

# The Christian's Warfare Part 8: A Biblical Perspective on Justice

*The Christian's Warfare*

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**Bible Text:** 2 Corinthians 10:1-6  
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This morning, we come again to 2 Corinthians 10 as our launching point for the message. We've titled this series of messages "The Christian's Warfare," modern Christian warfare. We're talking about spiritual warfare and we see in this passage that spiritual warfare is fought in the mind, it's waged in the mind, that it is a battle against error. It's a battle against lies that fill our minds and then take us captive, and the image Paul uses is of tearing down strongholds, of razing, knocking down castles with battering rams and siege ramps to destroy enemy strongholds because enemy strongholds have a way of controlling areas beyond that stronghold, and so strongholds in the mind control our thinking and control our lives and bring us into the domination of sin in different ways, and that discouragement that comes from that. John MacArthur was speaking about this, this week, and the message I heard him say and he mentioned that the word for stronghold can also be used, it's related to a word that can be used for prison and also for tomb, and he made the point that the stronghold becomes your prison and eventually it becomes your tomb.

So we need to tear these things down and so we've been looking at the issue of modern spiritual warfare, the Christian's warfare, by looking at what are the biblical truths that can demolish things that are hindering our understanding in our lives. So today, we come to look at a new subtitle. We've looked at a number of things through the weeks. We started out looking at pride and prejudice, the preoccupation with this world and its systems rather than eternity. We looked for several weeks at a biblical perspective on power for three weeks. And then this morning we want to look for a biblical perspective on justice. A biblical perspective on justice. So we come to this important subject, a word which fills the public discourse in our day, the word "justice," calls for justice, redress of grievances, the concept of social justice. How are we to understand that? How are we as Christians to interact with these things in ways that are productive, where we're able to speak truth into our world, into other people's lives, into our own heart, and into one another, so that we walk in holiness.

This is a very interesting day. I mean, we talked about 2020, Jess mentioned, yeah, we, you know, thought it was really clever. Everybody probably, every, I don't know how many churches probably had a 20/20 vision, you know, and so we're going to do, this is

what we're going to do for 2020 and the Lord has a way of reminding us that a man plans his way but the Lord directs his steps. We're supposed to plan our way but our plans are held tentatively because we don't know what tomorrow brings. The future is, as it were, a veil right in front of our eyes. We have no idea what's on the other side of that veil. And so we thought this week we'd have certain things going on. Of course, the coronavirus struck and changed everything, and then we've seen so much turmoil in our society related to this issue of racial strife and social justice. It started, really blew up again with the horrible situation in Minneapolis and George Floyd.

And so there's been much discussion. I mentioned the subject literally fills our days. We see it almost weekly it seems that something else comes up to remind us of this, the pressure that is building in our society, the emotional intensity, and we as Christians are pressured by that but the Bible tells us that we are to be in the world but to not be of the world, that we are to interact with the real issues in the world and we're to face them honestly but we're not to think as the world thinks. We're not to be conformed to this world, as Paul says in another place, Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Transformation happens in the thinking, so we think God's thoughts after him, and this has been something that has really, I think, shaken the Evangelical Bible-believing church.

I was reading an article this week that was talking about the inroads of a kind of unhealthy thinking that has happened in Reformed churches even, that has come through some of the issues surrounding social justice, and you know, this idea and concern about justice and I thought about why is it that, because this article was making the point actually that it's been interesting to see that what we saw about 10 or 15 years ago was, I don't remember when they coined the phrase but remember young, restless and Reformed? You may remember that was like maybe it was a Christianity Today front page or something that there was a real growth in Reformed theology among young people, young pastors, young professionals, young people, colleges. Reformed theology was really spreading in exciting ways and as someone who's been Reformed for a number of years when it seemed like nobody around was that you would run into in the culture, I mean, other believers in Evangelical culture, it's really a great joy. But this article was pointing out that the fact that surprisingly among the young, restless and Reformed there's been a tendency to get caught up into this justice debate in a way that seems to be taking, though there are real concerns, there are real issues that need to be addressed, it seems to be taking people away from the Gospel, that the pressures around us in society are causing that to happen, and I thought about, you know, why is that? Why is it that this is such a difficult thing to work through and it's so difficult that it's really causing people to stumble, even pastors and churches that have been formerly really solid and are struggling. And I think it's because, partly because the confusion comes from the fact that the Bible does say that we should be concerned about racism, that we should hate racism, that we should call it sin, that it is sin to mistreat someone, to treat someone differently based on their skin color. The Bible makes it clear there's only one race of people physically and all of us are descendants of Adam and the difference in us is basically just the difference in the melanin in our complexion so that we are all the same in that sense.

