That's why you don't put a new patch that has yet to experience change. You don't attach it to the old garment, because that new cloth, of course, is going to shrink. And if you attach it to the old garment, it'll shrink and pull away at the places it's attached.

And that old garment is not going to change and it's not going to accommodate that modification. It's not flexible. That's the same idea of the wineskins.

New wineskins are pliable. You put the wine in them, you seal it up, the wine ferments, it gives off certain gases and therefore causes expansion. The wineskin, because it's made of goat skin that's fresh and pliant, it grows, it expands to accommodate the growth of the wine.

But after it's grown once, it doesn't have any more stretch in it. After you've used the wineskin, it's not capable of stretching anymore without breaking. Therefore, you don't put new wine, which is going to grow and change, into an old wineskin, which cannot accommodate change.

You see, the two parables are saying the same thing. In one case, the old cloth, and in the other case, the old wineskin. They both represent things that in their earlier life, in their earlier history, they did accommodate change.

But they're no longer flexible. They're too brittle. They cannot accommodate change any longer.

But the new cloth patch and the new wine both represent things that are. They still have a future. They still have change and growth or shrinkage or at least modification that they're going to experience.

And you cannot add that which is still alive and changing and dynamic to that which is dead and brittle and which will only be damaged by the attempt to merge the two. What is he talking about? He's talking about Judaism and Christianity. Or law and grace.

Or the old covenant and the new covenant. However you want to talk about it, he's talking about Pharisaic Judaism, basically, Rabbinic Judaism. And its inflexibility.

It doesn't have any room for people to be happy. Doesn't have any room for people to be compassionate. Doesn't have any room for people to reach over the wall and touch the unclean leper.

It just doesn't accommodate those kinds of things that are not in the protocol. But Jesus is here to do things all different. He's here to bring a living new reality.

And that living thing has got to grow. It's got to change. It's got, it's like leaven in a lump that spreads.

It's like a mustard seed that grows into a big tree. It's like new wine that is going to only ripen and get better, but it's going to take up more room as it does. It's going to be changing.

And you cannot marry the movement of Jesus to a religious system. Because religions, by their definition, are inflexible. And judgmental.

And tend to major on minors and tend to get institutionalized. You know, that which was a revival a generation ago is an institution today. And we can see it so obviously in church history.

Not only in Jesus' time, but at many points in church history since then. The Catholic Church during the Dark Ages, of course, could allow no reformation. And therefore, when Martin Luther came and tried to reform the church, it didn't work.

The church didn't reform. So he left and started something else. Because the Catholic Church, with all their traditions, they just couldn't adjust to the light that was being brought to them.

They were too, too gelled, and gel is almost too flexible, too cemented into their straitjacket of religious tradition. But the irony is that the Lutheran movement, or the Reform movement, which was the radical front edge of what God was doing in the early 16th century, it could not accommodate further growth. When the Anabaptist movement came along and said, well, listen, if we're going to reform, let's go all the way back.

Let's not just reform a few things, let's go right back to what the Bible says and do it that way. And of course, the funny thing is that the reformers, who were the radical fringe vis-à-vis Roman Catholicism, they became locked into their traditions to the point where they couldn't tolerate new insights, actually old insights being restored by the Anabaptists. And surprisingly, many of the Anabaptists at a later time were not able to accommodate other things like, say, the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit, which came along.

Later still, when the early Pentecostals began to experience the gifts of the Spirit, a lot of the early Baptists, of course, Baptists are not technically the main descendants of the Anabaptist movement, Baptists are descendants of, I mean, the Anabaptist heritage, not quite so much as Mennonites and Amish are, of course. But many Baptists who could not accommodate any growth in that area spiritually, they rode the Pentecostals out of town, they tarred and feathered them. I mean, they treat them like they were heretics.

And, you know, that's sort of the way things are. But what God is, what God is, is He's a living person. And what He does with people is a living thing.

