

Biblical Principles Of Justice (Part Three)

Principles From the New Testament

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A long-running and somewhat controversial case just concluded, here in North Carolina. A husband and wife (Sandy and Casey Parsons) were finally sentenced (he got eight years, she got 10 years), for fraudulently cashing benefit checks, including monthly adoption assistance checks from the Federal government, for their adopted daughter. They took these checks after she disappeared. The adoption assistance that they took ran for over 20 months. So they got 20 months' worth of checks totaling about \$14,000 and for that they got this sentence—actually not just the time, but they also got a fine of around \$54,000-\$56,000 that they are supposed to repay.

Now you would not think that is all that bad. What is so controversial about that? But there is far more to this case than what I have already told you. U.S. District Court Judge Thomas Schroeder said that, after sentencing more than 1000 people in his career as judge, he has never been more troubled by a case.

The adopted daughter, Erica, disappeared in November 2011 and from the very beginning—as soon as it was found out that this girl was missing—the Parsons have been suspected of foul play in the matter. Prosecutors say that, after investigating, they found that the couple routinely abused the girl by whipping her and beating her repeatedly, feeding her dog food, and breaking her fingers. Remember, she disappeared in November 2011; it was not reported that she was missing until 2013, nearly two years later.

In the sentencing comments Judge Schroeder said he is convinced the Parsons played a role in Erica's disappearance. After hearing all the evidence the judge called the Parsons sinister, saying, "You embarked on a plan to get rid of her." He believes that they hid or destroyed her body in 2011 and had been covering up ever since. As an example of their covering up, they told police that Erica was visiting her grandmother in Asheville all this time. But the police did a search for the name of this person and said that the grandmother does not exist. So, because they kept getting their welfare checks and they did not report her as missing, this kept her whereabouts from being investigated for nearly two years and all of the trails went cold.

However, after hearing all of this—this is all public knowledge—they still have not been charged for her disappearance. Why? No body has been found. So foul play can only

be suspected in her case.

Like I said, the Parsons claimed that Erica decided to live permanently with the phantom grandmother (it was about December 2011 when they claimed that) and they agreed with her decision, so they just let her go. And they said they only heard from her one time since: A phone call in February 2012 shortly before her 14th birthday.

Well, we can see just from what has been said here—what little I have given you about this—that their story is full of holes. Tests, on both of them and around their house, and investigators coming in and asking questions, they have been pegged by everyone as highly deceptive people. But there is no material evidence that they committed murder so no charges. You cannot charge them for something that is not known. So they may indeed have gotten away with murder of this young girl. That does not seem like justice does it, that they should get away with murder.

But, in reality, justice has been served. You may think that it is strange that I could say that, but it is true. Perhaps evidence will be found in the future that will change matters but suspicions and deceptive personalities are not solid enough grounds for a murder charge. So, because of the lack of proof in this case, justice has been served, not for Erica, but for the Parsons. It is kind of hard to take, is it not? But justice needs to be on both sides of the case here.

Real justice is based on truth. And justice can be harsh: It can be harsh for the perpetrator of a crime, and sometimes it can be harsh on the victim of a crime. In this case, it is harsh on Erica because there is no proof (everyone seems to know or believe at least that the Parsons actually perpetrated this crime but they do not have any proof) so the justice is that they cannot be charged until proof is brought forward.

Justice protects both sides of the equation. That is a hard thing, but, as I said, justice is based on truth on what is known, what can be shown, what can be proved. That is the only way that it works in human society.

God is different. He knows everything—nobody gets away with anything with God. But justice in human society has to depend on what can be seen, what can be heard, what can be felt, what can be smelled, what can be tasted. It has to pass scientific evidentiary rules. It cannot be just a suspicion or what everybody thinks. That turns into mob rule. That turns into willy nilly. You cannot even call it justice.

So while no charges have been brought, no conviction of these two has happened in this matter. It makes it feel wrong. But, really, it is right, up to this point—with what we

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know and what we can prove. Justice has been served. So the judge, knowing this could only verbally castigate the Parsons from the bench for being sinister and deceptive people. But he gave them pretty much everything he could give them for their welfare fraud.

I just wanted to give you a little bit of an understanding of what we are dealing with in terms of justice. This is why the statues of justice have a blindfold over the eyes and a pair of scales: To weigh what is known, or what can be put in the scales, against one another. So it has got to be blind. It has got to follow the rules. It has got to only make decisions on what can be known or proved. That is justice.