And so racism is sinful and so we know that and so Christians know that. They also know the Bible is about caring for the poor and opposing oppression and injustice. The Bible is clear God hates oppression. And so you see these things, these are themes that are in the Scriptures clearly and so how can we not get involved in those things? But there's a lack of discernment. I think added to that the failure of the church in the past causes us to struggle, be tempted. The Evangelical church in America in many ways missed the mark. I mean, certainly, you know, though there were people and as I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, the abolitionist movement came up through the church but yet there were many who professed faith and loved God and said they loved his word and I think many who actually did, who did not oppose slavery as they should have. And that is a, I said discouraging and very sad reality. Now how could they have been blind? You read some people and you read some stuff on what they say about this and then how could they not have seen that? And there's some perplexing questions.

I would say, listen, I want to say this. It's really important and I think this is one of the things that you see today that we need to watch out for and that is there's a phrase that C. S. Lewis called or coined I guess, called chronological snobbery. It's one thing to look at errors in the past and call them out and say that was an error, but it's another thing to have a wholesale condemnation of people because of some error that they had, and Lewis called it chronological snobbery. He said that what happens is every age of people looks back on the past as chronological snobs. We see things that they were wrong about and we judge them and are appalled at them and think how in the world could they have been so stupid? And Lewis points out that if they could look at us today, they would say the same things about us in different areas, that we're blind in areas that they weren't. They saw things better in areas than we do, and we see things better in areas than they do, and so the key is don't judge in a way that condemns people. Judge in a way that speaks truth. Yes, they were wrong. It was wrong. But there but for the grace of God go I. We need to heed what Romans 2 says, or actually Matthew 7, by your standard of judgment you will be judged. And so if you're harsh in judging, you will be judged with that same standard so we need to be more humble and realize that we're all missing in some areas.

Now it doesn't mean we don't call out sin. We call it out, but we call it out with humility and love, and joy that God has given us clarity and victory in so many areas. But I think the fact of the failures of the past, particularly in the church, make it really difficult to wrestle with these issues because the church even in America in the last, I mean, certainly slavery but then the Jim Crow laws, ongoing effects of that that continued to even into recent years, things like redlining which was the practice of bankers and real estate people to draw a red line in areas and not approve loans for African American people inside of that red line or outside of that red line depending on the circumstances. That's just wicked oppression and evil.

Well, the church didn't respond as we should have in many ways, many churches did not in the 60s and so I think as Christians today we look back at that and we're grieved by that appropriately, but we must not go too far and fail to be discerning in the present, lest we commit an equal and opposite error in another direction. Whenever you're reacting to something so much and you're looking at something that somebody else is doing wrong,

you need to watch out. The answer is don't just keep looking at what they're doing wrong, look at the Bible, look at the word of God, submit yourself to Scripture because if you keep looking at what they're doing wrong, you tend to run away from it into the other error of the other extreme. You see this again and again in society. It's the pendulum swinging. The way to stop the pendulum swinging is let the word of God be your guide, your plumb line.

So we see this and we understand too that one of the things that's encouraging actually is the concern about justice and the fact that the word is being used so much is actually a positive thing. It is and there's a lot that's misunderstood and there's a lot of confusion, but the fact that it's a concern is a positive thing and it is an evidence of the fact that human beings are made in the image of God. That's why they care about justice. That's why one of the first things little children learn to say, especially if they have siblings, is, "It's not fair! That what Sally is getting that I don't have." Right? It's not fair. We're made in the image of God, God is a judge. He is the only true judge and so even there it's good that justice would be a concern and it's good and right to think about many of these things that need to be looked at. What kind of criminal justice reform needs to be done? What kind of laws need to be examined? Those things are legitimate conversations but we must beware of being caught up and conformed to the world.

So 2 Corinthians 10:1-6 gives us a passage that, as I've said, has been kind of our launching point each week because it's giving us a philosophy of how we're approaching these issues. 2 Corinthians 10:1,

1 Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ-- I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! 2 I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh. 3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, 6 and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

We tear down these strongholds, destroy these fortresses which are speculations, reasonings in the mind raised up against the knowledge of God, we're taking every thought captive. That's the essence of spiritual warfare, to think God's thoughts after him.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we thank You for Your word and we come today confessing our great need of Your truth and of Your grace, the ministry of the Holy Spirit to help us. Father, we pray that Your Spirit would minister to us and as we are in the pages of Scripture, that You would through Your word send forth Your loving-kindness and Your truth. Let them*

*lead us to Your holy hill, to the place of Your habitation that we might walk in humble fear before You and loving the light. Father do this for Your glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

So a biblical perspective on justice. You know, it's been interesting to see. I mentioned earlier that we're supposed to deal with these, not be conformed to the world but another image that I think comes to mind in thinking about the Evangelical church, and maybe what some of us are experiencing at times in our lives is what Paul exhorts us to watch out for in Ephesians 4:14. he says, "As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine," that there's a tendency as society becomes more turbulent and circumstances become more difficult, the winds and the waves are pressuring, that we can lose our moorings and find ourselves adrift on stormy seas. Certainly, something to think about in light of the hurricane even this weekend that brought to us the remnants of it, the storms that we've seen and the effects of the wind. Well, we need to be aware of that. We live in a world in which at times the pressures, the emotional pressures, the intellectual pressures are great and we're to be people who are able to stand up against the storm. Not to be blown here and there but to stand, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. We need to go down deep and put pillars like they do in beach areas, beach houses. They dig those pillars down so that the house is anchored not on the sand but deep down on pillars that give it stability to stand up against hurricane force winds.

