



MT. ROSE REFORMED
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Eye for Eye

Reverend Scott Johnson | February 15, 2026 | Exodus 21:12-36

Old Testament Reading

Our Old Testament reading is Exodus chapter 21, verses 12 through 36. So Exodus 21, verses 12 to 36. And this is the infallible, the inspired, the inerrant word of God.

Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death. But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee. But if a man willfully attacks another to kill him by cunning, you shall take him from my altar that he may die. Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death. Whoever steals a man and sells him and anyone found in possession of him shall be put to death. Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.

When men quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist and the man does not die but takes to his bed, then if the man rises again and walks outdoors with his staff, he who struck him shall be clear. Only he shall pay for the loss of his time and shall have him thoroughly healed. When a man strikes a slave, male or female, with a rod, and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be avenged. But if the slave survives a day or two, he is not to be avenged, for the slave is his money.

When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let the slave go free because of his eye. If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let the slave go free because of his tooth.

When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten, but the owner of the ox shall not be liable. But if the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past and its owner has been warned but has not kept it in, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner also shall be put to death. If a ransom is imposed on him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is imposed on him. If it gores a man's son or daughter, he shall be dealt with according to this same rule. If the ox gores a slave, male or female, the owner shall give to their master 30 shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

When a man opens a pit, or when a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit shall make restoration. He shall give money to its owner, and the dead beast shall be his. When one man's ox butts another's so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and share its price, and the dead beast also they shall share. Or if it is known that the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past and its owner has not kept it in, he shall repay ox for ox, and the dead beast shall be his.

New Testament Reading

You can keep your place there. That will be our sermon text this morning. Our New Testament reading is Matthew chapter five, verses 38 through 42. Matthew 5, 38 through 42. You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

Understanding the Civil Law

We are working our way through the book of Exodus, and last week we began a section in Exodus in which the Lord gave to Moses various laws that would govern the life as the Israelites, as they were being formed at this time to live as a nation, as the covenant people of

God. They needed laws to direct and to govern the various circumstances, situations that would come up.

And we began looking at some of these laws last week, and it's easy to get bogged down in all of the details of these various laws that God has given to the people of Israel. So before we get into the passage, let's just remind ourselves, first of all, of the function of these laws, how they operated, or what was their role in the life of God's people under the old covenants, in the nation of Israel.

These laws are part of what theology has called the civil or the judicial law of God. These were not meant to be permanent, but they were given to the people of Israel as long as they were a nation, that is, up until the coming of Christ. These laws were to direct the life of the nation of Israel. And I mentioned last week that we should not read these laws as if this is God's blueprint for a perfect society. That is not the intent of these laws. Of course, the laws are just, they are righteous and so on.

But as we saw last week, with some of these laws, at least, God was not establishing what an ideal society would look like, but he was giving laws that would regulate practices that he knew would take place, but he did not necessarily sanction or approve. But he gave laws that would at least moderate or regulate practices that could be easily abused or perhaps even somewhat evil in themselves, for example, divorce. We might even include the practice of slavery in that category as well. And so that's something to keep in mind when we consider these laws.

The Application of the Ten Commandments

And part of the purpose of these civil laws was to illustrate or to demonstrate how the Ten Commandments applied to the life of the Israelites in their day-to-day dealings with one another. As I said last week, these civil laws are not meant to be the basis of the laws of any nation or state today. We are not to take these civil laws and make them word for word the law of the United States or any other country.

However, there is much value in considering these laws and studying them because they demonstrate ways in which the Ten Commandments, the moral law, ought to govern and inform the lives of all people today. For example, some of these laws have to do with a situation in which an animal is owned by someone and that animal kills another person. And the principle that we can take from that and a principle that ought to be enshrined in the just laws of any

nation is that we are not only responsible ourselves to protect the lives of others, but that responsibility also extends to the things or the animals that are under our control.

And so if I have a vicious dog and I carefully or carelessly, I should say, if I irresponsibly, carelessly let my dog roam the neighborhood and he bites a neighbor, I am guilty of breaking the sixth commandment because I have not restrained my dog from hurting others. And so there's these laws and we can see how the 10 commandments would apply to the everyday life situations that may come up among the people of Israel.

