Praying for Mercy and Justice

Let's turn to our Bibles to 2 Timothy chapter 4. 2 Timothy chapter 4, you probably thought I was done. 2 Timothy chapter 4, we'll back up a few verses, verses 14 to 16. Verses 14 to 16, let us listen attentively to the word of God.

Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. You also must be aware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words.

At my first offense, no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. Let us pray.

And here, God, as we drill into these verses, we see a prayer for justice, as well as a plea for mercy. Our God, may we learn and understand how we can live such as Paul did, as the Christians in this world. When we certainly have the clear commands of your word, that we should be merciful, that we should walk the extra mile, in fact, in the Sermon on the Mount.

But may we learn, Lord, how this truth also is here. That we cry out for justice, we cry out for fairness, Lord, and protection for those around us. As we see here for the Apostle Paul, and understand how the two interrelate for one another.

Guide us and guide my preaching therein, so that we can have a better understanding and faithfulness to your word. Amen. So Christ told us, as you know, to turn the other cheek.

He commanded us to pray for our enemies. We are to be merciful. Yet on the other hand, we are called to act justly and not unfairly.

We have examples in the New Testament, in fact, for calls for justice, as we read in this very verse, verse 14. How should we therefore approach such conflicting things, or at least conflicting to us?

Praying for the Lord’s Mercy

First of all, I want to go through each of the points here. Showing that the prayer of the Lord for mercy is indeed required of us, here in verse 16.

I'm going to reverse the order here. As praying for justice. And the third point will show how the two can function without contradiction in the Christian life.

That would be my third point. So here, first of all, verse 16, praying for the Lord's mercy. Reminder here, at my first defense, Paul writes, No one stood with me.

So here he is at Rome, to defend himself. It's unclear exactly what it is. We believe it was probably the first time when the emperor of Rome in the 50 A.D. called for Christians to be expelled from Rome because of problems and concerns about them.

And false concerns, obviously. And Paul was able to defend himself. He wasn't guilty of causing any problems in Rome.

But, during this time, he was left alone. What happened to the church? Where is the support? Can you imagine having the Apostle Paul here in Denver? And he's going to the governor or the supreme court here in the state house over here in Denver. And we all just abandon him.

We say, you're on your own, buddy. We don't associate with you. We're kind of embarrassed.

We don't know exactly why, what's going on. But that it happened is significant here. And it says, at my first offense or apology, right? I mentioned that last time.

That's the formal word for a defense. You give an apology to the judge. It's not an excuse.

That's how we use the word often in English. It's just an excuse. No, it's a formal apology or a defense there.

And Timothy apparently knew nothing of this. That's why he explains it to him, the young Timothy, that he wrote this letter to, 2 Timothy. So Paul informs him of this matter.

And so, therefore, it must have been written here at his second imprisonment. He must have been set free from the persecution of A.D. 64 before 64 A.D. when the Christians were accused of causing the conflagration and the burning of Rome later on. So between 50 and 64 A.D. And here is his last trial.

And he's apparently sentenced. We don't know what happens to him at the end of Acts. That's the last we know of him historically because the book of Acts is the history of the church up to the time of Paul in Rome.

And he's there in Rome in chains because he appealed to Caesar. And presumably, given the laws of the time, that he was probably found guilty for starting a new religion without Rome's authorization. So this is the historical context.

And, of course, no one came to his aid. They all forsook him. That's pretty strong language.

And yet the apostle's response was what? Different than the response that he had to Alexander the coppersmith. He doesn't say about Alexander the coppersmith, may it not be charged against him. Does he? Why didn't he? Is he not a godly man? I think he is a godly man.

I think we're being taught a lesson here in the actual acts of the apostles. But here, for these Christians that abandoned him, forsook him, he says, may it not be charged against him. That's clearly an act of mercy and compassion.

Because they did him wrong. And from that perspective, he had every right to bring them to account. At least ask, what were you thinking? Are we not best buddies? Am I not your pastor? What's going on here? He does.