So that's what 2 Corinthians 10 is calling us to do, to dig those pillars and to as we're tearing down unbiblical ways of thinking, we're establishing ourselves in the truth. So we want to do that today, Lord willing, we seek to have a biblical perspective on justice. One of the things we see in the Scriptures is that the Bible in many ways is a book about justice. Now it's not its primary purpose, its primary purpose is to reveal God to us, but the God it reveals is a God of justice. In fact, the words around justice and legal concerns, judgment, righteousness, justified, justification, you can find just those four or five words about 1,500 times in the Bible total. The word justice, 138 times. Judgment, 689 times. Righteousness, 609 times. Justify, justification, 47 times. Spread between the Old and the New Testament.

So the Bible is a book that has a lot to say about justice, about the law. I mean, think about it, the first five books of the Bible are called the law. The law and the prophets is the way that they would refer to the Old Testament, usually the law and the prophets, sometimes they would say the law, the prophets, and the writings, basically three sections of the Old Testament. But the law was the first thing given: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Exodus, the 10 Commandments are given there and then expounded upon. They're regiven in Deuteronomy, that's why Deuteronomy is given the name Deuteronomy, it's the second law. That's what deuteros nomos means, second law.

So the law is the foundation of all of Scripture as God reveals himself to us. So the bible is a book about justice. Now what I want to do is think about, then, what does the Bible say about justice and begin looking at that this morning under three points, and the first is that when you want to think about justice biblically, what you see as you read the pages

of Scripture is this, 1. God alone defines justice. God alone defines justice. James 4:12 says, "There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you to judge one another?" There's only one lawgiver, only one judge, why are you judging one another? Paul says in 1 Corinthians, his first letter to the Corinthians in chapter 4, "It's a very small thing for me to be judged by you and it doesn't really matter what I think about myself," I'm paraphrasing, "all that matters is God's judgment." In fact, this idea that God defines justice is really exhibited probably most clearly in the fact that God is the judge. That's the main thing that, the main way I think that we just really see that so powerfully and so clearly is he calls himself the judge. I mean, the Bible begins with God as judge. He's the lawgiver, he gives a commandment to Adam, uses the word "commandment, this is your commandment," and then he says, "Hey, did you eat from the tree I commanded you not to eat?" You see, God is lawgiver, and then God is judge. What does he do as soon as they sin? God judges them. He passes judgment on the serpent, on the woman, on the man, Genesis 3. In Genesis 6, God judges the world in righteousness by sending a flood to wipe out almost all of humanity save eight people. Genesis 18 and 19, God judges Sodom and Gomorrah. Their wickedness is so great.

Now God doesn't judge capriciously or without all the facts. It's so amazing there that God comes down, meets with Abraham. Remember the story in Genesis 18. God, well, three men come to Abraham and one is the Lord, the other two you don't know who they are. The Lord talks to Abraham. They eat together. He tells Abraham, "You're going to have a son by Sarah." Sarah hears, laughs. I mean, she tries not to let the Lord hear her. I'm sure she didn't let the Lord hear her but the Lord knew she laughed because the Lord is the Lord, and he says, "Why did Sarah laugh?" And she hears that and she's terrified. But after they eat and talk about that promise, the Lord says, "Shall I not tell Abraham, my friend, what I'm about to do?" And he basically tells Abraham what he's about to do. He says, "I've come down, the outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah is so great that I've come down to see if I've heard correctly." I'm paraphrasing. He doesn't really say it that obviously but what I'm saying is this is a case of the Lord revealing himself to us in ways we can understand because God does not need to come down and see if the outcry he's heard is true or not. He knows. The eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good. He knows all things but here is his gracious, loving compassion to show us, now remember this is the first book of the Bible, we're just learning about God here in Genesis, we're just now though people who are blind and don't know the Lord, lost in sin, God's revealing himself and he's prattling with us, he's baby-talking, he's speaking in ways we can understand and he says, "Listen, Abraham, I want you to know that when I exercise judgment, I always have all the facts. I don't pre-judge. I don't do things capriciously. I never judge and then think, 'Oh, I might have made a mistake.' No, I get all the facts."

