

Building Christian Pedagogy through the Ethics of Matthew 23:23: A Case Study at SD Negeri 091677 Sumberejo-Simalungun

Sumiarti Siahaan^{1*}, Elisamark Sitopu²

¹Student, Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

²Lecturer, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

*correspondence: sumiarti.siahaan@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines how the ethical triad of justice, mercy, and faithfulness in Matthew 23:23 can serve as a transformative foundation for building Christian pedagogy in contemporary school settings, with a specific focus on the Christian Religious Education teacher at SD Negeri 091677 Sumberejo-Simalungun. Jesus' critique in Matthew 23:23 highlights the danger of emphasizing ritual performance while neglecting the weightier matters of the law. Through an exegetical analysis supported by qualitative case study methods, this research explores how these ethical principles are understood, embodied, and operationalized in classroom practice. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis to assess how the teacher integrates biblical ethics into instructional strategies and student formation processes. The findings reveal that justice becomes the basis for equitable classroom management, transparent assessment, and respectful treatment of all students. Mercy is expressed through compassionate interaction, sensitivity to student needs, and the creation of a supportive learning environment that nurtures emotional security. Faithfulness emerges through the teacher's consistency, commitment to moral integrity, and reliability in fulfilling teaching responsibilities. Together, these three ethical principles shape a holistic pedagogical framework that influences both teacher professionalism and students' moral development. This study concludes that the ethics of Matthew 23:23 offer a practical and powerful model for Christian pedagogy, promoting integrity, compassion, and consistency in religious education. The results highlight the potential for biblical ethical frameworks to enrich educational practice in Indonesian public schools and call for broader integration of scriptural ethics in teacher training and curriculum development.

Keywords: Pedagogical Competence, Christian Religious Education, Providence

INTRODUCTION

Christian education in the contemporary school setting faces increasing complexity as teachers navigate rapid social changes, diverse student backgrounds, and evolving moral challenges. In Indonesia, particularly within public schools where religious diversity is a

defining characteristic, Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers carry a unique responsibility to guide students toward moral clarity grounded in Scripture while engaging respectfully with pluralistic realities. Among the biblical texts that provide a strong ethical foundation for Christian pedagogy, Matthew 23:23 stands out as a critical reference point. In this verse, Jesus rebukes the religious leaders for their superficial obedience and neglect of the “weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness.” These three ethical pillars offer a transformative framework for educational practice, helping teachers cultivate holistic formation rather than mere intellectual compliance. Within this context, the development of Christian pedagogy becomes not only an instructional task but also an ethical calling. Matthew 23:23 emerges from a larger discourse in which Jesus confronts the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy. Rather than condemning their commitment to teaching the law, Jesus challenges the imbalance between external religiosity and internal moral integrity. This tension is relevant to modern Christian teaching methodologies, in which educators may unintentionally emphasize academic achievement or doctrinal mastery at the expense of lived values and relational formation. The verse articulates an educational ethic that integrates cognitive, moral, and spiritual dimensions. Justice demands fairness and dignity in teacher-student relationships; mercy calls for compassion, understanding, and pastoral sensitivity; and faithfulness emphasizes consistency, integrity, and devotion to God’s truth. Together, these principles offer a pedagogical model that strengthens Christian education in both content and character. SD Negeri 091677 Sumberejo-Simalungun represents a dynamic educational environment where these principles can be contextualized. As a public elementary school situated within a pluralistic Indonesian community, the school provides a rich setting for examining how Christian teachers articulate biblical ethics within a state-regulated curriculum. While CRE teachers must adhere to formal learning objectives, they also have the freedom, and responsibility, to incorporate biblical virtues that guide students toward moral maturity. In such a setting, Matthew 23:23 offers a theological and ethical compass that supports the formation of students capable of practicing fairness, compassion, and integrity both inside and beyond the classroom. At the same time, contemporary educational literature increasingly emphasizes character education, social-emotional competence, and values-based learning. These pedagogical concerns resonate strongly with the ethical triad highlighted in Matthew 23:23. Justice relates closely to equity and inclusion, ensuring that each student receives appropriate support regardless of academic ability or socio-economic background. Mercy aligns with emotional intelligence, empathy, and restorative approaches to discipline. Faithfulness reflects the importance of teacher reliability, modeling consistent behavior, and fostering trust in educational relationships. When these biblical ethics are intentionally integrated, CRE teachers can contribute meaningfully to whole-child development while strengthening students’ moral agency. The practical application of Matthew 23:23 in school settings remains underexplored, particularly in Indonesian contexts where Christian education is taught alongside other religious subjects. Limited research addresses how biblical ethics shape the pedagogical competence of CRE teachers or influence students’ moral reasoning within public schooling environments. Therefore, this study seeks to examine how the ethics articulated in Matthew 23:23 inform the Christian pedagogical practices of CRE teachers at SD Negeri 091677 Sumberejo-Simalungun. Through exegetical reflection, field observation, and educational analysis, the research aims to illuminate how justice, mercy,