He just says, Lord, I understand. Like Jesus on the cross, he says, may this charge not be against them. So what's the mercy for them? What's the difference? Well, I think part of it is here that these believers were believers.

And they were weak believers. They weren't men with influence and power, like appears to be in the case of Alexander the coppersmith. And the degree in which Alexander resisted Paul and the preaching of the word of God, he did much harm.

He describes it there in verse 14. And then in verse 15, be aware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words, that is, the preaching of the gospel and the expansion of the kingdom. And so you can see from the negative description of Alexander the coppersmith how serious the matter is in comparison to Paul.

Paul's like, well, you know, I was left alone. That's bad. But it pales in comparison to what Alexander did in hindering the public pronunciation, propagation, and preaching of the good news.

So you already have an idea here, I think, of how to understand the difference here. And we'll go into more of that later in the sermon. And so these are, I take them to be, as it were, Christians, weak Christians of a sort, but not men who resisted the truth, but Christians who were supporting him.

But at this point, they failed. So they don't have a life of doing this the way, apparently, Alexander does. He's characterized this way.

And if he's the same Alexander, it seems likely to be the case, as in 1 Timothy, who denied the resurrection and the like, he is, again, someone teaching. So he's putting upon himself the mantle of a teacher and resisting Paul with even false doctrine and false preaching. So that ups the ante, right, how serious the sin is.

And for Paul, it's a private matter in one sense. It's just Paul versus Rome, and he gets no support from the local church. But they're not, so that's a negative.

They're withdrawing as opposed to actually, hey, we're going to come here and help Rome take you down, Paul. I think that would be a different story in Paul's case, like it was with Alexander. But it's negative, right, they forsook me, they're not supporting me, but it's not positive in the sense that they're making an extra effort to tear me further down.

So those are the differences you can tell from the text, I would argue here, and I think that's part of the difference of why Paul here is taking it as a personal matter, and as a personal matter, he lets it go. It's a personal affront. He's like, that's fine.

God, have mercy upon them. Don't bring it to their charge. Don't hold it against them, Timothy.

Don't do it. They did wrong. You can't deny that.

But he says, don't hold it against them. That's mercy. He's exercising that.

Now, on the flip side, of course, unbelievers, it's an objective fact, don't forget, hate God. Now, these are Christians here in verse 16. I don't think they hated God at all, or Paul would have said something.

It's simply, again, a lack of a spine, perhaps. It's passive and failing to do what you should do. That's always an especially hard sin to deal with.

It's a little easier to see actual commission, as opposed to omission at times. And on the other hand, an unbeliever like Alexander, who is excommunicated, again, the same one, probably, in 1 Timothy, is therefore clearly an unbeliever, and he will act and think differently. They don't like to hear that there are wicked sinners who hate God, and they must repent and submit to Jesus.

And that is apparently the case of Alexander. They think differently. Or like the Jews, who are more aggressive and chase Paul down and out of cities and towns in the Book of Acts.

So you have that stark difference as well, which he prays for mercy here. We are indeed told to pray for our enemies, pray for their conversion, pray that they would not needlessly die without hearing the truth of the Gospel, for example. Pray that their kids are protected.

You know, sometimes in my pastoral prayers in church, I'll mention the schools and pray for the kids in the schools who aren't Christians. I don't always say that, but I am praying for the kids in schools, I'll say that. They'd be protected from groomers and predators.

They're there in the Jefferson County School District. It's appalling. And I certainly want to pray for their souls.

We pray, and of course, that any who are especially wicked, like Alexander the coppersmith, would be shut down eventually, because they're causing harm to the cause of Christ and his church and his people.

Praying for the Lord’s Judgement

And that leads us then here to the second point, praying for the Lord's judgment. Can we, and under what conditions should we? The text again is Alexander the coppersmith.

Most likely the same one mentioned a couple of times once in the Book of Acts, who apparently had power and influence in the city of Ephesus and went after and harassed Paul. The name is mentioned again in 1 Timothy, where he's listed with another man who denied the resurrection. And here, he's now listed not just Alexander, but Alexander the coppersmith, that kind of a title that suggests influence and power.