And so he says, "I've come down," and the angels go to gather the facts and also to rescue Lot and, of course, they find things are wicked and evil and we're told that in the text but what we see is the Lord is the judge. In fact, Abraham as he's discussing with the Lord, there again an amazing thing, God tells Abraham what he's doing so Abraham will intercede for the city and the Lord has this conversation with Abraham. "Will you spare it for 50? How about 40?" Get all the way down to 10. "Yes, if there are 10 righteous

people, I'll spare the city." Well, there weren't 10. But Abraham starts the discussion by this, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" Genesis 18:25. God is the judge of all the earth.

So this idea of judge continues throughout the Scriptures, that God is the judge. It's declared by the Psalmist in Psalm 75:7, God is the judge. Psalm 82:8, "Arise, O God, judge the earth!" Hebrews 12:23, God is the judge of all. We see the Lord judge Egypt for their mistreatment of his people, judge Pharaoh. That's the story of Exodus, the first 13-14 chapters. Then God judges his people who worshiped the golden calf. God judges Nadab and Abihu, priests who bring before him an inappropriate offering which he had not commanded, Leviticus 10. God judges Korah, Dathan and Abiram for their wicked rebellion against God's leadership, Moses and Aaron. He causes the earth to swallow them up. God judges Achan for his sacrilegious, disrespectful keeping back of the corban, the ban, things under the ban. God threatens his people as they go into Canaan, "Listen, if you are not righteous or you do not walk with Me, I will judge you by sending you out of the land." And then what you see is the book of Judges is basically God regularly judging his people by allowing them to fall under the dominion of surrounding nations because they've abandoned God and then he raises up judges to deliver them. It's a cycle. Sin, disobedience, judgment, raise up a judge, repentance, restoration. Sin, disobedience, judgment. But God has already told them too that at some point, "If you don't repent and you don't walk with Me, I will cast you out of the land." And God judges the northern kingdom through the Assyrian people. God judges the southern kingdom through the Babylonians and casts them out of the land.

But it doesn't end there. The New Testament is also filled with God as judge. J. I. Packer in his book, "Knowing God," says this, "People who do not actually read the Bible," listen to that, "People who do not actually read the Bible confidently assure us that when we move from the Old Testament to the New, the theme of divine judgment fades into the background. But if we examine the New Testament, even in the most cursory way, we find at once that the Old Testament emphasis on God's action as judge far from being reduced is actually intensified. The entire New Testament is overshadowed by the certainty of a coming day of universal judgment and by the problem that arises from that, how may we sinners get right with God while there is yet time." Packer continues, "The New Testament looks on to 'the day of judgment,' the day of wrath, the wrath to come and proclaims Jesus the divine Savior as also the divinely appointed judge. He is the judge who stands before the door," James 5:9, "ready to judge the quick and the dead," 1 Peter 4:5, "the righteous judge who will give Paul his crown," 2 Timothy 4:8. "This is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who has been designated by God as judge of the living and the dead," Acts 10:42. "He is the one God appointed, that God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world by that man through whom he has ordained by raising him from the dead," Acts 17:31. The Bible is clear, the New Testament is clear that God is judge. He is our judge.

So he judges all. He is the only arbiter of what justice is. He defines it, God alone, and as Christians, those who profess to follow him, we must define justice the way he does. It's not up for a popular vote. Even an electoral college vote. It's not up for it. God alone

decrees what justice is. That's the first point. If we're going to understand justice from a biblical perspective, we have to see that God alone defines justice. Secondly, God himself embodies justice. God himself embodies justice. You could almost say God himself is justice. You know, I mentioned there's a cluster of words in the Scriptures that mention about 1,500 times total justice, judge, judgment, righteousness, justification. The idea basically that God judges, that is, a judge looks at and examines and sifts through the evidence and the circumstances around an event, and then when he brings justice, what that is, he looks at, say, an action and he compares it to a standard, and if that action does not meet the standard, then there is punishment to be meted out, and justice is when people get what they deserve. When you and I get what we deserve, that is justice. We get what we deserve because we deviate from the standard and we get the due penalty of deviating from the standard.

This means that really God's righteousness is at the foundation of justice. This is why in the Bible in the Old Testament and the New Testament, a key word that's often translated "justice" is actually often also translated "righteousness." It just depends on context. In the Old Testament, the word "tsedakah, righteousness," is sometimes translated "justice." In the New Testament the word "dikaiosune," is sometimes translated, is mostly translated "righteous" but sometimes "justice." God himself embodies justice because God himself is righteousness. He embodies righteousness. Psalm 145:17 says God is righteous in all his ways. It is his essential character to be righteous.

Now the word "righteousness" in the Old Testament and the New Testament has this idea of a standard, and to be right like the Old Testament word "tsedakah" had the idea of being straight with the standard, and so the word "unrighteousness" means "to distort; to depart; to twist." It wasn't straight. That's what unrighteous, the word that's translated unrighteous most times in the Old Testament is a word which means "twisted; to deviate."