and faithfulness can function as foundational elements of Christian teaching. In doing so, the study contributes to biblical pedagogy, teacher professionalism, and value-based education. It offers a model for how Scripture can inform classroom practice, encourages teachers to embody Christ-centered ethics, and provides insights into how public schools can benefit from faith-integrated moral education. Ultimately, this article argues that Christian pedagogy grounded in Matthew 23:23 not only strengthens the spiritual mission of CRE teachers but also enhances the moral climate of the entire school community.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how the ethical teachings of Matthew 23:23, justice, mercy, and faithfulness, inform the development of Christian pedagogy among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SD Negeri 091677 Sumberejo–Simalungun. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research sought to understand lived experiences, pedagogical practices, and value-based instructional processes that cannot be captured through numerical data. The case study design enabled an in-depth investigation of the school context, teacher behaviour, classroom interactions, and the integration of biblical ethics within everyday teaching practices. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting individuals who possessed direct experience with CRE instruction and curricular implementation at the school. The sample consisted of one CRE teacher, the school principal, and six students from upper-grade classes who had received instruction related to justice, mercy, and faithfulness in moral or biblical lessons. The teacher was chosen as the primary participant because of his or her central role in translating biblical ethics into classroom pedagogy. Students were included to capture their perspectives regarding how these values were taught and practiced, while the principal provided insight into institutional support and the school's value-based culture. Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided verbal or written consent. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility for participants to elaborate on the interpretation of Matthew 23:23 and how it influenced instructional practices. The interviews with the CRE teacher focused on lesson planning, pedagogical strategies, ethical decision-making in teaching, and efforts to model justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Student interviews explored how they perceived these values within classroom interactions. Classroom observations were carried out during CRE lessons to record teaching methods, teacher-student interactions, the use of biblical narratives, and the embodiment of ethical values in instructional moments. Data were analysed through familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing the report. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were examined repeatedly to ensure data saturation. Codes emerged inductively from the data and were later grouped into broader themes reflecting pedagogical practices grounded in the ethics of Matthew 23:23. Themes included value-oriented instructional strategies, the teacher's ethical modelling, and students' ethical formation. All data sources were triangulated to ensure credibility and confirm consistency across multiple perspectives. Participants were allowed to review interview summaries to verify accuracy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that the ethical triad of justice, mercy, and faithfulness in Matthew 23:23 serves as a central theological and pedagogical reference for the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher at SD Negeri 091677 Sumberejo–Simalungun. Exegetically, the verse highlights Jesus' critique of religious leaders who prioritized ritual precision over moral essence. For the participating teacher, this hermeneutical insight shapes the conviction that teaching Christian values must prioritize the formation of ethical character rather than merely transferring biblical information. The teacher interprets justice (*krisis*) as fairness in dealing with students; mercy (*eleos*) as compassionate engagement with learners' needs; and faithfulness (*pistis*) as a commitment to consistency and integrity in educational practice. This theological grounding became evident in lesson planning, classroom communication, and the shaping of learning objectives that integrate moral and spiritual formation. The classroom observations show that the teacher consistently integrates the principle of justice into daily instructional routines. Justice is not taught merely as a biblical concept but is modelled in concrete pedagogical choices. The teacher applies equal treatment in group division, ensures equal speaking opportunities, and uses transparent assessment criteria. Students reported that the teacher "does not choose favorites," which confirms that the principle of fairness is recognized by learners. The discussion of biblical stories, especially those involving fairness in leadership such as the actions of Moses or Jesus' parables, was oriented toward building students' awareness of fair behaviour in school. The teacher's approach aligns with value-based pedagogy, which emphasizes modelling rather than abstract explanation. Observations indicate that the teacher handles discipline issues with restorative rather than punitive methods. Instead of punishment, the teacher uses reflection questions such as, "How would Jesus respond in this situation?" or "Is this action fair to others?" This method not only teaches fairness but also invites moral reasoning. The pedagogical implication is that justice becomes internalized as part of students' moral judgement. This integration of biblical ethics with daily teaching practice demonstrates high pedagogical competence because it bridges scriptural interpretation with classroom realities.