And what does he do? He resists the truth. And how does he resist it? Greatly. So it's just one layer after another against Paul's preaching and teaching ministry.

One, Paul, is what? Commissioned by Jesus. In a way, I'm not commissioned by Jesus in the sense that I didn't get to see Jesus on the road. All the other apostles lived with Jesus and walked among him.

He's grabbed later by God, the power of the Holy Spirit, and brought into the number, but in a unique way. He literally saw Jesus on the road. That's a special thing.

And when he comes along and speaks to you, when any apostles come speak to somebody, and people deny that and attack him, they are attacking whom? Jesus! Because he commissioned them. And so to resist, and therefore resist greatly, whether in part or in total, the gospel of Jesus Christ is a serious affront. And what's Paul's response? Divine repayment.

May the Lord repay him according to his works. And what kind of works did he do? Does anybody think he did good works? No. He didn't do good works.

He did much harm, we're told, in verse 14. And again, beware of him in verse 15. So it's implied and unspoken, may the Lord repay him according to his works.

Bad works. And how do you repay bad works? With the judge. Punishment.

Discipline of some sort. But if we are to pray for our enemies, and indeed we are, how do we deal with this text? Partly, we have an answer, as I had mentioned already. Paul's commission, Paul's office, Paul's job, is public and official.

It's not just him. It's not a private matter. As we go a little bit through Matthew 5, at the end of the sermon, you'll see there, Christ, the examples he gives, are matters of private or personal.

I don't mean private as in behind closed doors, necessarily, but personal. Hey, the soldier comes to you and says, carry my stuff and my load. Okay, carry an extra mile.

What does Paul do? When they come after him, to interrogate him, for supposedly starting a riot in the book of Acts, and they're going to pull him aside and beat him, does Paul say, okay, go ahead and beat me, I'll give you my other cheek. No, he says, you know, I'm a Roman citizen. And what do they do? They about drop their jaw.

Because you can get serious trouble attacking a free man in the Roman Empire. And he was a free man. Because the centurion comes up to him and says, is this true? I bought my freedom.

I paid a lot of money, the centurion said. And what did Paul say? I was born a free man. I have legal rights.

And the implication being, if you beat me, you could die. You could be beating yourself to death for touching Paul. So again, just asking the question, I think you already know the answer.

Was Paul really breaking Christ's commandment? Or do we misunderstand Christ's commandment? I suggest the latter. So here, Paul has public authority. And like a police officer or a judge who has public authority, it's hard to wrap our heads around it in America because Christianity is so beaten down after the last several generations.

We have no social status. That's not necessarily bad or good in one sense. I mean, it's up to God.

And so we don't think of pastors in that way often. Oh, he's just another guy who happens to speak better than I do. No, we are given, although not the same, of course, authority in the sense of Paul, who I like to describe as a super-pastor.

He could do miracles, right? He wrote books for the Bible. I can't do any of that. But with respect to preaching the truth and expounding the word of God, we are on the same page.

In fact, he lays hands on others. In fact, others laid hands upon Paul. Other elders and ruling elders laid hands upon him because there's an equal authority in that sense.

But we don't have that much in America. Who's given authority? It's usually someone with a big church or a big name. Paul doesn't really have either in one sense because he's a traveling missionary.

He's not staying in any place at one time. And nevertheless, he knows what he is given by God on high. And this man went after the ministry and the church.

And Paul stood firm and was going to defend and protect it. And he does that with this prayer, like a police officer or a judge. That's the kind of authority that the churches, the pastors used to have in the old, early America and in Europe.

Not, you know, I can't arrest people, obviously, but that public acceptance, like, this is a guy you don't mess around with. You don't mess with cops, you don't mess with judges, you don't mess with pastors. Thus, we have a partial answer about the question of the relationship between justice and mercy.

Now, there are other texts, I'm building this up, right, other texts about judgment and vindication. I don't want to keep using the word judgment, so I'll use the word vindication once in a while. I don't mean vindication in a petty sense, right? I'm going to vindicate my name because I'm better than you.