Another purpose of these laws that make them useful to us, as well as they were useful to the people of Israel then, was that they reveal to us, they show to us what God values, what he deems important, what he considers worthy, worthy of protection among the people of God. And so, for example, we'll see in these laws that God is very concerned about those in society who are weak, who are vulnerable, who are easy to be exploited or oppressed by others. And so many of these laws are protection against the unrighteous oppression or exploitation of those who are weak and vulnerable.

And so we'll see that as we go along. So having said that then, we'll proceed as we consider this passage this morning in the same way that we did last week. We'll consider first what these laws meant to the people of Israel back then, the original recipients of these laws. What did they mean? How were they to be carried out? And then we'll look at these laws in light of the coming of Christ. And we'll consider the significance that they hold for us as Christians today.

As we look at this passage, kind of reads like almost a random assortment of different laws, but there is some structure here. We can break this passage up into three different sections. There are three laws that pretty much break down into three different categories. Verses 12 through 17 deal with crimes that demand the death penalty. And so verses 12 through 17 are crimes that require, or they are capital offenses. They require a capital punishment. Verses 18 through 27 deal with crimes involving personal injury. And then verses 28 through 36 are laws that cover what we would call today criminal negligence.

Crimes Requiring Capital Punishment

So let's look first at the first group of laws in verses 12 through 17. These laws call for the death penalty for those who break these commandments. And verses 12 through 14 deal with the crime of murder. And these laws in verses 12 through 14 distinguish between someone who kills

someone intentionally, that is, he murders someone, versus someone who accidentally kills someone. It was purely an accident. He wasn't meaning to kill him. He had no malice against him and so on.

And so if the killer acted with premeditation, if he intentionally set out to kill somebody, even if it was in the heat of the moment, he was guilty of the crime of murder. And in the Old Testament, the penalty for murder is always the death penalty, capital punishment. The one who committed murder, he may try to find safety by fleeing to the altar of God and taking hold of the altar. But if he purposely killed someone, even the altar of God would not provide sanctuary for him. He was to be taken away from the altar and his life was to be taken away from him. He was to be put to death.

But if a person killed somebody by accident, for example, if two friends are out in the woods chopping down firewood and one of the ax handles flies off or the ax head flies off the handle and hits the other guy in the head and he dies, that's an accident. Accidentally killed his friend is not considered guilty of murder. And so that's what verse 13 refers to when it says, but if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand.

And so in the mysterious providence of God, these tragedies take place. These awful things can happen. A person can accidentally kill another person. But according to God's perfect justice, the person who killed him is innocent, he ought not to be punished even though somebody died. But unless it was an accident, according to these laws, according to God's justice for the Israelites, if someone killed another person purposely, he is a murderer and he must forfeit his own life. He must be subject to capital punishments.

The Biblical Case for the Death Penalty

And this raises the question. If capital punishment, as we read it here in these laws, if it was part of these civil laws that God gave to the people of Israel, these laws that have expired along with the state or the nation of Israel, does that not mean, therefore, because the civil laws no longer directly apply to our laws today, does that not mean, therefore, that there is no biblical warrant or justification for the death penalty today?

And the answer to that is, no, there is. There is biblical warrant, biblical justification for the death penalty today, but it's not found in these laws per se. Rather, the biblical mandate for the death penalty is found in Genesis chapter nine, verse six, where the Lord says this, whoever sheds

the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. You remember that these words were spoken by the Lord to Noah.

And the Lord spoke these words to Noah before the creation of the people of Israel. So this was not a law that had to do only with the people of Israel, but the Lord spoke these words to Noah when he made his covenant with him, a covenant that included, that embraced all of humanity. And so this verse in Genesis 9:6 is something that was meant to apply to all societies at all times. It is the biblical warrant for the death penalty.

Now, of course, when we talk about our own judicial system and the actual carrying out of the death penalty or sentencing a criminal to death, we ought to be extremely careful and sober and serious about that. There should be no question of guilt. And there may be circumstances, even when someone is murdered, extenuating circumstances that may call for something less than the capital punishment.