Like wine, new wine that has yet to expand, and it's because it's a living thing, in a sense, that it expands, it's the yeast or whatever in there that causes it to ferment the way it does, it's because there's life in it that it can't be accommodated by that which has no life left in it. And Judaism in Jesus' day had become inflexible, intolerant, and had no more life in it. And it was incapable of adjusting to the growth and the expansion and the flexibility that a life in the Spirit, which is what Jesus was bringing, would mean.

You know, it's kind of funny, in a sense, that on the day of Pentecost, when the people were filled with the Holy Spirit, those who were critics looking on said, they're just full of new wine. Which was, of course, meant to be a slur, and Peter refuted it, but in its own way, it was sort of true, because Jesus had Himself used the expression, new wine, to refer to life in the Spirit, that new reality of what it means to be one of God's people, and what it means to live in a way pleasing to God, that was a new revelation, in a sense. And it had to replace that old inflexible revelation that had become so inflexible, and was from the beginning, actually, in the case of Moses' Law.

But, anyway, that's what Jesus is saying here. He's saying, listen, you're trying to impose on my disciples your religious ideas about fasting, your religious ideas about this and that, and those religious ideas of yours, they're an old, dead system. And what my disciples are doing is new and alive and young, and it's a happening thing, it's a growing

thing, and we're just not going to marry it to your system.

We're not going to buy in to your assumptions. We're not going to try to accommodate our movement, and what God is doing through us, we're not going to try to accommodate that to your movement, which has been dead for a long time, and isn't going to grow anymore. Something new has to happen.

Many years ago, I guess it was in the 70s, early 70s, maybe, there was a book called, I think it was *The Problem of Wineskins*, by Howard Snyder, maybe? I think Howard Snyder was the guy who wrote it, if I'm not mistaken. He was basically talking in that book about this very problem, that whenever God does some new revival, or does some new thing, it often breaks the molds of what the religious institution has now become. And therefore, if the old institution tries to co-opt the new move of God, and bring it in to the structures in the institution that they have, it deadens it, it destroys it, and basically he was suggesting that new wine has to be put in new wineskins.

That is, along with the new life of a revival, the whole structure of religion has to, in a sense, take on different forms. That doesn't mean new morals, but it just means new forms. At one time, for example, when I was a kid, you dressed up to go to church.

That's no longer an assumption in practically any church I know of now. I'm sure there are still churches where that's important to people, but they're not the kind of churches I go to. But, I mean, things have changed about that, and sometimes against a great deal of resistance, but I've told you before about Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, and how God, I think, caused one of the greatest revivals of this century to occur centered in that church initially.

Because one guy, Chuck Smith, the pastor there, was willing to let God create his own structures to go along with his own revival. And instead of baptizing people in the church, as had always been done, he took them all down to the beach to baptize them, because they couldn't fit them in the church. The new wine was too big to fit in the old wineskins.

And it was there that all these worship choruses came along. There were no transparencies there. There still aren't, I don't think, at Calvary Chapel, but everyone sang them by heart.

But eventually, where there's no revival happening, people don't learn things by heart, and therefore they had to learn them by transparencies. But where there's a real revival happening, people tended to memorize them and sang spontaneously for hours. But see, here's the problem.

That was a revival then. When I was a kid, when I was a boy, back in the good old days, we used to come to church, we'd sing choruses spontaneously for two hours before we'd

have a Bible study, and then we'd sit for two hours through a Bible study. Now, that's what revival was then.

But if we, on our Friday night meetings, decide revival means two hours of singing and two hours of Bible study, we may find, if anyone still comes, that no one's still awake by the time it's over. No one ever dreamed of falling asleep during the Jesus movement. It was revival happening, and that was what was happening.

But there's nowhere in the Bible that says you have to sing for two hours or have two hour Bible studies. It's just when we institutionalize what was once a revival, it becomes dead in an old wineskin itself. And we have to be more aware of what kind of practices fit best with the new kind of life God's giving.

I mean, the house church movement, I'm not saying that everybody's going to go for that, although it's amazing how many are. Because way back in the 70s, there were people who, home Bible study groups were beginning to be all the rage, and Ray Steadman's Body Life book was a big seller, and churches were using that book to get into cell groups and stuff. We heard about them back then, but it never really became considered to be the norm for church life in those days.