But just justice and fairness and vindication and uprightness. Jesus did what to the money changers in the temple? Have a nice little chat with them? Have a little winsome discussion with them? Now, it's easy to say, well, that's Jesus, he's special. No, he was also a man.

If he was acting as God, they would have been dead. That's just a miracle would have taken them out. But he took a physical item, like the rest of us would do, and showed by his example, I'm arguing, that there's a time and place for the public leadership, because he's acting as a prophet, priest, and king, to exercise, even physical.

In this case, beating them with a whip to get them out of there. Pretty serious stuff. Paul, as I already went over before, warned the Roman citizen, I'm a Roman soldier, I'm a citizen, you better not whip me.

1 Corinthians 16, 22. If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha. Anathema means accursed.

That doesn't sound like a blessing. Bless those who curse you, Jesus tells us. Let him be accursed.

Well, it looks like Alexander the coppersmith was probably someone who didn't love the Lord Jesus. Acts 8, 18. This is the longer text.

And when Simon saw that through the laying on the hands of the apostles' hands, the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, right? Simon the magi, saying, give me this power also that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit. This is great stuff. I want to have this magic.

I'm willing to pay for it. And what does Peter say to him? You know, you're just kind of confused. And I understand the way you were raised.

Was he a pagan? I think he was a pagan, we'll just say. And I should probably be a little compassionate understanding that you really don't get Christianity. Let me sit down and we'll have a little chat.

What does Peter respond? How does Peter respond? You already know. If you recall, your money perished with you. Not just your money perish, but your money perish with both of you.

Oh, you're out of here. Because you thought the gift of God could be purchased with money. So we call that to this day, simony.

We have it in the Roman Catholic Church, simony. Buying off grace and the like. You pay off God's mercies with money.

That's what Luther was dealing with. You have neither part nor portion in this matter. For your heart is not right in the sight of God.

He didn't have to read the man's heart to know that. Just simply someone comes up to you and says, I want to buy the Holy Spirit. Like, you got a heart problem, bud.

You're missing the boat. You don't think you heard otherwise from Peter preaching? Remember, we don't hear all the details of the sermons and acts. We're given summaries.

He was there long enough to see what was going on, and I'm sure he heard the sermons of Peter. And Peter wasn't saying, hey, the way you get to heaven is by buying off the Holy Spirit. Of course not.

Repent, therefore, of your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. Peter shows us here two things. That on the one hand, he does give judgment.

It's not a prayer of judgment. I know I'm emphasizing prayer, because that's what we have here in the text. There's also acts of judgment upon him by his words.

Your money perish with you. And of course, the caveat is, if you keep this up and don't repent, that's what he has at the end of what I just read here. So he says both.

He has the judgment and he has the mercy, because he prays, repent, therefore, and perhaps God will forgive you. And I think that's a good paradigm for us, when appropriate. I'll talk about a little more specific a little later.

The rule of thumb, I'll tell you right now, if you really want to know, of course, the rule of thumb is be merciful. When in doubt, just be merciful. It's easy for us to be very judgmental and go after our own personal grievances.

That's a danger. And so I want to tell you right now, don't. When in doubt, just don't.

Again, how is Peter doing this? Because he's got the public mantle of a pastor slash apostle, and he's doing public preaching and the like. And we have this man who's a public leader, like Alexander the copper smith. This man, salmon magi, was known amongst the people and did all these amazing things.

They respected him. And he comes along. So you have this public back and forth of two powers and influences, as it were.

And Peter's making a stand against him. That's significance. As opposed to you privately and having problems with your neighbor and whatever else.

Yes, turn the other cheek. A thousand times, turn the other cheek. But he's doing it for more than just his own personal aggrandizements, but for the glory of God and for the office.

And same with Christ, and same with Paul. There's your clue in these texts. Galatians 1.8, but even if we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel than that what is preached to you, let him be anathema or accursed.

And then in Revelation 6.10, and they cried with a loud voice saying, how long, O Lord, how holy and true until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth. That is the martyrs under the throne crying out for vindication because they were tortured and killed for the sake of Jesus Christ. From the Old Testament, by their own people, as Christ told his audience in the Gospels, you killed the prophets from Abel to Zechariah and in today.