So righteousness means to be consistent with a standard, but when you read the Bible carefully and theologians make this point, it's very important for us to understand that God is not righteous because he adheres to a standard. There is no standard to which God needs to submit. God himself is the standard. It is of his essential character to only do what is right.

And so he is the standard, he is the measure. I mean, think about the emphases that we see in the Scripture on God's character. One of the key words in the Old Testament is the holiness of God, the New Testament as well. God is holy. Holy. He's transcendent. He's far above us. The distance between the Creator and the creation is vast. That's holiness. That separation takes many forms, essentially it's a separation of being. I mean, he is the one who is and has always been and always will be. He is totally independent. Everything else is dependent. Everything else comes from him and through him.

So holiness. He's holy but he's also good. Everything about God is good. He brings blessing. He is benevolent. He is beneficent. He does only good things and a subset really of his goodness is righteousness. It's another way, these are attributes that the Lord talks

about in his word as he shows us who he is, as he reveals himself to us, and there's some overlap like a Venn diagram, those of you who remember, some of you young people are talking geometry or Venn diagrams or other things that use diagrams like that. Basically it's an overlay of set notation that shows there's a lot of overlap between many of these things, and goodness and righteousness are a complete overlay. Righteousness is a subset of his goodness. He is good in all of his ways. The Lord is good and he does good and so he only does those things which are good. He is righteous.

Turn with me to Deuteronomy 32:3 in the Song of Moses given shortly before he dies. In verse 3 he says, "For I proclaim the name of the LORD." I proclaim the name of the Lord. The name means the essential character. I want to tell you, I want to proclaim who God is. I want to proclaim what God is like. That's what he's saying. "For I proclaim the name of the LORD; Ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He." He layers term upon term to say everything that God does is perfect and right. He's a rock because he is so perfect and unchanging. All his ways are just. He's faithful, without injustice, righteous and upright is he.

So he is the essence of righteousness. Everything he does is delightful if you and I could see. Now the problem is we're sinners and so we look at his work and we judge. Now we're made in his image and so we tend to judge. We look and we judge. Now we're supposed to be humble judges, we're supposed to get all the facts which is something very very rare today. To find somebody that looks at all the facts on anything today is extraordinarily rare. That seems to try to do that. I mean, everybody has their experts on everything. I'm thinking about the coronavirus. Just listen to this expert, listen to that expert. They have their own little facts that they're working with and they're all saying different things. Hey, can't we just get all of the facts? Can't we try to look at all of the data? That's what a person who really wants truth and righteousness to reign would do. Well, God does that and we don't have that and so when we look at his work sometimes, we only see little glimpses of things and we're perplexed, we don't understand and we tend to judge the Lord. We wonder how he could be good, "How could this be righteous? How could this be right for the Lord to allow this on top of something else?"

Things happen. In a sinful fallen world, evil and harm happen with such regularity. Some of you may have heard about this week one of our dear ladies in our church, Dianne Revell, and her husband, Elton, they lost a grandson suddenly. I don't know yet what happened. He had some seizures and he was found dead in his dorm room in Statesboro, Georgia, Georgia Southern. 20 years old. These things happen and we're left wondering why. Many of you have things in your life that you're wondering why. Some things from the past that are lingering in your present everyday experience and you're wondering why did God allow that? How could that have been good? And listen, the reality is God is just and he's going to punish evil and he's keeping a record of every wrong, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord." Part of his righteousness is, his goodness is that he punishes all that do evil, that is harm. But the wonder of it is his sovereignty as we talked about in recent weeks, we can trust him, he's faithful, he will only bring things into our lives even though they do harm in some way, God will turn that to the greater good for

his glory and our greater good so that the net benefit will be good, and so that we can say in truth, if we could see what he's doing, even when terrible things happen and Job was the classic example which we looked at a few weeks back, when everything evil just rained down on Job, Satan took everything he had away, God let him do it, and then Satan took away, God let Satan take away his health, and yet in the end Job would say, "This was good. God's works are righteous. Everything he does is right and true." Because the Lord had a purpose to bring blessing to Job and his purpose is so perfect it incorporates all the other things. It incorporates what happened with Job's children.

Now we think we'd like to live, you know, to be full age or whatever, but you know, if you're in the Lord and you go home to be with Christ, you don't want to come back. For you it's right that you were taken. I mean, that's the joyful hope of the Gospel is the moment we breathe our last, we are in the presence of the Lord. In his presence is fullness of joy. At his right hand there are pleasures forevermore so that to enter into his presence and to think I was only 45 or 55, I thought I had more time, you're not saying that after you breathe your last. You're saying, "Praise Jesus. Thank You for bringing me. Why did You wait so long?"