Now, over the last two sermons in this series that I am giving on biblical principles of justice, we have dealt only with the Old Testament. We have only gone to a few scriptures in the New Testament, mostly just to verify something from the Old Testament or just to give a principle, from which we passed quickly on to something else. But this sermon is going to concentrate on biblical principles from the New Testament. What we are going to see, when it is all said and done, is that the principles that we pick out of the New Testament on justice complement what we have already seen in the Old Testament.

But there is a difference. It shows the outlook of the New Testament in a way that is easy to see, and that is that New Testament principles of justice tend to be more personal, rather than national, in scope.

In the Old Testament, God is dealing with all humanity—or He is dealing with the people of Israel who formed a kingdom (and later two kingdoms). So He gives these principles of justice in terms of national laws or national principles that the judges (or kings or whoever is in charge) are supposed to follow. So they tend to be very broad in scope in the Old Testament.

But when you get to the New Testament, the focus of God's attention is, first, on Christ's disciples, and then, maybe a little bit larger—Christ's disciples in the whole church. That is a very small segment of people as compared to what was in the Old Testament that He was working with at the time. So it narrows down to church principles, yes, but mostly to principles of judgment in the church or in your personal life. But they are very much like the ones that we see in the Old Testament. They are just narrower in scope. We will see this principle in several scriptures.

We are going to start in Luke 24. This section gives you an idea of how the Old Testament and the New Testament fit together. We will begin in verse 27. This is after

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Christ has died and has risen from the dead. He has already gone with the two disciples to Emmaus. He is now talking to the other disciples as they have all gotten together. He tells them that they were slow of heart to believe.

Luke 24:27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures [the Old Testament] the things concerning Himself.

Luke 24:44-45 Then He said to them, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.” And He opened their understanding that they might comprehend the Scriptures [the Old Testament is all they had at the time].

John 5:39 [Jesus is talking to the people here] You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they [meaning the Scriptures] which testify of Me.

He is saying that the words of the Old Testament actually speak of Him. They are about Him, that He is seen in them. Let us move on to Acts 18.

Acts 18:28 for he [Paul] vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

He took the Old Testament and showed them specific places—Messianic prophecies and the like—which showed that Jesus was going to be like this, that the Messiah was going to do this sort of thing. And so he proved Messiah out of the Old Testament.

Finally, let us go to Ephesians 2. This is one we all know.

Ephesians 2:20 having been built [he is talking about the church] on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.

All of these scriptures have a common theme. That common theme boils down to the Old and the New Testaments being a complete whole—that the New Testament is not separate from, necessarily, the Old Testament. The Old Testament shows what would happen in the New Testament; the New Testament, then, fulfills what the Old Testament shows. They are complementary to one another. They show different aspects of the same thing.

So the Bible’s verses—whether they appear in the Old Testament or in the New

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Testament—are equal as Scripture. They are all Scripture. It does not matter where they come from. It is all good. It is all the Word of God, whether the Word of God is in the Old Testament or in the New Testament. It is a complete whole. So we see that the things that are in the Old Testament are going to be echoed in the New.

Or if we might look at it the other way around, things in the New Testament are going to build upon what was in the Old Testament—just as the apostles built on what the prophets said. You have the apostle Matthew. He frequently quotes the Old Testament and applies it to Jesus Christ all throughout his gospel. And so we (meaning the church) have that to go back to. We have the words of both the prophets and the apostles to build our lives upon and to learn from and grow upon.

So the church rests on both the Old Testament and the New Testament, and Jesus Christ is the linking bridge. You might call Him the keystone, or you could call Him the great undergirding rock that everything sits upon. He supports it all and brings it all together and makes it work.

The thing I want you to get from what these scriptures that we have gone through (there is plenty more that say similar things) is that the Bible—Old Testament and New Testament together—is a complete book and it has to be taken as a whole for true and fruitful understanding. When we see principles of justice in the New Testament, they are often the same because the Old and the New Testament principles agree.

But Jesus often does something to modify it for our use because it is no longer applicable to us in terms of a nationwide law or principle, unless of course the nation has accepted it itself—which America has done in many instances. However Jesus is more interested in getting us to understand how these principles apply to us and to our lives and to our relationships. So He changes the principle slightly so that we can put it into practice in our own lives—not all the time, but sometimes it is like that.