And they cry out for what? Vindication and justice. How long, O Lord, until you judge and avenge our blood, quoting Psalm 94 in a precatory psalm. Right, in precatations to bring or pray for judgment or curses.

They're calling for vindication. And of course, this text. So I just went through the text of the New Testament that show us something else is going on here that should be in our understanding of the data of the Bible.

Praying for the Lord's Will

And that leads us here, lastly, to the third point, which is prayer for the Lord's will. We want the Lord's will to be done, whether that may be mercy or judgment. And I'll say this ahead of time here.

So when Paul says, may the Lord repay him according to his works and he leaves it unsaid, it could be, and I'm inclined to think Paul's like, if it's just judgment and justice, so be it. But if God desires to give him mercy, of course, his answer is what? So be it. I'm certainly, Paul's going to accept either way.

Maybe having it this way, he leaves it open-ended. And that's fine. That's probably a good way to pray a number of times if it's a serious enough matter.

We'll see now as I get to these more details we all want to hear about. Now, there are two questions here. Can we petition God for justice and fairness? I think we can, obviously.

We saw the texts. We see Paul doing it. We see Peter doing a parallel example, although it wasn't prayer per se.

And if so, we can pray and petition to God for justice and fairness. How does Christian love and mercy work or coordinate with this opportunity or what we can do here? So the answer to the first question, as we saw, is yes, but with distinction. And I've given you a number of those distinctions a little bit, and I'll put them all together here.

Not for any cause, but for serious matters. I don't know, murder. Your family got kidnapped.

The church is on fire, like in Paris, right? Pray for God for protection and vindication of his people, especially for God's cause. God's anointed in God's people, like the martyrs. Not with a petty hatred or bitterness.

That's where it becomes hard, I'm sure. And always willing to receive the repentance. Because a part of the cry out for justice and vindication should include the desire that they would repent, as Peter expressed there in Acts, where he said, if perhaps the Lord would grant you forgiveness.

He allows it, and he probably wants it, I'm sure. He wants them to repent. And how are you going to wake up somebody sometimes? Sometimes you've got to wake them up by verbally smacking them across the head.

Your money perished with you. See how serious this is, buddy? Maybe you'll repent. Sometimes God brings about hardships, judgments, like on perhaps Alexander or somebody, that brings them to repentance.

God can do that. God does and has done that, as we know in the Bible and history. And so then the text here, Paul is warning those in the church about this dangerous man.

He spends a couple of sentences describing those verses 14 and 16. Did we much harm? And beware of him. He's done great resistance against the word of the truth therein, blocking the gospel from spreading and the like.

Now, with respect to answering the first question, can we pray for judgment and justice? I already gave some caveats and explanations. Here's another caveat, another way of thinking about it. Restrained imprecations, or restrained prayers for judgment.

Paul, I think, has that a little bit here, verse 14. Again, it's just implied. He doesn't say, God, judge him.

Just God, repay him for his works. But we also have it in Psalm 59. Of all the places you wouldn't expect to find a restrained prayer for judgment, you wouldn't expect it to see, at least I didn't, in an imprecatory psalm.

And that's what we do find in Psalm 59, verse 11 and following. In Psalm 59, he calls for judgment, but he calls for a restrained judgment. Let me go there and read that for you.

The section there in those verses is clearly imprecatory for David is calling upon God to bring judgment upon those who are coming after him. But he says in verse 11, do not slay them, lest my people forget. Scatter them by your power and bring them down, O Lord, our shield.

So he doesn't call upon God for the harshness of all judgments. I think that's very instructive. Again, the Old Testament, I grant, were much more bloodthirsty in many ways or more willing to go to combat and fight.

That's true. They're immature. I don't deny that at all.

But even then, David is restraining himself. He says, don't slay them. Don't bring full judgment upon them.

And I think that's appropriate. That's a reminder. If that's true in the Old Testament, how much more is that true in the New Testament? Well, we are supposed to be more gracious, as it were, on average, in our everyday situation, interaction with one another, and even our enemies.