And so God's righteousness incorporates every single detail all around the events and so if we could see it, we would say, "Well done. Well done. That's unbelievable. That's so beautiful. That's perfect." But you and I can't see it now but there are ways though that you can see glimmers of grace around circumstances and look for those, and it's not a Pollyanna kind of thing. It's really looking at what God is doing. A couple of circumstances this week that families I know are going through including Dianne and Elton, some real difficulties but in talking with them, they even were seeing and sharing with me some of these glimmers of grace and you're like, "Wait a minute, the fact that the Lord would have those circumstances in place to help in this way, that is awesome." And we have just a glimmer of this beautiful ornate plan that is perfect. On our side, I love the image that someone has used of a tapestry. You know, a tapestry that an artist weaves together and so that it's a beautiful piece of art on the side that the tapestry faces out, but if you look on the backside of the tapestry, it is a mess, you know, just a total chaos looking thing of all these strings coming out the backside of the tapestry. I think most of our life is lived on the backside of the tapestry so just get used to it, but to know that every thread that is there is there by the foreordained, perfectly all-wise God to make the exact moment of color that needs to be there for the tapestry and when we get to heaven, we're going to just be in awe.

So he embodies righteousness. I mean, it's his essential being to be righteous. He does no evil. He cannot tempt man to evil. It's unthinkable for God and yet he's able to allow freedom because if he wasn't able to allow freedom there would be no opportunity to know him. If he wasn't able to restrain his righteous wrath and his desire for justice and he holds back his judgment, he allows people time to repent and to come back to him but we need to understand that he is the embodiment of justice. He defines justice because he is justice. He is righteous and everything that accords with his character is righteousness. Then the third point, not only does God define, God alone defines justice, God himself embodies justice, number 3, God calls you to image justice. He calls you to image justice.

He has created every human being on the face of the earth in his image, in his likeness. Genesis 1:26 and 27, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. So in the image of God He made him; male and female He created them."

So image, likeness. Image God's justice. We are called to be like God in the way we live. Now it's impossible until you're born again. You cannot do it. But every single human being is called to that regardless of whether they have the ability or not because they've not been born again. They are called, they were created for this purpose, to be like God. So whatever he says justice is, is what we are to be. He created us in the image of God, to look like him. The idea of the word "image" means like a replica. The word is used in 1 Samuel 4 to speak of replicas that the Philistines made when they sent the ark of the covenant back to Israel. They made little statues of gold so they could make an offering to the Lord. Remember they captured the ark of the covenant in battle, they thought they had defeated Yahweh because they had defeated Israel. This was the way that people thought at that time, if our country beats your country, our god beat your god. And so they put the ark of the covenant, they take the ark of the covenant which isn't that big of a thing, it's not that impressive, it's not giant statue, it's just this little ark carried on poles, they put it at the foot of their god Dagon in the temple. "Here's the spoils of battle, Dagon. You have won." Dagon was a fish god, giant statue, some kind of fish looking man. A lot of people worship things like that, isn't that amazing? If you don't worship the true God, you will worship things that are inexplicable. It's true of every single human being. If they will not bow their knee before Jesus Christ, they will worship something and it will be insane and increasingly insane.

They put the ark at the foot of Dagon, the priests of the temple of Dagon, "Hey, this has been a great day. We won. We beat Yahweh." They bring, they put the ark there before the statue. They come in the next morning and I would have loved to have been there, you know, walking in with a cup of coffee with that priest who's opening up. It's my day to open up. He's opening up, turns off the alarm, and he walks into the main area and there Dagon, this giant statue, is on its face before the ark of the covenant. "We gotta do something here!" He calls the other guys, you know, "We've gotta get this thing back up! Come on!" They get the ropes, they pull the statue back up. "Lock the doors, don't let anybody in!" They put the statue up. They go about their business like nothing happened. They go home that night. The next morning they come in and I bet they were kind of thinking a little bit when they came in that morning, they had forgotten to bring the coffee with them. Anyway, they come in and the statue is on its face again. This time the head is broken off and the hands and the feet are broken off. The Lord is saying, "I am the Lord. I let My people because I was disciplining them, I used you to judge them because I am a judge but don't you trifle with Me." And in fact, God was inviting, this was an evangelistic opportunity for those Philistines, the true God that was separated from them over among the Jews is inviting them to see, "I am the Lord. Come to Me." Like he did to the Egyptians, many of the Egyptians left with Moses and the people but they were saying, "Your God is truly God."

So images are those little things. So anyway, okay, so they decide, "Hey, we don't need to keep this anymore." And also what God was doing is wherever the ark of the covenant

would go, the people would break out with these tumors, and not only did they have tumors, they also had rats. They had outbreaks of rats. I mean, that's a miserable situation. And so they had this going on, they had this thing happen in the temple. "Hey, let's send this to another city." They sent it to another city. "You guys keep it for a while. Hey, we want you to have it." You know, it's like the traveling art display that moves from city to city. Here it comes and wherever it went, the tumors and the rats showed up, and after I think the third city, they decided it's time to send this back to the Lord.