But now, more and more, people of almost all denominations are starting to say, well, you know, the house church, it might make more sense. And maybe because God's doing something, He's changing the world's concept of church. And therefore, it may take on new structures.

It may not be in the next generation that churches will have buildings. That'd be nice. Churches didn't have buildings for the first 300 years either.

But maybe after all these centuries of the tradition that the church has to own a building, they'll get away from that and start spending their money on missions instead of spending it on a mortgage, and on maintenance, and so forth. Who knows what may happen next? But traditions, not all the traditions have fallen away yet. And the wineskins have to be flexible.

We have to be willing to see those things which are ingrained traditional ideas of church go by the boards if they are not agreeable with what the scripture says. And we find out we're only doing them because that's the way it's always been done. And that's what I think new wineskins is all about.

Jesus said you need to have new wineskins for the new wine. Somebody had a hand up. Who was that? Yes, Jefferson.

Well, taxes could easily be a way that God will get the church into getting rid of their buildings, especially if they lose their property taxes, their tax exemptions. Might be a good thing. Well, yeah, as far as the Midwest, I'm not saying that what's happening here

on the West Coast is happening in the same degree everywhere in the world at one time.

If this is a real move of God, though, it will tend to creep into all corners of the church, I think. I'm not here to make anything happen. I'm just here to say that when things begin to happen, when God begins to do things, we'd better not stand in the way of them.

I'm not a facilitator of those kinds of things. I'm not the one who's got the vision. But I will say this, I'm not committed to any religious dead norms that don't have a biblical basis.

Well, I don't know that taxes had an awful lot to do with what Jesus was saying here, but what you're saying is the reason the church didn't have buildings is because of the taxes? Well, maybe so, but maybe also because they didn't see any need for them. They had homes already. They didn't need to have additional buildings.

Most Christians have homes. And the ones who don't, there's probably enough Christians who have homes that they could have meetings that could accommodate all the ones who don't have homes. But anyway, that is why I suspect there was no church buildings for the first several centuries, because they didn't need them.

You see, the introduction of church building, I don't need to get off on a tangent on this, but the reason that the church building movement happened, it was after Constantine, when the Roman Empire became Christianized, they decided that since kings live in palaces and since other important institutions are known by their elaborate structures and so forth, that the church should have fine buildings too. And it was sort of like an evangelistic strategy. People want to come to church if you make these beautiful cathedrals and so forth, with magnificent paintings and statues and acoustics and so forth and choirs.

And it was sort of an evangelistic device, which I don't mean to pronounce upon whether that was a good idea at the time or not, but I think it has led to things, mentalities that are not particularly agreeable with what the early church understood to be the place of church. Anyway, let's go on now to Matthew 12. It might seem like a great jump, and it is, from Matthew 9 to Matthew 12, but the reason for it is that both Mark and Luke place the events of Matthew 12 immediately after the events we've just read about in Matthew 9. So it would appear that Mark and Luke agree with each other against Matthew in this particular chronological arrangement, and so we'll go along with the majority on this, two out of three.

But Matthew still gives us the more detailed accounts of the events described, so we'll stay with Matthew, we'll just turn over now to Matthew 12. The same material, the material we just read in Matthew 9 is found in Luke chapter 5, verse 33 to the end of the chapter, and what we're about to read has its parallel in Luke 6, verses 1 through 11. And it's all found also in Mark chapter 2, in Mark's version.

But here we have to jump around a bit to find it in Matthew. Let's turn to Matthew 12 then. At that time, Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath, and his disciples were hungry and began to pluck the heads of grain and to eat them.

Luke 6, verse 1 adds this detail, that they also were rubbing them in their hands, which would be how they would, of course, break the grains of wheat free from the head, and also to tend to separate the bits of chaff from the head when they'd rub it like this. The grain seeds, or grain berries, or whatever, would tend to stay in their hands, or wheat berries, as they were called, would stay in their hands, and the chaff would blow away. The trouble with this is that it resembled work.