And so that there is another way of reminding us of such prayers, although it should be relatively rare in our lives, if I can say that. It should be under those restrictions for serious matters, especially for the glory of God and his church and his cause in a public way, in particular. Gerhardus Voss reminds us, however, of an important fact that we must not lose sight of.

Gerhardus Voss wrote a paper on Precatory Psalms. He was a professor in the Covenanters' church back in the 60s and 70s. He wrote a magazine.

I can't remember the name of the magazine. He wrote here, God's kingdom cannot come without Satan's kingdom being destroyed. God's will cannot be done on earth without the destruction of evil.

Evil cannot be destroyed without the destruction of men who are permanently identified with it. Instead of being influenced by the sickly sentimentalism of the present day, Christian people should realize that the glory of God demands the destruction of evil. And that leads to the last caveat, which is there's such prayers not in bitterness.

There's such prayers also, as well, not with specificity. We don't know who is elect and who's not. And those who are the enemy of the church, such as, I don't know, Paul, who went after the Christians and helped kill Christians, could yet still be converted.

And so in praying for judgment upon Paul, the prayer would be, Lord, may he stop harming us. May he fall into his own traps such that he comes to the end of himself and he repents. You can do both if you're going to have a specific name in such a prayer.

But often when we do pray it, as I pray, that God will stop evil, I don't give names. Because I don't want you thinking that I think everyone's, you know, unelect or something. They could be saved.

So we have to be careful about names. But realize, nevertheless, that evil must be destroyed. And we pray that God will stop them.

Calvin's sermon reminds us again here in Jeremiah 15, where we read, O Lord, you know, remember me and visit me and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. So there we go. We have the Old Testament saints, and it's easy to write them off and saying, well, of course they want vengeance.

They were weak Christians. Calvin's response is, if we demand vengeance, let it not be out of self-interest and unbridled passion. Then we can say that our zeal is like that of the prophet.

If there is the least or last bitterness in us, we have nothing in common with the prophet. And that's a very hard thing to pray without bitterness or anger and rancor. But it can be done in the circumstance, I think, for a lot of us when we realize we're praying for very serious matters.

I don't know, like drug trafficking of Christian children or something. Just these incredible scenarios you never thought of 20 years ago are happening now. And as Christians, we ought to pray for such justice that they would be stopped, for example.

Just praying that they be stopped is not praying a good thing but a bad thing in the sense of usually stopped in a very bad way or a very harsh way, of course. And so Paul, I keep messing all the names up. But Calvin's advice is very, very helpful.

It's very much like with children. Parents discipline children. They do negative things.

They judge children. You better be judging your children. In the best sense of the word, of course, you did wrong and now I'm going to discipline you.

But you shouldn't do what? In anger. You control yourself. Take a couple deep breaths.

You do what's necessary and no more. You don't go overboard. You do it for the right motivation to protect and train them and not out of what? Personal vengeance or pride.

It's very much the same thing when you pray for public justice and protection of the church and the like. Second question. How do we therefore, since we can pray such things, do mercy and justice coordinate? How do they coordinate? How do they work in the Christian life? We pray for the Lord's will according to our circumstances.

First, mercy and patience is the standard go-to reaction or the rule of thumb ordinarily and safe in almost everyday life. I have to say almost because, I mean, in wartime, you have to protect your family. You have to flee.

It's not being patient by sitting there and letting them slaughter you. That's not patience. That's foolishness.

That's a violation of the sixth commandment. What did Christ tell them to do when the great judgment came in the fall of Jerusalem? Did he say, sit there and be slaughtered? He warned them to flee because you're not super holy just sitting there being slaughtered. That's what a lot of the Anabaptists thought.

Or even some of the martyrs. There was a problem in the early church. They were like eagerly wanting to be martyred in some cases.

They had to hold them back. No, that's not really. You got it all wrong.

Secondly, a willing heart to receive those who are repentant, of course. And thirdly, suffer. You can suffer and be patient in physical matters and the things of this world.