And so they make this amazing plan. I love what they do. They decide, you know, if this truly happened from the Lord, that shows the unbelief, if this really was supernatural and God did all of this, we want to find out. We want to find out if it happened from him or by chance. And so they put these, they put an oxcart together. They put the ark of the covenant on the oxcart and they decide they don't need to send it back empty so they make these gold offerings for Yahweh and they are images, statues of the tumors and the rats, gold likenesses of the tumors and the rats. And they decide, "We're going to see if this is God or chance, we're going to just put this ark on an oxcart, we're going to put two cows pulling it that have never pulled a wagon before, two female oxen." And we know that they were female oxen because they were lowing all the way. They were going to put it, not face any particular direction, we're going to see if the Lord did this, it'll go back to Israel, and if it was by chance, the ox will just wander around, no big deal, because they don't want to go anyway. They want to stay here. They want to get back to their calves.

So the Bible says that as soon as they let the oxen go, they went straight to Israel. They did not deviate to the right or to the left. They went straight there quickly, lowing all the way, the text says. You know what lowing all the way means? They were calling their calves. They wanted to go back to their calves but God had ordained, "No, you are going to testify to My glory," and so they went all the way to Israel. They took the ark back.

But those images were something that were a likeness, a representation of that, and you and I are likenesses to God. We are made to be little, as it were, replicas of God. Now we're not God, we're creatures, but he made us somehow to resemble him before the world and we're supposed to resemble him in our justice, in our righteousness. We are to be like him. We are to be righteous. We're to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

One of the things that this tells us is that justice is primarily and what we're going to see as we read the Bible carefully, is justice, one of the things that is different about justice as it's being talked about today is justice in Scripture is primarily an individualistic concern. It's not only that but in the culture today it's all about groups. Groups oppressing groups. You're a part of a group, your identity is a part of a group and it's just about group oppression, group power. That's social justice. God's justice is about individuals. God is concerned that every single person answers to him as an image-bearer. He made every single human being to reflect his glory, to be like him.

You see this in a number of ways. One of the ways is that in the law of God, the 10 Commandments are given as 10 commands that are second person singular commands. "You," singular, "shall have no other gods before Me. You," singular, "shall not make for

yourself an idol. You," singular, "shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. You," singular, "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. You," singular, "honor your father and your mother. You," singular, "shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not lie. You shall not covet." God and the law is actually the expression of who God is. It's not just rules that he makes up arbitrarily, this is who he is. This is what he's like. He doesn't do harm like that. He keeps his own glory first and we must, the first four commandments. But he's not a God who kills capriciously and we must not. He's not a God who's unfaithful in his marriage vows and we must not be. He's not a God who steals the personal property of other people and we must not be. Do you see that? In the eighth commandment, "Thou shall not steal," personal property is there in the commandments of God. It's not about group property, it's about individual, "You don't steal from someone else." That's justice. That's who God is.

And then judgment is based on individuals. I mean, back to our close to our passage in 2 Corinthians 5:10. We started off reading 2 Corinthians 10 but if you go back to chapter 5, verse 10, "For we must," look at the singularity. Judgment is based on God will judge each individual based on how they have lived up to the standard, which is himself, his righteousness embodied in the law, revealed in the law. 2 Corinthians 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." That is, "we" plural. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one," do you see that? "Each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." We're judged individually.

The same thing you see in 1 Corinthians 3 actually when he talks about the rewards of the Christian. 1 Corinthians 3:13, Paul says, he's talking about how we are to build upon the work that Jesus has done in our lives for God's glory and he says in verse 12, "Now if any man builds on the foundation," this is 1 Corinthians 3:12, "Now if any man," any individual, "builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will lose that reward."

You see this in Romans 2:1-16. Judgment is individual. Just look with me at verse 5. He's talking about those who judge others and condemn others and he's showing that we all are before the judgment seat of God, we are all guilty. But he says in verse 5, "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds." Each one according to his deeds.

Other places, you'll give an account for every idle word. Every single person will appear before God alone so justice is something that is personal and individual first and foremost. So in all of the circumstances that we look at, the question is what are the actions that were done and do those actions meet up to the standard of God and his word?

Paul says in chapter 2, verse 12, "For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified." He's making the point that we're all condemned. In fact, in chapter 3 he ends this section in verse 19 and 20 when he tells us verse 19, Romans 3, "Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God." The law God gave is an expression of who he is, "This is My standard. This is My heart. This is My character and you are to be like this." And then the law was given to us and sent to show us we don't meet the standard. We are without hope and without help.