At least it resembled work to the Pharisees. It says, but when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Jesus, look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath. Now, first they criticized Jesus to the disciples.

When he was eating with tax collectors and sinners, they came to the disciples and said, why does your master do this? Then, they criticized the disciples to Jesus. Well, they said, why don't your disciples fast? And now they're criticizing the disciples again to Jesus. Why don't your disciples keep the Sabbath? Now, it says they were doing what was unlawful to do on the Sabbath.

It is not suggesting that it was unlawful for them to eat this grain, which was not theirs. I mean, obviously, they weren't in their own grain fields eating this grain. We might today consider that to be theft.

You walk through somebody else's farm and start picking apples off his trees and watermelons out of his patch and start eating them and stuff, and it's not even yours. We would consider that to be stealing. But under the Jewish law, in Deuteronomy 23, there is specific laws about this very thing.

And the law did permit, in Deuteronomy chapter 23, the law did permit that any Jew, when passing by a vineyard or a grain field of his neighbor, if he was hungry, he could help himself. Now, he could not run home and get his bushel basket and bring it out and harvest and carry a load home. It was just as much as you could eat as you walked through.

I mean, you're welcome to help yourself, just so long as you kept moving. And didn't camp there. But this was a provision that was made for the poor.

There would never be anyone starving in Israel because of this. And what the disciples were doing was perfectly lawful to do in terms of eating other people's grain, but it was unlawful to do it on the Sabbath according to the Pharisees. Why? Because when you pick grain, that is on a small scale harvesting.

When you rub grain in your hands and separate the weight from the chaff, that is on a

small scale threshing and winnowing. These were activities which farmers did, of course, on a grand scale at harvest time. And when they did so, that was their work, that was their labor, that's how they made their living.

Therefore, for the disciples to do that on this occasion, though on a micro scale, was sufficient reason for the Pharisees to criticize, because it was the same kind of activity that would be wrong to do on a grander scale, therefore giving no consideration to the quantitiveness of it, but the qualitiveness of it, it was an act of working on the Sabbath. Harvesting and winnowing and threshing. Well, that was the basis of the criticism.

Why? Look, your disciples are doing what's not lawful to do on the Sabbath. It's not that what they did was unlawful other days, but it would be unlawful to do it on the Sabbath, according to the Pharisees. Then he said to them, have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him? How he entered into the house of God and ate the showbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests.

Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath, the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are blameless? But I say to you that in this place there is one greater than the temple. But I say to you, excuse me, but if you had known what that means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless, for the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. In Mark's Gospel, between verses 7 and 8, there's an additional statement that Mark includes.

Just before Jesus said, for the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath, Mark has him saying, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. That's Mark 2... What? I don't have the reference here. What is it? Yeah, okay.

It's Mark 2, 27. He said to them, the Sabbath was not made for man, excuse me, was made for man, not man for the Sabbath, therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath. Okay, now I'm going to comment on that, but let me read the next little patch too, because both these stories have to do with Sabbath, and that's what we want to talk about here.

Verse 9, now when he had departed from there, he went into their synagogue. It sounds like it was the same day, in which case Jesus and his disciples were eating on their way to church, but actually, which is, there'd be nothing wrong with that, but Luke 6.6 says, this event happened on another Sabbath, specifically, Luke 6.6 says, on another Sabbath, they went into the synagogue and this happened, so Matthew doesn't clarify that. So, he went into their synagogue, and behold, there was a man who had a withered hand, and they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, that they might accuse him? Then he said to them, What man is there among you, who has one sheep, and if he falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much

more value, then, is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

Then he said to the man, Stretch out your hand, and he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other. Then the Pharisees went out and took counsel against him, how they might destroy him. Why? Because he broke the Sabbath.

Now, two Sabbath stories, they actually occur on separate Sabbaths, but are put together in all the accounts, because they both show us Jesus' unconventional approach to the Sabbath, and how He differed and was in conflict with the Pharisees about Sabbath observance. Now, His argument on the first case, when the disciples were picking grain and eating on the Sabbath, He found what He thought to be a fairly parallel situation in the Old Testament. These disciples were hungry.