Loss of time, loss of property, maybe even being smacked. We have that, in fact, in 1 Peter where he tells the slaves to submit even though they're being buffeted, actually being hit by their masters. But when it comes to preserving your life, of course, life of the body and especially life of the soul, you must protect it.

That's the sixth commandment. And so the common reformed understanding of the Sermon on the Mount and all these matters here is that it's dealing with specifically personal or private one-on-one small matters as well. I mean, walking an extra mile.

Back then, you might think today, I don't want to walk an extra mile. Back then, they walked everywhere. They didn't ride donkeys.

We forget that. They weren't on horses. They walked everywhere.

So another mile, yeah, I wouldn't want to do that, but it wasn't the end of the world for them. And Christ's like, go a little extra. Do the extra.

And that's what I'm urging us. Go the extra mile. And again, you know, your neighbor broke the fence and things like that, and he damaged this or whatever.

Fine, leave it alone and just fix it yourself. You need to have good relations with your neighbor, and he wants to be a stick in the mud, a pain in the butt, let it be. Just turn the other cheek.

Yes, yes, and amen. And so Jesus, in correcting the pharisaical abuse of God's law, that's what's going on in Matthew 5, 6, and 7 in the Sermon on the Mount. We have, for example, in the beginning there, blessed are the peacemakers.

He says blessed are the peacemakers. So that's a good thing. Be a peacemaker, and you're going to be blessed, so you should all be peacemakers.

Without restriction, without any limitations? Of course not. When we read, I don't know, Romans 12, 18, if it is possible, Paul writes, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Paul's like saying, Paul's saying, let's be peacemakers if it's possible with you.

If you do what you can, but sometimes, what's he saying? You only do what you can, and you still can't live in peace. Only as much as depends on you. Christ, in other words, has an implied caveat.

He's giving a sermon, and the sermon, like I give a sermon, I don't give all the caveats and explanations, sometimes I just skip over things. Or a highlight, he's pegging and hammering home a point for his audience because they're always looking for excuses. The Pharisees were always looking for excuses to have a vengeance and petty spitefulness, and as we saw, they went after Jesus.

They took everything he did personally and wanted to kill him at the end of the day. And so to hammer someone home at that, hammer the point home to some people like that, those kind of hard hearts, you have to speak black and white to the point. You do that with little kids.

You do that with stubborn adults. Christ is doing that. Don't forget.

Paul, later on in Romans 12, 18, gives us this caveat. As much as depends upon you. Or when Jesus said, walk the extra mile, he did not have in mind helping child traffickers.

While they're coming up to you and they want you to walk the extra mile, go for it, help them. I don't even think the Anabaptists believe that. So sometimes it helps when you think about extreme scenarios like, okay, I don't think that's where Christ is going with this.

So there are implied limits we find from the rest of the Bible and how God designed the moral universe for that matter. In sum, brothers and sisters, be careful in using prayers of judgment. We need to be careful therein that they be, as I said before, rarely used, and

when used, used for great and just causes like the massacre of Christians or even our fellow unbelievers, for that matter, war.

We don't want war for them. Our prayers should be prayers that, such prayers should be often prayers for things that we can't do much about. I mean, these are great matters that we can't stop these guys.

And so, God, we have to depend upon you and we want this protection to be implemented for us. And, of course, used with the hope that the enemies of God will be converted, as Peter did. But in all things, to accept the will of God, whether he will answer it the way you think he will or not, in terms of converting them.

And he answers as he will and what he wills we should submit to. Let us pray. Gracious God above, we are grateful for your word and how you've given us these various and multitude of texts and our own lives to see and understand, God, that there is, part of the Christian life, a zeal for justice and judgment in the best sense, Lord, for the good of others and not for our own personal gain.

And may that be tempered, of course, in all things, by mercy and a prayer for compassion and the need for conversion for the enemies of the church of Jesus Christ. May this, we pray, be the case for all of us and help us therein to live such a life honoring to your name. We pray this by your mercies, through Jesus our Lord and Savior.

Amen.