Sometimes these principles from the Old Testament are just quoted outright—used as proof that they need to get their argument across and then they move on. That is all it takes. We could go to John 1. John 1 and Genesis 1 start the same: “In the beginning, .” That gives you a good indication that the content of John 1 is very similar to the content of Genesis 1. The apostle John wrote it that way specifically for that purpose to make you think back to that same Being who is in Genesis 1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

We are supposed to think, being good students of the Bible, that the One who created

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the heavens and the earth is the same One who was with God and who was God and who is now known as the Word (the idea, the statement, the word) and these words are important in creating us spiritually.

It is not a physical creation. Now God is creating through words—the Word and the words that He gives us—so that we can have life, not just physical life but spiritual life. So we can start looking through John 1 and coming up with these same sort of underlying principles of justice like it all begins with God and God gives the law.

Remember, it goes on and talks about Moses giving the law. Well, Moses gave the law, yes, but Moses got it from the Lord who gave it to him on Mount Sinai on tables of stone. Well, that same law is still in effect, but grace and truth come through Jesus Christ. The same Lord gave both.

So we see these principles of justice start being echoed. But they take on a different tone because, back in the Old Testament, they were mostly looked at from a physical point of view. When you get to John, a very spiritual writer talking about a lot of deep spiritual things, he is trying to get us to think about how these things affect us spiritually. So the principles will be spiritual in nature rather than physical.

This happens not just in John 1, this happens throughout the New Testament—the something from the Old Testament will be pulled in to the New, and then a spiritual change will make it applicable to us personally. And they need to be modified to fit New Testament realities.

For instance, I said we are not a nation anymore as Israel was in this world. We are actually a nation that has been pulled out of this world. And there are things that we have to do that are different from what Israel had to do. We have to act a whole lot differently than Israel had to act. We have to make a witness that Israel never made. We have to do all these things.

And so these principles are tinkered with just a little bit so that we can get an understanding of how we can use them in our own personal lives every day. Hopefully we will not have to use them every day, but a lot of times we do have to use them fairly frequently. These principles are altered to fit the individual rather than the state. Just so you know and understand, going in to some of these principles, that they are not always going to be exactly what we saw in the Old Testament.

Let us go to one in Matthew. We are going to be in Matthew for quite a bit because a lot of these are just mentioned right away, just like we saw in the Old Testament. How

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many principles of justice did we see just in the first four chapters of Genesis? We saw them very quickly. And of course, in Matthew 5, you have Jesus' Sermon on the Mount where He basically lists out the principles of godly living for us in this one complete sermon, going through chapter 7. So these principles come into play very quickly. This passage kind of encapsulates the change in approach between the Old Testament and the New.

Matthew 5:17-19 Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Notice He is bringing the kingdom of heaven in here time and time again because that is His approach. That is our goal. The kingdom of heaven is what we are supposed to be thinking about. Not the kingdom of Israel. Not the kingdom of Judah. We are talking about the kingdom of heaven. That is the focus.

Matthew 5:20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

This, as I said, encapsulates Christ's change in approach as He delivers some of these principles to us. He assures us right away that these laws, these principles are not done away. Not at all. Not in the least. He says they are not going away until they are all fulfilled. And He says, on top of that, that He is fulfilling them. He came to fulfill them.

Now we have to think of this, not in terms of putting them behind us because they are done away, but we have to think of this more in terms of what the word 'fulfilled' means. 'Fulfill' means 'filled to the full.' You might have seen in the Berean where I went over this in one of the old sermons I did. I gave the illustration of the Old Testament in the sermon, thinking of it as a candy jar filled only one inch on the bottom. That was the law as given then. But Jesus came to fill up the rest of the jar with His understanding of the law. He wanted to expand what had been given in the Old Testament and fill up our understanding of how that applies.

And so something very simple like "You shall not kill"—which is what He goes into next—then becomes "Murder begins in the heart." It goes far beyond the actual act of killing somebody. It actually started way back in somebody's heart, and He even talks

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about it in terms of calling a brother a name (because “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”). So it touches on more than just the act of taking somebody’s life.

That law covers all the internal goings-on in a person who is maybe not even thinking of doing that act. But it starts with calling names and denigrating, and pretty soon there is hatred, and it goes on. Somebody can be guilty of contravening this law without even actually doing the act—because he has hatred within him and he has basically murdered that person in his heart.

Then He goes through adultery—same thing: It begins in the heart. It begins before the man turns his eye to look at the woman. He has already begun the process of lusting after her.