However, we must affirm that biblically speaking, according to the perfect justice of God, when someone commits murder, the just penalty is that that person's life must be forfeited. He must give up his own life because he took the life of another unlawfully. But it's important to see the positive truth that is contained here in God's provision for the death penalty. And that is God has given every human being worth and value and inestimable worth and value because every human being is created in the image of God who is infinitely worthy, infinitely valuable.

It is such a heinous sin against God to unlawfully destroy the life of His image bearers that His justice demands the life of the one who is guilty of murder. That's the measure, that's the extent to which God places value and worth in His human creatures, those who bear His image. And so we too ought to value human life as much as God does.

Respect for Authority and Human Dignity

When we go on in this passage in verses 15 and 17, they tell us of two other crimes that required the death penalty. I'll just read those two passages, first verses 15 and then verse 17. So verse 15, whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death. Verse 17, whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.

Now these laws, I think it's reasonable to assume that these laws are not dealing with the ways in which young children, small children will act out against their parents, maybe even in a fit of

rage, even strike their parents, hit their parents. But these laws have in view adult children, adult children whose contempt and hatred for their parents is so intense that they physically attack them, or one of them, or they call down God's curses upon their parents. And when that happened, according to these laws, the guilty son, the guilty daughter had to be put to death.

Now, these laws, they sound, some of these laws, they sound very harsh to us. We certainly don't have a law like this in our laws in our society today. But again, it's important to see the positive reason. What was God seeking to protect? What value was he assigning here with this law? And what the Lord was seeking to protect was the dignity of human authority, particularly parental authority. God takes the fifth commandment. The fifth commandment says, honor your father and mother. God takes that very, very seriously.

So we can see just how important it is to God and how important it should be to us to give all due respect and honor to our parents and not only to our parents, but to all lawful authority that God has set over us. No society could flourish or survive for long which did not have a basic value and respect, not only for parental authority, but for all forms of lawful authority. And so although, unlike in the case of murder, we don't apply the death penalty today for breaking the Fifth Commandment, nevertheless, these laws should impress upon us just how much value God places upon having an authority structure that is respected among any kind of society.

Another crime that call for the death penalty is in verse 16. So look at verse 16 and I'll read that as well. Whoever steals a man and sells him and anyone found in possession of him shall be put to death. So kidnapping a person, stealing a person, and keeping him as a slave or selling him to someone else to be their slave, this was such an egregious assault against that person that the Lord called for, commanded the death penalty for the one who was guilty of that crime.

And again, what we see here is God's basic concern for those who bear his image. He is concerned for the dignity, the liberty of human beings. And so for those who do not treat other human beings with that respect that they deserve simply by being made in the image of God, they treated them not like people, but like animals, like a slave trade does, then they were to be put to death.

And as I said last week, since this verse describes the basis upon which the institution of slavery was founded upon in our own nation, whatever else we may say about the Bible's teaching on slavery, we can confidently say that the Bible clearly condemns the kind of slavery, the institution of slavery, as it existed in our own country in the South a few hundred years ago.

Laws Concerning Personal Injury and Restitution

The second group of laws, so that's the first group of laws, verses 12 through 17. The second group of laws are in verses 18 through 27, and these have to do with personal injury, causing physical harm to someone. The law in verses 18 and 19 deals with the situation in which two men fight and one is injured but not killed. And so the penalty in that case was a just restitution. The man who injured the other person, he not only has to pay for that injured person's loss of time at work, but he also has to pay for his medical care so that he is thoroughly healed.

It's not hard to imagine that perhaps if the Israelites kept these laws in their minds that they might have thought twice before settling their differences with their fists, knowing that it could become quite expensive if they hurt someone in a fight. Verses 20 and 21 deal with the treatment of slaves or servants. I will read verses 20 and 21. When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be avenged. But if the slave survives a day or two, he is not to be avenged, for the slave is his money.

Now, we need to remember that what was culturally acceptable in these days, in those days, is not what we might find culturally acceptable today. So it's hard for us to hear some of these laws, but these laws assume that a master of a slave or a servant had the right, he was within his bounds, to use physical punishment against his servant. However, the use of corporal punishment could not be extreme, it could not be vicious or cruel.

Verse 20 says that if a master beat his servant so severely that he died, that the servant shall be avenged. And so what that means is that the law against murder and the penalty of capital punishment that this applied just as equally in the case of a master with his slave. A master was not free to simply murder his slave or to beat him to death. If he did, he would be subject to the same penalty for anyone who murdered another person.