Well, David and his men had been hungry once. In fact, they had been hungry once on a particular occasion when there was no lawful, according to the ceremonial law, no lawful way for them to eat. David was fleeing from Saul.

It's in 1 Samuel 21 that the story is found. David and some friends were fleeing from Saul. They came to the tabernacle at Nod.

They asked a Hithophel, not a Hithophel, not a Hithophel, it was, what's the guy's name? The priest. They asked the priest, do you have any bread here? A Himelech. The guy's name was a Himelech.

See, that's like a Hithophel, a Himelech. They asked the priest, a Himelech, is there any food here? And the priest said, I don't have any bread here except the show bread, but of course only the priest are allowed to do that. David said, that'll do.

And David took the show bread, 12 loaves that were according to the ceremonial law to be eaten only by priests, and David ate them. He never received any rebuke for this from God or from the priest nor from the Pharisees in Jesus' day. They didn't find any fault with David for doing that.

And that was Jesus' very point. Why do you not find fault with David, but you find fault with my disciples? Now, the obvious answer that they would have, he didn't ask them that question outright, but that's the implied question in his statement. If he had asked them directly, why do you find fault with my disciples, but you don't find fault with David and his friends, is because they'd probably say something like, well, that was, you know, David.

David was on urgent business. David was an important man. I mean, he was God's anointed king.

He was running for his life. Obviously, that was extenuating circumstances. And Jesus'

answer, I suspect, would have been, well, we have such extenuating circumstances now.

Israel is in a crisis, and I am greater than David. And those who are with me are as worthy to violate ceremonial law as those who are with David were to violate ceremonial law. Now, I'm putting words in Jesus' mouth, and maybe you would object to that, except that I'm basing it on what he said next, because he gave another example of their own inconsistency in verse 5. Have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath, the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are blameless? But I say to you that in this place there is one greater than the temple.

Now, the priests in the temple, how did they profane the Sabbath? Well, they worked on the Sabbath. Just like, I mean, someone's got to do the religious work. And the Sabbath, there's religious work to be done.

In fact, the priests had to offer every day of the week, along with the other sacrifices that were irregular, there was a regular, continual burnt offering they had to offer every morning, one lamb, and every evening, one lamb. That was just a daily routine. But on the Sabbath, the continual burnt offering was two lambs in the morning and two in the evening.

So that you can see, the priests actually had twice as much work on the Sabbath. They didn't stop working because it was the Sabbath. And Jesus says, so haven't you read that on the Sabbath, the priests of the temple profane the Sabbath? That means they work on the Sabbath and they're blameless? Now, Jesus anticipated that their answer would be, well, you know, that's the temple business.

Temple's important stuff. And Jesus said, well, I'm greater than the temple. One greater than the temple is here.

So those who are going about my business are just as important as those who are going about the temple business. And if violation of the Sabbath is justified if it is to do God's work, then my disciples can violate the Sabbath if they're going about my business, my Father's business. The very thing Jesus said about himself in John chapter 5 when he healed on the Sabbath was criticized for it.

And he said, well, my Father works here, so I work. If I'm doing my Father's work, how can you criticize me? Now, the reason they could criticize is because they had the idea of religion that many people do, namely, that religion consists in special days and special rituals and so forth. One cannot avoid, who has had any contact with them, thinking about the Seventh-day Adventists and other Sabbath-keeping Christian groups when we read these stories, they themselves quote from these stories, but they quote the wrong parts, and the parts they quote, they misapply.

For example, when Jesus said in Mark 2, 27, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for

the Sabbath. Of course, what Jesus was saying is that man wasn't made so that there'd be someone to keep Sabbath. But the Sabbath was made for the benefit of man, to give him a day of rest.