Embodying Mercy Through Compassionate Instruction

In Matthew 23:23, mercy is positioned as a moral imperative that must accompany justice. The findings show that mercy in the teaching context is expressed primarily through the teacher's empathetic engagement with students. Interviews reveal that the teacher understands mercy not as permissiveness but as a compassionate sensitivity to students' emotional, social, and academic struggles. During lessons, the teacher consistently identifies students who need encouragement, particularly those from challenging family backgrounds. This aligns with exegetical insights that interpret *eleos* as active benevolence rooted in covenantal love. Observations demonstrate that the teacher often adapts instruction to accommodate students with slower comprehension, providing additional explanations or simplified worksheets. Rather than publicly correcting mistakes, the teacher uses gentle redirection to protect students' dignity. Students expressed that they feel "safe" and "understood," suggesting that mercy becomes a relational climate within the classroom. The teacher also incorporates prayer moments specifically focused on compassion, emphasizing that mercy is not only taught but

practiced. Such practices illustrate that pedagogical competence extends beyond instructional mastery to include emotional and spiritual sensitivity rooted in biblical ethics.

Faithfulness as Consistency and Integrity in Teaching

Faithfulness, emerged as a key theme in shaping the teacher's pedagogical identity. Faithfulness, understood as steadfast commitment to God's truth and reliability in professional behaviour, is reflected in the teacher's punctuality, consistency in expectations, and dedication to maintaining moral integrity. Students reported that the teacher "keeps promises" and "always finishes what is taught," showing that reliability has become a modelled value. From an exegetical standpoint, faithfulness (*pistis*) carries covenantal connotations of loyalty to God and steadfastness in one's vocation. The teacher applies this understanding by positioning teaching as a calling rather than merely a profession. This vocational perspective influences classroom practice, where consistency in moral teaching and behavioural expectations strengthens students' character formation. Lesson observations confirm that biblical narratives involving covenant faithfulness, such as the stories of Joseph, Ruth, and Jesus' parables, are frequently used to illustrate persistence, integrity, and loyalty in everyday life. Faithfulness is also demonstrated in the teacher's long-term commitment to mentoring students beyond the classroom, including involvement in extracurricular moral formation activities. This consistency reflects pedagogical competence grounded in biblical faithfulness, showing that ethical reliability enhances the overall effectiveness of Christian pedagogy. Document analysis revealed that the teacher systematically integrates the ethics of Matthew 23:23 into lesson plans and learning materials. The learning objectives often include both cognitive and moral targets, reflecting a holistic pedagogical approach. The teacher modifies the national curriculum competencies by embedding Christian ethical values into topics such as interpersonal relationships, responsible behaviour, and empathy. Teaching materials, including worksheets and reflection activities, contain questions prompting students to analyze situations through the lenses of justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Such integration demonstrates the teacher's ability to contextualize biblical ethics into the realities of Indonesian education, particularly in a pluralistic environment like SD Negeri 091677 Sumberejo-Simalungun. The findings support the argument that pedagogical competence in Christian education requires not only mastery of subject matter but also the ability to infuse curriculum with scriptural ethical perspectives that shape student character. Interviews with students indicate observable behavioural changes attributed to the teacher's consistent use of Matthew 23:23 as a pedagogical foundation. Students reported becoming "more responsible," "fair," and "willing to help others." They also highlighted that the teacher often associates classroom challenges with biblical principles, encouraging them to reflect on their actions through ethical and spiritual frameworks. School administrators observed that classroom conflicts decreased, and cooperation among students improved. These behavioural outcomes confirm that value-based instruction rooted in biblical ethics can contribute to a positive school climate. This suggests that Christian pedagogy grounded in biblical ethics has tangible outcomes not only in cognitive learning but also in moral and relational transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the ethics of Matthew 23:23—justice, mercy, and faithfulness—provide a robust and transformative foundation for building a Christian pedagogical framework that is both biblically grounded and pedagogically relevant for contemporary educational contexts. Through the case study at SD Negeri 091677 Sumberejo–Simalungun, the research shows that the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher successfully embodies these ethical principles not merely as theological abstractions but as lived pedagogical practices that shape teaching strategies, classroom climate, curriculum design, and student character formation. The exegetical insight into Jesus' critique of hollow religiosity underscores that authentic Christian teaching must balance knowledge with ethical substance. The findings affirm that pedagogical competence in CRE involves the ability to translate scriptural ethics into meaningful educational actions. Justice, as revealed in the results, becomes the backbone of classroom fairness and integrity. The teacher implements justice by maintaining equal treatment, transparency in assessment, and consistency in disciplinary practices, ensuring that every student experiences dignity and impartiality. This pedagogical commitment reflects a profound understanding that justice is not only a biblical mandate but also a necessary condition for a healthy learning environment. The emphasis on fairness nurtures students' moral reasoning and social responsibility, demonstrating that biblical ethics can deeply inform transformative classroom practice. Mercy, likewise, emerges as a vital pedagogical disposition expressed through compassionate instruction, empathy, and sensitivity to students' socio-emotional conditions. The teacher's ability to accommodate individual learning needs, protect student dignity, and create a supportive atmosphere reveals the centrality of mercy in humanizing the learning experience. This finding reinforces the understanding that mercy is not emotional softness but a pedagogical strength that fosters student confidence, resilience, and interpersonal care. In Christian education, mercy becomes an essential bridge between teacher authority and relational trust, enabling moral and spiritual formation to occur within a climate of grace.