The slave shall be avenged. The master would have to give up his own life if he murdered his slave. Again, you see how God is protecting those not only who bear his image, but those who were in particularly vulnerable situations and a slave would have been. Verse 21 deals with the case where a servant is beaten but he survives a day or two before he dies. And verse 21 says that in that case, he is not to be avenged. That means the master is not to be held guilty for murder, for the slave is his money.

Now, again, this is hard for us to hear, kind of hard for us to accept, but what this law is saying is that the master is not guilty of murder in this case, because the slave survived a day or two. In other words, the master was not trying to kill him. He was not trying to put him to death. And so he's not subject to capital punishment. What the verse is saying is that the master has inflicted his own punishment upon himself. The slave is his money. He no longer has the labor, the services of that slave that he would otherwise have.

It sounds harsh to us, this law, but let's hear that law in the light of these other laws that the Lord gave to his people. In verses 26 and 27, listen to this. It says, when a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let the slave go free because of his eye. If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let the slave go free because of his tooth. And so there was a, a narrow limit put to how much a master would hurt his slave. If he did any kind of permanent damage, any kind of permanent injury, if he knocked out his eye or his tooth, the slave would go free. And so when you look at these laws, the overall design for them was to protect those who were servants or slaves from the abuse that they might have been subjected to by their masters.

The Principle of Lex Talionis

Now verses 22 through 24, these are the most difficult verses in this passage, partly because, or perhaps mainly because, the Hebrew is very difficult to interpret. It's not easy to translate, but the general sense seems to be this, that two men are fighting near a pregnant woman, probably not a good idea, but they're fighting near a pregnant woman, and one of them accidentally hits the woman, and she's injured. And if there was, and not only that, but the baby that she carries is born prematurely.

If there was no permanent harm done to her or her newborn infant, the man who unintentionally struck her would still have to pay a fine. It was a terrible thing to do. So even if there was no damage done to the woman or to her baby, he would still have to pay a fine. But if there was some harm done to either the mother or to her unborn child, the guilty man would suffer a penalty.

And what was that penalty? Well, look at verses 24 or 23, 24 and 25. Verse 23 says, but if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. Now, let's leave the pregnant woman to the

side for a minute and just look at these verses and consider them because these are so famous. People who have never read the Bible in their lives, they'll be familiar with this phrase, eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth.

They're not only very famous, but they're also very misunderstood. So what do you think of when you hear the expression, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth? Well, what you think of probably is personal revenge. He insulted me. He offended me. I will get even with him. Just like the Bible says, eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. I have it coming to him. But the truth is, eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, this is not a mandate for personal vengeance.

Rather, God gave this law to the Israelites as a principle to guide the judges or the elders, the lawful authorities to determine the appropriateness of a penalty. And the penalty had to be consistent or had to match in severity the harm that was done. And so the punishment must correspond to the crime, not more, not less. That's what this verse means or these verses mean. The Latin name for this principle, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, the Latin name for this is Lex Talionis. It means the law of retaliation.

But again, it's not referring to personal vengeance or retaliation, but it refers to the proper penalty that should be given to the one who inflicts harm on someone. It cannot be more severe than the harm done. It cannot be less severe than the harm done. It must be proportionate to the degree of the injury. God knows the human hearts. He knows our hearts. He knows that when we are offended or hurt by someone, we not only want that person to suffer in some proportional way as he has caused us to suffer, but we want him to suffer more, a lot more.

And so when that obnoxious driver tailgates you, you don't say to yourself, oh, I hope that someone tailgates you just so you can know how it feels. But what you think to yourself is something more like, I hope you get hit by a train. That's what you deserve for how you've been so rude to me. And so we have no sense of proportion when we feel like we have been slighted or sinned against. And so this law was meant to ensure that that kind of mentality of seeking revenge would not prevail in a court of law.

But on the other hand, the law also protected the victim of a crime from penalties that were too light, too easy, so that there would not be this sense on the part of the victim and the part of society that justice wasn't really served. So one question that we have when we think about this principle, eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, does this mean that God meant that this law to be

carried out in a literal fashion? And so that if you make me mad and I knock out your tooth, that the only just penalty is for someone to knock out my tooth?