Then he goes into the Gospel. The good news is that now apart from the law, Romans 3:21, "now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction." Jew and Gentile are saved by the gift of righteousness. God is righteous, he demands righteousness, but the good news is he gives the gift of righteousness to those who believe. You repent and believe and this is the most urgent thing in the world. Every single human being is going to stand before the judgment seat of God to be judged for what they've done in the body, and they're going to be judged against the standard which is God's character which he made us to be able to meet but we don't meet it. And justice and goodness requires punishment, it requires the punishment of those who do evil, and therefore we are all under the wrath of God but the good news is that God has sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the likeness of sinful flesh as an offering for sin, and that he in his body bore our sins on the cross. He was punished as if he had lived your wicked and sinful life, my wicked and sinful life. He was punished as if he had done what I have done, what you have done, and he said those wonderful words, "It is finished. It is paid in full." After hanging on the cross in agony, separated from the loving fellowship of God, the sky dark at noon to signify that God who is light and in whom is no darkness at all has abandoned the sin-bearer and Jesus hanging there alone, experiencing hell itself, the reality of separation from God, he finally is able to say, "It is finished. I have paid it in full. Into Your hands I commit My spirit." At the moment he died, the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom, the way to God is open. Sinners like you and me who have defied God every day that we've lived, we've rebelled against him, we've lived in continuous sin against him, the way is made for you now to go from being under the wrath of God, an enemy of God, to now being made right with God, declared not only not guilty but declared righteous, righteousness given to you. What kind of righteousness? The righteousness of Jesus. A perfect record of righteousness.

God looks at the one who believes in Jesus and he sees you as if you had done everything that Jesus did in his earthly life. He looks at you and he doesn't see the evil things. No, those were taken out of the way having been nailed to the cross. He looks at you and he doesn't see those evil things, he sees his Son and the perfection of his obedience. Every moment of every day, Jesus loved God with all of his heart, with all of his soul, with all of his mind, and with all of his strength, and if you are trusting in him, God sees you just like that. There is therefore now no condemnation for them who are in Christ Jesus. No

condemnation remains. It's all out of the way. This is what gives us the joy, then, to walk with him and this, now, on this side of Calvary when you repent and you believe and you place your faith in Jesus and you surrender yourself to him and you come to him loving him, then he, now, gives you his power to live through you and to walk in obedience to the law so that you become more and more righteous in your experience. He delivers us from sin day by day, makes us more like Christ, to be more like Christ is to be more like the Father because what did Jesus come to do? "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." You become more like Jesus, you become more like the Father. You become more like Jesus, you become more righteous and it happens all of it by faith.

This is God's beautiful plan and for us to understand justice and righteousness, we need to think from God's vantage point and understand this is the main thing. God alone defines justice and he himself is justice and he calls every single human being on the face of the earth to meet his standard and that's why the urgency of preaching the Gospel is so great because those who want to determine for themselves and say, "Hey, injustice is when you start trying to put your values on me. You as a cis-gendered heterosexual person are trying to put your values on me, that's unjust." No, you may feel like that's unjust but God sets the direction of justice, my friend. I'm sorry that you feel that way but that's not right. It's not according to truth. God made man male and female. Two genders. He sets the standard and the reason you're so unhappy is because you are living in rebellion against a God who is good. Everything he does is right. Even though you're struggling with these feelings, even though you're struggling with these tremendous emotions and you've been affected by the lies that you've heard, Jesus Christ can set you free and he will then set you free not only from the guilt, but he will set you free from the power. He will let you walk in holiness. He will make you a man or a woman that looks more and more like Christ. That's the good news that people so desperately need to hear and we need to be compassionate, we need to understand people are hurting, we need to be gentle in the way we speak and caring in the way we speak, but we need to also be bold in the way we hold forth the word of life because being bold, holding forth the word of life is being loving because people need the truth and God help us to share his truth and to live his truth.

Let's pray.

*Our Father, we thank You for Your word. We thank You, Lord, for revealing Yourself to us in Your word. We deserve to be sent away from You forever because of our sin. We did not deserve, we don't deserve anything good from You. We are rebels at heart. All of us if we got what we deserved would get only wrath and yet we see in the Bible that You are a God of righteousness, all His ways are right, all His acts are righteous, but all His deeds are done in kindness. You, Lord, show love to all men. You cause it to rain on the just and the unjust and we're to love our enemies so that we can be like our Father in heaven who loves even those who are His enemies, who graciously invites sinners to be saved. Lord, help us to be more awed by the glory of who You are, to be more filled with joy that comes from being Your children and be more filled with the love that we receive from You. May it overflow through us to others in the body of Christ, our brothers and sisters, but also, Lord, to unbelievers around us. Do this for Your glory. Lord, make us more and*

*more like Christ. Shine forth Your righteousness in our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*