That's what he was saying, but the Seventh-day Adventists say that the emphasis is Sabbath was made for man, not just Israel. See, most of us who don't keep Sabbath say, well, that was part of the Jewish law to the Jews. And they say, no, Jesus said the Sabbath was made for man, not just the Jews, but for mankind.

Wrong, wrong emphasis. Jesus is not making a comment here in this synagogue telling the Jews that God made the Sabbath for Gentiles to keep. It hardly would have anything to do with his argument at all.

There weren't any Gentiles present to hear it. His statement was that the Sabbath wasn't made for man to have something to be in bondage to. The Sabbath was made for the benefit of man, namely to Israeli men, Israelites, because they would need a time of rest in the week.

And therefore, to benefit them, God gave them a day off for their benefit, not for their bondage. And see, this is the point. That which God made for the benefit of man, the religious mind takes and makes it into a bondage to inflict on man.

So that what was supposed to be a boon to man when God initiated it, turned out to be a burden because he wasn't even allowed to eat, if it involved a bit of work on the Sabbath. So the Sabbath was made a burden, which was just the opposite of what God had in mind for it. One might tend to draw a similar analogy to the way some Christians are about divorce and remarriage.

We know that the Bible sets high standards on this matter, and that divorce is a sin. We know that divorce, at least in most cases, is a sin. There's always somebody sinning when there's a divorce takes place.

It might be that one party is innocent and the other is guilty. But the point is, divorce is not a good thing. But the way some people treat divorce, some Christians treat the subject, you'd get the impression that man was made for marriage, not marriage for man.

You know, I mean, one thing could be argued from the same text that Jesus I mean, when Jesus says the Sabbath was made for man, when was the Sabbath made? Back in the creation week. Back in Genesis chapter 2. You know what else was established in Genesis chapter 2? Marriage. And you want to know something else? Marriage was made because it was not good for man to be alone.

Marriage was made for man. Now, that in no sense justifies anything like a light view of divorce. But what it does mean that when some people find themselves in a divorce

situation, maybe against their will or maybe they've made a mistake, possibly an irreversible mistake.

Ron Reed was telling me about some lady who wrote to him not long ago who had divorced her husband. She had been a Christian, he was a non-Christian, he was a drunkard and abusive and so forth. She didn't have technical grounds for divorce, but she divorced him.

Later he got saved after he had married someone else. And now she regrets having married him. But she finds herself she wishes she'd stayed with him because he eventually got saved and she realizes she made a mistake and divorced him.

But does she have to live the rest of her life unmarried because of this? Well, it depends. Is marriage somehow the absolute that God created man in order to fit him into this absolute concept called marriage? Or did he make marriage to be a benefit to man? In which case, it would seem to me to go against the spirit of it, to insist that people who've made such mistakes and cannot reverse them, to insist that they be punished by some kind of legalism about this subject. To my mind, it's very analogous to what the Pharisees did with the Sabbath.

Sure, they had biblical grounds for enforcing the Sabbath, but they'd missed the whole point. They act as if the Sabbath was some kind of an absolute thing in the mind of God and he just created men so that he'd have someone there to keep the Sabbath. Instead of the other way around.

Anyway, it's something to think about. Whether the parallel is exact or not, I don't know. You can sort that one out.

I in no way would take a light view of divorce. I'm absolutely against it. I take one of the strictest views around on this subject.

But once it has happened, and once a person maybe has done the wrong thing, and if there's no restitution they can make because simply circumstances are such that there's no way to retrace their steps and get back to where they should be, I do not see Jesus as imposing some kind of a lifelong punishment on those people who've made such mistakes and saying, sorry, since you can't make restitution for it, you're just out. You're just out for good. That doesn't seem to be the way Jesus taught about these kinds of issues to me.

After all, marriage is both a moral issue and a ceremonial issue. It is entered into by ceremony, and its transcendent meaning has to do with a symbolic thing, Christ and the Church. It also is a moral issue because when you break up your marriage, you do a wrong to somebody, namely your partner.