Well, probably not, at least, when it comes to anything less than murder. When it comes to murder, it was to be literally life for life. But anything less than that, this law was not so much to be applied literally as it was to be a rule, to be followed. If you look at verses 26 and 27, and a rule to be followed in the sense that the penalty, whatever it was, should be proportionate to the crime, but not that it should be literally an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.

So look at verses 26 and 27 again. The penalty for the master who damaged his servant's eye, the penalty for the master who knocked out his servant's tooth was not that he should have his eye gouged out or his tooth knocked out, but he had to set his servant free. So there's good reason to think that this law was never meant to be interpreted literally or applied literally, but rather metaphorically, if we can use that expression. So if you injure me, you must suffer in some way, a penalty that's equivalent to the hurt that I've received from you.

Protection of the Unborn and Criminal Negligence

So having dealt with that, then let's go back to the poor pregnant woman who was injured when this fight broke out between two men. Again, these are difficult verses to interpret. Even conservative scholars disagree on exactly what they're saying, but they seem to be saying this, that God considers the harm done to the child of the mother as significant as any harm that is done to the mother herself. In other words, God is just as concerned for the unborn child that she carries as he is for the pregnant mom.

And so if the mother miscarries or if her child sustained some injury that becomes evident after birth, then the men who were fighting or the guilty one who had hit the woman, he is just as liable for the harm done to that baby as he is for the harm done to the mother. And so what that means then is that God assigns the same value and worth to the unborn child in the mother's womb as he does to the mother herself. Because the baby in the womb, and we know this from other scripture, it's consistent with what the Bible teaches generally, but the baby in the womb is also an image bearer of God.

And again, we are not to think that these Old Testament civil laws are to be made the laws of our country in a kind of direct word for word fashion. Nevertheless, any society, any society like our own, that does not protect the life of the unborn child in the womb, that is necessarily a

society that is fundamentally unjust. It is fundamentally unjust because it does not protect those whom God cares about, those who are the weakest, the most vulnerable in society, and who is weaker and more vulnerable than the baby in her mother's womb. And so we can see in this law, God's care, his concern, not just for the mother, but also for the baby that she carries.

The third group of laws are in verses 18 through 26, and these have to do with criminal negligence, that is hurting someone else by careless or irresponsible behavior. And in these laws, the same principle of a just penalty for harming another person, these are extended not only to someone who may harm another, but to their animals that they owned. And you can imagine in an agricultural society like the people of Israel were then, that these kinds of situations described in these laws would probably be not infrequent.

And so there is just a sampling of what might happen in these laws. An ox gores somebody. An animal is injured or killed when it falls into a pit that the owner has not covered up. An ox may attack another man's ox and so on. We won't look at all of these laws in detail. But the important thing to take from them is that the Lord laid responsibility on the owners of the animals for the actions of those animals.

So if you own a bull that had attacked or gored other animals or people in the past and you did not keep it locked up and safe from others, you would be responsible and guilty for whatever the bull did just as though you yourself had gored another person or attacked or killed another person. You would be subject to the same penalties. And so the general principle for these last set of laws is that you and I are responsible for the consequences of our foolishness or our carelessness. And this is one way in which we see how the sixth commandment applies in our lives, that I may not purposely go out to hurt somebody, but if I do something foolish or careless and it results in someone's injury, then it's as though I did try to hurt them. And so I'm subject to the penalty in that case.

God's Unbending Justice and the Moral Law

And so these are the laws then that we are considering today, and as we look at these laws in the light of the coming of Christ, one thing, or the first thing I want you to notice is the nature of these laws. That they are exacting, they are uncompromising, there is no flexibility with these laws. But they demand, they demand nothing less than a fair and equitable retribution against

the person who has broken them. That is exactly what is expressed in that principle, life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, burn for burn, and so on.

That the laws requirement for justice must be met. And so when a law of God is broken, satisfaction must be made in the form of a punishment. Satisfaction that is equal to the transgression. Justice must be upheld. And this is because of the one who has given these laws, God, the great law giver, he is perfect and infinite in justice and righteousness. And his justice must be upheld. He cannot deny his very character. It would be contrary to the integrity of who God is as a righteous God, a holy God, a just God, if he did not uphold his own standards of justice, if he did not mete out the penalty that is due to those who break his commandments.