So we can see how Jesus filled these laws to the full and made them expanded far beyond the simple ‘letter of the law’ approach. Their full meanings and scopes are expanded by Jesus Christ and by the apostles to cover all that God intended in them from the beginning. Now, even though when He gave the law to Moses, it simply said ‘You shall not murder’ or ‘You shall not commit adultery, there was far more underneath those simple words that He intended from that very beginning. So Jesus came to reveal those things, to bring them to our attention.

Specifically, if you want to say what the change is in a principle, the change is that the laws that were given in the Old Testament are then amplified in the New. They go from literal external regulations to internal traits of character. The external is still wrong. It is still wrong to go take your knife to your neighbor and cut his throat. But, for a Christian it is supposed to be internalized to the point where we do not even start thinking badly about the neighbor—we are to love our neighbor as ourselves.

So our character is supposed to stop anything even remotely like trespassing one of those commandments, long before it actually gets to a literal trespass of that law. We are supposed to nip these things in the bud. At the first bad thought about somebody, it has got to stop. That is not how we treat them. Let us go do something good for them.

He uses the Pharisees as an example of this. The Pharisees were literalists. They mined the Old Testament for any kind of literal thing and then they would make their determination that carrying a burden on the Sabbath was equal to three barley grains or whatever it was. They were very literal with that sort of thing. And Jesus says to us we have got to go way beyond that.

We have got to go to the heart of these things about what it is to carry a burden on the

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Sabbath. It is just an example that came off the top of my head. We have to understand that Sabbath law in a spiritual way rather than just in the 'righteousness' of a literal understanding that the Pharisees had. Our keeping of the Sabbath has to be different better.

Whereas they were often saying "No, you can't do that." "The law doesn't allow you to do that." "This is forbidden." "You can't go through a field and pluck ears of corn and eat of them." "You can't do this, that, and the other thing." Jesus said, "Don't you understand what I said back there about mercy and such, that it is better than sacrifice? You should be turning this around what *can* you do on the Sabbath: What does God want you to do on the Sabbath? What does God want you to get out of the Sabbath? What does God want you to give others on the Sabbath?"

The Sabbath is a day of freedom. It is not a day of being just bound by law. It is a day of doing good—like Jesus did: He freed people of their sicknesses and such, He taught He conversed with people; He got to know people. That is the essence of what He is trying to get across here, that we have to go beyond these very nitpicky literal laws and go to understanding these laws in their fullness what God wanted to get across, what He intended from the beginning.

So our righteousness is superior to the Pharisees' righteousness, if we start employing these things in our lives, because it is internalized and it is spiritualized and, in addition to those things, it is infused with outgoing concern for others. That is kind of the general idea with all of these principles of justice—that once we get into the New Testament though their physical usage is still valid (in national courts), mostly Jesus wants us to understand how they are going to help us one on one.

Here we are in Matthew. Let us go to chapter 18—a very well-known passage about dealing with a sinning brother. Jesus says:

Matthew 18:15-17 Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

This principle that we see here (in my Bible, it is not only quoted but it is also in italics showing that it is coming out of the Old Testament)—'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established'—is the principle we are dealing with. But we

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see that the context has changed. This is not talking about us sitting in the gate of the city and hearing a court case between two people from the city—one who has brought a case against the other. It is not that.

This is the church we are talking about. This is the context of interpersonal relations between two brothers in the church, church member A and church member B. Church member A supposedly sinned. Church member B saw it and he goes to church member A and says, “You have sinned against me.” But church member A says, “I didn’t. I didn’t do what you thought I did.” And church member B says, “Yes, you did. I saw it.” And church member A says, “I didn’t.” And it goes on.

“Okay, you’re not going to believe me. Alright,” says church member B, “I’m going to bring church member C and church member D. They saw you do it too.” Now, notice they saw it. They are not just friends who are backing up your story because they like you, but these are actual witnesses to the event—to the sin.

Jesus takes this scripture out of the Old Testament. He is specifically pulling from Deuteronomy 19:15, which we went to in the last sermon, where it says exactly this: “By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.” So He is taking a principle that, in Israel, was applied to civil and criminal cases—where you needed two or three witnesses to verify that something actually happened—and He is applying it in the church between brethren in a dispute.

He takes it from way out here, in the world, and brings it right in among us and says “This principle is valid among you. Don’t be accusing each other of sin and you can’t prove it. Quit pointing fingers at one another.” If you are going to accuse somebody of sin and of offense against you, well, then you better have some backing for your words—because we are beginning to expand out here who is involved and who is affected. And a dispute between members of the church could then start affecting their families, and it could go out and affect the whole church.