But if the wrong has been done, can't be undone, or you've done all you can to do it

wrong, do we hold somebody by the ritual, the ritualistic aspects of it, the rules, this is a sacred thing, and even though by staying single you're not going to help the person that you've wounded, your former partner, we're going to make you do it anyway just because of our religious requirements. Anyway, that's something that has to be sorted out with more time than we have here to give it. But I would like to say that Jesus made two statements in this context that are very important, and I think we're going to come back to the second of these stories next time, before I go further.

But, two very positive statements about Sabbath, and since Jesus is the lawgiver for the Christian, here they are. Jesus said in verse 8, for the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. This is in the context of saying that the priests in the temple are allowed to violate the Sabbath, that is to work on the Sabbath, because they are going about God's business in the temple.

And He, Jesus, is greater than the temple, therefore anybody who is going about His business is exempt from the requirement to rest. They can continue to do God's work just like Jesus did on the Sabbath because Jesus is the Lord over the Sabbath. He's not under it, He's over it.

He's the Lord of the Sabbath day. And therefore, if you're doing what He wants you to do, which you should be doing seven days a week, by the way, it's only the religious mentality that says, well, we've got to keep one of these days holy. Well, what do you do with the other six? If every day is supposed to be 100% dedicated to Jesus Christ, and that's the only view of Christianity I see as normative, anything else is apostasy, if you're supposed to be committed to Jesus Christ, always concerned to do His will every moment of every day, if that's true, then in what sense can you make one particular day more sacred than that, when every one of them is supposed to be 100%? You see, in the view of Christianity that Jesus gave is that you love God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength one day a week.

No. Seven days a week. Then how can you do any more on any Sunday or Saturday or any other day? It's all the same.

As long as you're doing what you're doing unto the Lord, what you're doing is what the Lord wants you to do, He is the Lord over the Sabbath, and therefore His desire for your life takes precedence over any commandments about Sabbath keeping. Now, He said it another way in the next story here that we read, namely, He said very specifically, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Verse 12.

How much more value is a man than a sheep that is pulling a sheep out of a ditch, which was apparently an exception that they would make if it was his only sheep and it happened on the Sabbath? He says, therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Now, this story, in which this statement occurs, needs more attention than we can give it in this session, so we'll come back to it next time, but let me just focus on that particular

statement. It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

Well, what's it lawful to do on other days? Bad. Aren't you supposed to be doing good all the time? And if what you're doing is the good thing, namely the thing that God wants you to be doing, then it means that the Sabbath is no different than any other day. It's lawful to do good on the Sabbath just like any other day, and it's not lawful to do anything other than good any day.

In other words, the Sabbath is no different than any other day. If what you're doing is God's will, like Jesus was, then He could ignore the fact that Saturday had come or that Saturday had gone. He would just do His Father's will all the time.

Because Jesus said it's lawful to do good on the Sabbath day. That would mean that if the work that you're doing is unto the Lord, fine. Now, some people might say, but you should abstain from your ordinary secular vocation one day a week to make it holy.

Really? Why? Are you doing a secular vocation that you're not doing unto the Lord? When everything you do, whether you eat or drink, should be done unto the Lord? Whether you work or play, whatever you do, you're supposed to be doing to the glory of God? How is it that you could be in an occupation that you can do not unto the Lord? You should change occupations if you don't do your occupation unto the Lord. If you have to work on Sunday or work on Saturday, because the job that you're in, which you feel God has you in, requires it, there's no reason why you can't work unto the Lord at your job on Saturday as much as you work unto the Lord at your job any other day of the week. The issue is, are you doing everything unto the Lord? Is everything you do a direct response to your relationship with Jesus as your Lord and doing what you perceive to be good in His sight? If you are, then the day of the week is irrelevant.

And people who stress the need to keep one day of the week show their lack of perception of the whole spiritual nature of what it means to follow God. It's all the time. It's full time.

It's 100%. There's no room for improvement on one day of the week over what you're supposed to be doing all the time. Now we'll come back to this next time.

We've run out of time unfortunately, but I want to talk more about this story about the man with the withered hand. There's a lot in it. And we'll take that and go further into the life of Christ in our next session.

Any questions?