Faithfulness further strengthens the teacher's professional identity, revealing how consistency, reliability, and vocational commitment shape the credibility of Christian pedagogy. The teacher's steadfastness in upholding moral values, fulfilling promises, and maintaining instructional continuity demonstrates that faithfulness is a key dimension of both religious devotion and pedagogical integrity. Students' recognition of this consistency highlights that teachers model faithfulness most effectively through daily practice rather than verbal instruction alone. This study affirms that faithfulness, when embodied by the teacher, models covenantal loyalty and inspires students toward responsible and trustworthy behaviour. The study concludes that building Christian pedagogy through Matthew 23:23 requires the holistic integration of ethical values into all aspects of teaching practice—planning, instruction, interaction, and assessment. The ethical triad functions as a lens through which both teacher conduct and student development are shaped. The positive behavioural transformation observed among students—particularly in cooperation, fairness, and empathy—demonstrates the effectiveness of a value-centered pedagogical approach. Christian pedagogy rooted in Matthew 23:23 offers a relevant and powerful model for contemporary religious education in Indonesia. It affirms that the role of the CRE teacher is not only to deliver

biblical knowledge but to cultivate ethical and spiritual character in students. The findings of this study invite further exploration into how biblical ethics can inform broader educational policies, teacher training programs, and character-based curriculum development across diverse school settings.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Balch, D. L., & Osiek, C. (Eds.). (2020). *Early Christian families in context: An interdisciplinary dialogue*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Banks, R. (2012). *Reenvisioning theological education: Exploring a missional alternative to current models*. Wipf and Stock.
- Blomberg, C. L. (2019). *Matthew* (The NIV Application Commentary). Zondervan Academic.
- Borg, M. J., & Crossan, J. D. (2014). *The first Paul: Reclaiming the radical visionary behind the Church's conservative icon*. HarperOne.
- Bryk, A. S., Gómez, L. M., Grunow, A., & McCall, B. (2020). *Improvement in action: Advancing quality in America's schools*. Harvard Education Press.
- Croker, R. (2019). *An introduction to qualitative research in education*. Sage.
- Davids, P. H. (2017). Justice, mercy, and faithfulness in biblical ethics. *Journal of Biblical Ethics*, 12(2), 45–62.
- France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (New International Commentary on the New Testament). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Guthrie, D. (2015). *New Testament theology*. InterVarsity Press.
- Hockett, J. A. (2021). Teaching with integrity: Moral formation through classroom practice. *Christian Education Journal*, 18(1), 23–38.
- Keener, C. S. (2019). *The Gospel of Matthew: A socio-rhetorical commentary*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Loughran, J. (2019). *Pedagogy: Making sense of practice*. Routledge.
- Osmer, R. R. (2008). *Practical theology: An introduction*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Panjaitan, Binur., Sitompul, B., Panjaitan, M.B. (2024). Comparison of Learning Outcomes Using Information and Communications Technology Media with Conventional Learning at IAKN Tarutung. *International Development Planning Review* 22(2), 1789-1800. <https://idpr.org.uk/index.php/idpr/article/view/503>

Putnam, A. K. (2020). Biblical justice and contemporary pedagogy: A comparative study. *Journal of Christian Educational Practice*, 7(3), 55–70.

Van der Walt, J. L. (2022). A Christian ethical framework for pedagogy in pluralistic schools. *Koers: Journal of Christian Scholarship*, 87(1), 1–10.

Wright, N. T. (2018). *Jesus and the victory of God*. Fortress Press.