In this way, these civil laws that God gave to Israel illustrate what is true of the moral law that God has given to all people at all times. And when I speak of the moral law, what I mean is that law that is given to us in the 10 commandments, that law that applies to every human being, the law that God has written upon our hearts. And when it comes to that moral law as well, God cannot compromise his justice. There is no flexibility. There is no compromising with the law of God. His law must be satisfied. Justice must be dealt.

And here's the bad news. We are law breakers. We are guilty of breaking God's commandments. We are just as guilty of breaking the 10 commandments. One way or the other, we've broken all 10 commandments, but we are just as guilty of breaking God's moral law as those people in these verses that are described here, as they were guilty of breaking these particular commandments. And so we are lawbreakers. We are subject to God's justice.

And here's more bad news. When Christ comes again, he is going to judge every single human being on the basis of his perfect justice. And that judgment will be fair, it will be just. And apart from the grace of God, we are all condemned as lawbreakers. Apart from the grace of God, we are guilty. We are all subject to the perfect justice of God for breaking his law. And God says in his word that that justice that must be satisfied against sinners, against you and me for breaking God's law is nothing less than eternal condemnation. Nothing less than an eternity suffering under the wrath of God, the anguish and torment of that suffering forever and ever because we have broken the law of God.

The Gospel: Justice and Mercy at the Cross

Again, this passage helps us to see just how unbending God's justice and His law really is. And our plight would be terrible were it not for the grace of God, were it not for the good news. But there is mercy and grace in the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is salvation for all who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior. But that raises the question, how can that be? If God is perfectly just, if his law and the demands of his law and the penalties that the law demands must be met, how can he save anyone? How can he show mercy and grace to anyone?

Well, the answer is found at the cross. The book of Romans says that the death of Jesus on the cross, it shows the righteousness of God in Romans 3:26, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. What a marvelous thing. When you look at the cross of Jesus Christ, what you see there is the display, the manifestation of the perfect justice of God. Every sin will be dealt with. Every transgression will receive justice.

But at the cross, you also see the mercy, the love of God, because it is Jesus who takes that penalty. It is Jesus who takes that judgment for you and me, if your hope and faith are in Jesus Christ. And so the cross reveals both the uncompromising, the unbending justice of God, but also the mercy of God, so that he is both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus Christ. The law says life for life, but the gospel says Jesus laid down his life for your life. And he has met the demands of the law so that you can enjoy the fullness of that eternal life, which he gives to you as a gift of his grace.

A Relationship Based on Grace

Another way to put all this is to say this, that God does not deal with us on the basis of justice. The law of God, these laws that he gave to the people of Israel, the 10 commandments. This is not the basis on which God deals with you and me as those who belong to Jesus Christ. Psalm 103:10 says, he does not deal with us according to our sins nor repay us according to our iniquities. Your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, your communion with God is not on a legal basis.

It is not because you have kept the law that God loved you. It is not because you continue to keep the law that he loves you, but he has loved you out of his mercy and grace in his son, Jesus Christ, despite the fact that you have broken the law and you still do not keep it perfectly.

And so what this means is that our relationship to Christ, our communion with God, is on a grace basis. It's because of grace that we are saved.

And this is the way in which we are to deal with one another as well. Not on a legal basis, tit for tat. I'll repay you for what you have done to me, but on a grace basis. And that's what Jesus taught in Matthew chapter five in that passage that we read. You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

And what Jesus is saying here is this, is that, as one who belongs to Jesus Christ by faith, that seeking retribution, seeking to demand your requirements for justice in your dealings with one another, that has no place in how you deal with other people. But on the contrary, as followers of Christ, we must be willing even to suffer wrong for the sake of bearing witness to Christ. And so as you, by the grace of God, as you overlook minor offenses, as you are ready to forgive those who sin against you, as you love your enemy and pray for him, then you are dealing with others in the very same way that God has dealt with you, not on the basis of justice and law, but on the basis of mercy and grace, that mercy and grace that was so marvelously exhibited when he gave us his son, Jesus Christ, to be our savior. Let's pray.