What Jesus does, by giving us this instruction, is helping to put the brakes on these little petty accusations one against the other. He wants peace in the church. The fruit of righteousness can only grow in peace (James 3:18). So you better not break the peace with an accusation when you do not have any proof. Make sure that, if you bring an accusation against a brother, you have got your one or two others that can verify what you saw. And then the brother, our church member A, can say: “Okay. You got me. I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have done that.”

But that does not always happen. Church member A will say: “No, you guys also are

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wrong.” So it goes up to the next level where it says here that “if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church.” So it either goes to a council of the church (if that is the way the church is set up). Most often, in the church of God, that is when it goes, or should go, to a minister. The idea here, as I explained in one of my sermons a long time ago, is to keep as few people involved as possible, keep it contained, because sometimes it will split the church right down the middle. You do not want to do that. You want to keep it as quiet and private as possible. Let as few people be privy to what went on as possible because that keeps the lid on things, keeps it from blowing up, keeps division out of the church.

What we see here, as an example, Jesus takes a national principle—something that would normally be used in a local, county, state, or federal court—and He brings it down to one on one, between church members, and makes it a principle of interpersonal relations, or of justice between brethren, rather than justice in a greater sense or in an overall sense—in a nation. But the overall principle remains the same.

Two or three eyewitnesses of an offense are necessary to prove the charge of sin (or of criminal activity, or of civil misconduct, or however you want to say it) within the church. The justice is the same. It works the same way. Just the context has changed. It is between us. This works between us. So He is saying: “Do not go accusing one another unless you have really solid proof and it is really important” (now, usually, everything that happens to *us* is really important; but that is where wisdom comes in).

This passage also contains the principle, as we saw in the Old Testament, of appellate courts. That is, if a lower court cannot reach a verdict (that is, if the two or three witnesses cannot get it solved among you), well, then pop it up to the next level, so that the higher court can give it a more thorough examination and maybe a wise determination.

We can plug in here another thought. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 5:23-26. This is talking about the commandment against murder. He says: “If your brother has something against you, and you go bring your gift and put it on the altar, and you know that your brother has something against you, well, leave your gift at the altar, go and reconcile with your brother, and then come back and give your gift.”

Putting the two passages together (Matthew 18:15-17 and Matthew 5:23-26), Jesus is essentially recommending that matters are best resolved without involving the courts without going to somebody else for a judgment. He says: “Reconcile privately with your brother and then come back to Me with your gift. Get these things done between yourselves. Don’t involve anybody else, if it is possible. Involve as few people as

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possible. And don't take it into the courts. Don't take these things to law" (which is something that Paul says in I Corinthians: "Don't take these things outside your own group here"). Because (Do you know what he tells them there at the end of Matthew 5:26? He says:) "If you go that route, you're going to pay every penny."

He says, one, it will be costly; two, you run the risk of the judgment going against you. At least when you deal with these things one on one, you can reach some sort of agreement. But if you start involving people on the outside, well, you are just going to have to take what you get. So He is saying, "If you can, avoid the courts and other people altogether. Get it done between yourselves." And you can do that if you are humble, and you are submissive, and you are willing to admit that you are wrong; and if you are willing to give. So solve the problem privately. It is good advice.

Matthew 5:38-42 You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

Here is another one, an Old Testament principle that we saw in the last sermon, brought forward into the New. Notice what He says here. He quotes what is there (actually it is mentioned three times in the Old Testament—Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21), but as soon as He finishes quoting it, He says: "But I tell you. . . . That phrase "But I tell you," "But I say unto you" is a clue that He is making a change.

He is telling them straight out: "The Bible says this, the law says this, but I'm going to give you an alteration." Or maybe it is not even an alteration, maybe it is just an elevation of the principle—or, like I mentioned before, a change in scope or a change in context—so that He is then telling you something that you need to know so that you can get a proper spiritual understanding of this law and how He wants you to apply it in your own life.

One thing that is kind of interesting here: This 'eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth' is mentioned only once in the New Testament, which, against the three times that it is mentioned in the Old Testament, tells you how much different the New Testament is from the Old and how much the principle changes from the Old to the New Testament. Jesus, here, alters it or modifies it in terms of personal relations.

Remember, normally 'eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth' was something that happened in

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a court. The judges were allowed to say “Okay, you knocked out his tooth” (no necessarily in Israel; they did not usually knock out a tooth). “Because you knocked out his tooth, then you owe him X amount of shekels. Pay the shekels and we’re done. Everybody can go out and go on with their business.” That is the way it worked in Old Testament Israel. But Jesus is saying that this does not apply the same way to His people—Christians—in the church. He is making an alteration in terms of how it applies personally, and He says: “Do not resist an evil person.”

