

# The Christian's Warfare Part 7: Biblical Perspective on Power 3

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*The Christian's Warfare*

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**Bible Text:** 2 Corinthians 10:1-6  
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Please turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 10, continuing to use this passage as a starting point for our messages, the series of messages that we began a number of weeks ago which we've entitled "The Christian's Warfare." We might say modern Christian warfare, that is, contemporary Christian warfare. The issue is how we are to do spiritual warfare and, of course, this passage we're going to read speaks of it as that which takes place in the mind, that true biblical Christian warfare is the war of truth versus the lies that fill our minds and that deceive us, and so the title of this series "The Christian's Warfare" has been aimed at dealing with lies that permeate our society and that press in upon the church and that press in upon our lives, and that are able to take us captive and to hinder our ability to hear God's word, our ability to benefit from his truth, and that enslave us in many ways, these lies. And so Paul is talking about spiritual warfare as that which is tearing down these lies that have been built up and erected in our thinking against the knowledge of God, and we have been looking at, as I said, things that relate to our modern challenges in American society today, particularly related to even the recent challenges in the last few years, especially the last few months related to racial strife but also related to the coronavirus and some of the challenges that we have in dealing with just living faithfully to Jesus Christ in very confusing times, and so what we tried to do is to really deal with root problems. I think that's what Paul's talking about in this passage as we'll see in just a moment. He's talking about getting to the root and heart of the errors that we believe, and so even though we're trying to deal with, I'm trying to address very practical issues, how do we think about things like, you know, critical race theory, social justice, we're going deep and starting at the Scripture rather than starting with the surface manifestations and I believe that's the way God would have us do it. I think that's actually the way Jesus ministers as we watch him going about preaching and teaching, when he's asked questions. So often when he's asked a question, it's a question related to, you know, personal experience, what's going on in the world, and you find him not answering the question the way the question-asker wants it to be answered, and very often he actually turns around and asks them a question, and ultimately he redirects the focus to what really matters and he's always going for the heart because God looks upon the heart. He wants his people to follow him from the heart, to love him with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our minds, and then to live that out in faithfulness to him.

So the title of the message this morning is "A Biblical Perspective on Power." This is actually the third week of this little subset. It's a Christian's warfare, "The Christian's Warfare," modern Christian warfare as a heading, and for three weeks we've been talking about biblical perspective on power. We've looked at, you know, issues of prejudice, how we should see authority, and then recently we've been talking about power because that's very much a subject of discussion and confusion today. Critical race theory. Critical theory in general, not just race theory, critical theory is all about power. It sees society basically as those who have power and those who don't, and however you cut it, however cross-section you want to look at, if you want to look at male versus female, if you want to look at, you know, race, white versus black, or you want to look at economics, wealthy versus poor, however you want to cut it, the way that critical theory sees it, it's all about power and justice is addressing inequities and disparities and power. This is how it's being thought about in society and when we come to God's word, what we're trying to do then is look at power from how God describes power. Let's start where he does and think his thoughts after him, and so what we've basically said is if the way to think about this, the issue of power is in two major points that Scripture makes on every page really of the Bible and that is, number 1, you can think about power, first of all, in terms of the sovereignty of God, that is, that God possesses all power. Psalm 62:11, "Power belongs to God." He is omnipotent. He has all power. And in his sovereignty he dispenses power according to his will. This doesn't mean there's not issues of justice. There are, and the way we use our power we're going to talk about today, how we're supposed to do that and essentially the message is we're called to be faithful to God with whatever measure of power he has given us; that we are not our own, we belong to him and whatever he's given to us we are to steward responsibly for his glory, but his freedom in distributing power is made clear in the Scriptures, and we looked at this two weeks ago and then also last week but mainly two weeks ago, no matter how you think about power, he claims to be the one who distributes it. If it is a physical power, he's the one who forms us in our mother's womb, he's the one who made us have the physical characteristics that we have. If it's intellectual power, he's the one who grants to us and formed our brains, and he's the one who teaches us. We saw in Exodus 4:11, he claims authority over disabilities. He's the one who makes someone deaf or dumb or blind, like Ted was mentioning, Fanny Crosby. The Lord claims that authority to do that.

Now it's a fallen world. It wasn't going to be this way before sin entered the world but given the reality that we're in a fallen world, he is still reigning and ruling over everything and he has his purposes in doing so. He tells Moses that in Exodus 4:11. Acts 17:26 we see that he tells us that he, Paul, in preaching there in Athens, Greece on Mars Hill, he claims for God, speaking for God says the Lord is the one who has appointed the times of everyone who would ever be born. He appointed your time to live, he appoints your time to die and he has determined, predetermined the boundaries of your habitation. I mean, he claims absolute sovereignty. You can argue with it in many ways, when we come to Scripture, so often – listen this is just reality – when you read the Bible carefully and honestly and when you face reality carefully and honestly and you bring reality to the pages of Scripture, your interpretation of reality to the pages of Scripture very often you find yourselves confounded by the word of God. Very often you read things that you find initially offensive, confusing, "I don't know how to make sense out of this." And yet if

you will stay there and humble yourself under the word of God, you will see that it is actually always perfect, that God's ways are always right.