The principle here was “I want retribution for what was done to me.” That is eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth. “I want what is due to me.” Jesus took this (“I want repayment and I want a fine,” “I want retribution for what was done to me”) and He said, “That is not how we work as Christians. Do not resist him. Do not resist the evil person.”

Now what is He saying? What He is saying here is that a Christian is not to demand recompense. The word here that we really need to understand, or to underline, is not to ‘demand’ recompense or vengeance.

God says: “Vengeance is mine, I will repay” (Deuteronomy 32:35, Romans 12:19, and Hebrews 10:30). It is mentioned three times “Vengeance is mine, I will repay.” Who said that? Jesus Christ. He was the Lord of the Old Testament who said that originally. And so He says: “Christians, don’t take it upon yourselves to demand recompense, or to take vengeance, even if something has happened to you that is insulting, or that is demanding upon your time, your money, or even your clothing. Don’t demand your rights so that you can get back at the other person for putting you through that.” It is far better just to give in.

That is a hard one for human nature because we want our pound of flesh. We want to get back at that guy for doing what he did to us, in making our lives so hard and putting us down and all that. Jesus says, “No. That’s not the way we should handle things. It doesn’t work well. It just makes for a lot of fighting.” If you take vengeance, he is going to want to take vengeance on you, and you are going to want to take vengeance on him and then he is going to want to take vengeance on you—and both of you are dead. And then, your sons are going to take vengeance on him, and his sons are going to take vengeance on your sons, and it just escalates out and it never ends. So He is telling them here, Christians have to learn to rise above the typical responsive human nature and just cheerfully comply when somebody is trying to run over you. That is hard.

But, rather than respond with a sinful attitude—which usually happens and which usually escalates the problem beyond all redemption and all solving—we are supposed to respond with a submissive, helpful, and even a loving attitude of service. If someone

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compels you to go one mile, say: "Hey, this load of bricks is light. I'll go with you two. That is what He wants us to do.

What that does is essentially two things: It usually takes the air right out of the abuser. He thinks he is getting something on you and you are just cheerfully going along, and it is like, as it says, you are heaping coals of fire upon his head. And the coals of fire is that beautiful witness, that beautiful example, you are giving of a Christ-like attitude. And though you may lose at that point (you might lose some time, or you lose some dignity or lose a few bucks, or you lose a coat, however it is), in the end, you are going to gain and that person is going to gain. That is the whole thing. If you do it right, everybody wins. It might not seem like a win in the beginning.

Jesus Christ is looking way into the future to this other person's (this abuser's conversion and of course, your own salvation and glorification. If you do it right, you win big in God's estimation. And that person who was abusing you but has a right example now has a witness, either against him or for him, in terms of whether he is going to change because of it. So, really, it is a winning proposition. But human nature hates to win like that—hates to win by losing. But Jesus says "If you really want to win in the end this is how you go about it: You give in, you submit; and you turn around and you love that person by doing good for him." Oh, so difficult!

What did Jesus Christ do? Nailed to the cross, beaten. We saw from the CGG Week! yesterday, all those humiliating things that were done to Him. And what did He say? "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"—the ultimate example of fulfilling what He says to do, right there. And they killed Him. They were not just taking his coat—which they did anyway—but they did all of these things to Him. And He said "Forgive them." So He gave us the right example. And what kind of win did that give Him, and us, and all the people of the world? See how it works.

So Jesus elevates this Old Testament principle, which so many people think is barbaric and cruel—an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth—from fair recompense for a victim to the victim not only refusing to press his rights, but, instead, doing good to the persecutor. It is an extremely high standard. It is totally Christ-like, totally godly.

This change in the way we are to look at 'eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth' is a warm up to His grand conclusion as He goes into the next section (verses 43 through 48 where He ends up with "You shall be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect. That section starts with "Love your neighbor" and it ends with "Be perfect." That is what He is looking for here—that we change our character to the point where we can love our neighbor even under persecution and we can act perfectly, like the Father, in ever-

situation.

So, as the Sermon on the Mount has emphasized continuously, through Matthew chapter 5, the Christian's conduct under the law goes far beyond the letter, to the spirit where he has godly character in his heart and it comes out in his behavior.

Matthew 7:1-5 Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

This is another principle. This one focuses on the judge. It applies in both governmental jurisprudence and making personal judgments. Judges are just a little different. The principle here establishes what we call the conflict of interest principle. Judges and jury members can have this as well.

If the judge or a jury member is involved personally or professionally with parties in the case, or if he or she has similar interests, or if he or she has some sort of prejudicial factor going on that would skew his or her judgment on the matter, the judge is supposed to recuse himself or herself. He has a conflict of interest in the case, his judgment would be prejudicial to his own interests. So he recuses himself and says "You will have to find another judge to make this decision." Using Christ's words, the judge in this case has a plank in his own eye that makes him unfit to make a judgment. And, as Jesus said, if he continues and makes this judgment, he brands himself a hypocrite.

Now this happened actually with me. I was, or could have been, the hypocrite. I was called for jury duty several years ago. And as much as I tried to get out of it, I could not. So they called me in and I had to sit while they were trying to pick the jury members out. So they called my number and I was number 12 on this jury. They were still picking, and they went through and they started asking questions. One of the questions was "Do any of you have any experience with NASCAR?" And I raised my hand real quick: "Yeah, do". So they started questioning me about how much involvement I had had with NASCAR.

"Have you ever worked for NASCAR?" No.

"Have you ever worked for any of the racing teams?" No.

“Have you ever done any commercial work for NASCAR? Have you ever had any business arrangements with NASCAR?” No.

“What are you then? Why did you raise your hand?” I said I am a big fan of NASCAR. I have got all kinds of stuff from NASCAR. I have been to so many races.

And the guy said, “He’s out.”

It ended up the case was civil—a lawsuit—where they were making the little plates that go on the wall for a night-light, and they used cars rather than the normal plastic plate. So when you turned it on, you saw Jeff Gordon (or Jeff Gordon’s car or whatever) there. Somebody had done this without getting proper licensing from NASCAR. They thought it would be prejudicial against the manufacturer, and so they let me go.

But that is how it works. I had a plank in my eye in terms of NASCAR. I would not have been able to see it correctly, or at least impartially, as far as they were concerned. So they let me go. So that is how it worked. I got out and I did not have to serve. So ‘Yay for me.

Let us go to another one.

Matthew 12:33-37 Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

Behind this passage is another principle of our justice system, and that is the practice of police questioning and courtroom cross-examination. A savvy detective or a savvy attorney can use the question-and-answer format to prize out the truth of a matter because, in the end, as Jesus says here, a person cannot hide what he is. His heart is going to reveal what kind of person he is by the words that he speaks. So his words then, as Jesus said, will either justify him (prove him to be right) or condemn him (prove him to be wrong), and the judgment will come down more truthfully.

On a personal level, this is a good one to keep in the back of your mind. If you are judging a situation, listen, be patient, because the truth is going to get out somewhere.

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along the line in what people say. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. It is a true principle. And you can make good judgments when you hear the words coming out of their mouth, and they either justify themselves or they condemn themselves. You do not have to make a judgment at all. They do it to themselves. So just sit back, wait, listen.

Luke 12:13-14 Then one from the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” But He said to him, “Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?”

That is all we need right now. Jesus refuses to judge this civil matter. It was just dividing an inheritance. You would think He would have been very good at it—the most impartial Man ever, the wisest Man ever. He could have said, “Okay, you get this, you get this and everything was hunky-dory. But He refused.

Even though God had given all judgment over to Him (it says that in John 5:22), He would not do this judging at this time, because it was not His jurisdiction and it was not His time. His appointment to that office had not officially come. That is what it says in John 18:36: “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight.” But it is not the time. So He refused to judge in a situation where He had no jurisprudence, He had no authority to judge.

The principle here is clear. Judges are appointed for a specific term and over a specific area. They are constrained—if they are outside of that term or area, they are ordinary citizens and they are not authorized to judge. So this is telling you, in terms of interpersonal relationships and your ability, whether you should judge a thing or not. If it is not in your bailiwick, back away. Do not judge it.

Our Savior, who had the authority to do so and had the smarts had to do so, would not even do it Himself. As Christians, our citizenship is in heaven and our time of judging has not yet come—that happens in the Kingdom. So we should be very careful about the things that we decide to judge.

Getting down to the nitty-gritty here. I do not want to go through every one of these in the New Testament. That would kind of be futile. You need something to do yourself. So I am just going to go through a few.

Luke 20:20-25 So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor. Then they asked Him, saying, “Teacher, we know that You

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say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth: Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" But He perceived their craftiness, and said to them, "Why do you test Me? Show Me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have?" They answered and said, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

That is the principle here. They were trying to catch Him—to make Him declare Himself in rebellion against Rome—telling the people "No, you don't have to pay taxes to Caesar." And then they would have said "Aha! Let's go to Pilate. He's telling people not to pay taxes to the Roman government. Seize Him!" Well, He would not do that. He said, "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." So what He says is, to each his due.

So to these two entities—the civil government and religion (God)—we have to maintain separate loyalties. This principle is what we call the separation of church and state. Religious matters and carnal governmental matters are separate entities and should not be mixed—not in this world, not in your life. Church and state together will only work when the ruler is loving and righteous and his subjects are in tune with him.

Even in Israel it was separate. There was David (let us say), on the one hand, as king and there was Abiathar the high priest (or Zadok, or whoever it was at the time) in the Temple. They are two separate entities. They function best when they are separate but equal, with a little bit of edge given to the civil government. You are probably surprised that I might say that. But it is better when the civil government has a little bit more authority to keep order.

That is how it was in Israel. The civil government had the upper hand in those terms. That is probably the best way it works among human beings. History shows that when governments become too strong, we get totalitarianism and secularism. On the other hand, when religion dominates, we get something like radical Islam or medieval Catholicism. Neither one are good. So Jesus, here, approves of the separation of church and state among carnal human beings.

I will not go to them all, there are a lot of principles that come out in the book of Acts. For one thing, they say in chapters 4 and 5—when the apostles were taken by the Jews—that God's truth takes precedence over men's judgments: "We are to obey God rather than men." That is a big principle for us as Christians.

Chapter 5 of Acts also includes the story of Ananias and Sapphira, which covers the

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principle of collusion and conspiracy. Even though maybe Ananias was the one that actually sold the property and kept it back, Sapphira was part of the conspiracy and she was judged as having done the same. So Romans 1:32 also backs this up—that those who approve of these wicked things that people do are worthy of death, as they are.

Acts 9: This is the story of Saul's repentance. This brings out the principle of judicial clearing of a record. Ananias learned that the Judge, Jesus Christ, had cleared Saul of the crimes against the church, and he had to treat Saul as if he were guiltless. That is what happens in civil matters or criminal matters where a judge or a court clears a person's record.

Acts 10, 11, and 15—with the conversion of the Gentiles—is an example of equity in Christ, or equity under the law. This is also confirmed in Romans 2:11 where there is no partiality with God.

Acts 22. Paul is arrested at the Temple and the commander of the Roman fortress decides to scourge him. Paul uses his right as a Roman citizen to avoid the punishment. So this is the principle that says, basically, that God allows us to use our rights in judicial matters to help our case. Now what was the difference between this matter and Matthew 5 where Jesus said "Don't demand your rights"? It is an interesting one. Paul's use of his rights here is not to get retribution, but to avoid unnecessary and undeserved punishment. He was not trying to get back at anybody; he was just trying to keep the peace and keep things without escalating.

Also, in Acts 25, Paul appeals to Caesar, as was his right, to get an impartial judgment. This is a principle that God allows you to use intricacies and loopholes in the legal system to get a fair judgment. Go to the extent of the law. Use what is there. He does not want you to manipulate the system for your own advantage, but He allows you to use the laws that are available to you to use. That is why they are there. You might as well use them.

I will mention Romans 2:12-16. This passage generally supports the principle that ignorance of the law is no excuse. This is where it says the Gentiles do what they had never read in the law, but still they do them, and they know that they are wrong—their consciences tell them that they are wrong. Paul says, they are going to be judged as if they had the law. So their ignorance of the law—actually reading the law and seeing the law—is no excuse. They are still going to be judged according to their works.

I wanted to get to Romans 13:1-7. There is a whole lot there. But this is just where it says that God appoints governments over men. I just wanted to bring out the overall

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principle that God appoints the governing authorities, and we must be subject to them in their jurisdiction. We could call this the principle of public service or the principle of public good. They are appointed for the smooth operation of society. We should do what we can to cooperate with them as long as they do not infringe upon the laws of God.

Let us conclude in Romans 14:

Romans 14:7-13 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

This is a good thought, I think, to leave this subject on. Paul's advice is that we should avoid judging as much as possible—especially, stop judging one another—because we are all under judgment. We are all under the judgment of Christ and we all have to answer to Him. So he begs us, he pleads with us, not to make it harder for anybody else among the brethren—he is already under the gun.

We are Christians, we are the Lord's people, and we should leave the judging to Him—because He knows how to do it best.

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