But it is a real issue that we are going to often find that and, you know, so God often confronts us and it's not surprising when we remember that the Bible tells us we're all sinners, and that part of our sinfulness is that we have an exalted view of our own ability to judge, and that because we're disconnected from God and sin has so infected us, we don't think rightly and we think that we know more than we do, and so we look at God's ways and he's infinite. I mean, if you just think about it, even if we weren't sinners, even if we weren't sinners, which we are, even if we weren't sinners we're finite and so to evaluate the actions of the infinite is just by definition impossible and perplexing. Add to that not only the difference between a finite trying to understand the infinite, now the sinful trying to understand the holy and of course we find ourselves confounded. It's not surprising.

And so we come to issues like the sovereignty of God and this can be one of the most offensive doctrines of all, but you read the pages of Scripture and you cannot escape it, and so the sovereignty of God is one of the key things, but then the second major point is the responsibility of man. Though he's absolutely sovereign, his sovereignty is not an excuse for fatalism, it's not a *que sera sera*, whatever will be, will be. No, we're not to live that way. We're not to be complacent and fatalistic. We are instead to be active and to be faithful. We have responsibility and our responsibility is not diminished by God's sovereignty. Now his sovereignty enables our responsibility but that's a mystery beyond our ability to fully comprehend. God continually commands us, the Bible is filled with imperatives, commands, instructions that are meant to be obeyed and followed.

So responsibility of man. So when we come to this issue of power, we've been looking at God distributes power however he wills. He causes us to be born to the family we're born in. He causes us to have the mental abilities that we have, the opportunities that we have, but that doesn't mean we're to be complacent and fatalistic. We're called to be obedient and some of the things we have to do, we've talked about three aspects of responsibility, or two already and today we're going to come to the third. We've said that the responsibility of man consists in really three things. Two weeks ago, we talked about our responsibility is to be humble, that is to acknowledge that God is God and we are not. That's what Job basically came to understand in the book of Job. The second thing we saw last week is we're called to be thankful. Everything we have we've received from him, his hand, and we are to praise him and to honor him and that's the turning point so often that sets us free to deal with the mystery of God's providential dealings. We don't understand why he does what he does, but if you start by being humble and then thanking him and praising him, that's the beginning of turning around and having joy. But today we come to the third point and this is the major theme for today's message is the third point of responsibility, so the theme for today's message is: be faithful. Be humble, be thankful, and today, be faithful. We are called to faithfulness. We're called to spend our lives, our time, our energy, whatever God has given us, all the resources God has given us are given to us as a trust and we are to be faithful with that, and we will answer to him for how we use what he's given us. Every single human being that has ever lived will

stand before God and answer to him. This is what the Bible teaches. Christians, we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Unbelievers, you will experience before the judgment seat of Christ in basically in his throne of judgment and you will be judged for every idle word, every deed, and so you need to run to Christ. That's the only way you can stand before his judgment is to be clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, to embrace the Gospel that he died in our place, that he paid for our sins, that he took the wrath of God that I deserve, that you deserve, and that he's now given us eternal life to those who believe, those who repent.

So we're called to be faithful. Now we're going to look at this and I'm going to read 2 Corinthians 10 and what we're going to see again is kind of the explanation of why we're dealing with issues again at the root cause. So 2 Corinthians 10:1-6.

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.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we ask now that You might open the eyes of our hearts, that You might send forth Your lovingkindness and Your truth, that You by Your Spirit might cause repentance and faith to come through Your word that You might give new life to those who are not yet saved, and that You might give new freedom to all of Your people. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

So biblical perspective on power, responsibility to be faithful. To be faithful. This is, God wants us to think in terms of the way we're to see our lives is that we, whatever we have been given by God, whatever the particular circumstances of our lives, things that we might wish were different. I mean, all of us, if we really are honest and thought a lot about it, there are times where we wish things were very different about us. We may not like physical characteristics, mental characteristics that we have, weaknesses that we have. We certainly don't like aging, even if you started out, you know, at a certain level, we tend to go down. I'm seeing that, you know, having more and more sort of senior moments. I don't even like saying that actually but it's true. We don't like the way this world is. There are so many things wrong with the world and we're right about that, there are so many things wrong with this world. We live in a world where hurricanes happen, earthquakes, tidal waves, tornadoes, lightning strikes, car accidents, cancer, the coronavirus, economic catastrophes, sometimes corporate, sometimes personal. We live

in a world where things are not working as they should and there's a sense in which we rightly react to that. There is a sense in which when you look at the world and you see that it's not as it ought to be, there's something in the image of God, the fact that he made us for a perfect world, there is a dissonance in the soul and so when we see injustice, there is a rightful dissonance in the soul, there is a concern, there's an anger and it can, at times, be righteous anger, although righteous anger is a very difficult thing to come by. We so quickly turn whatever's righteous into sin, don't we? But we look at the world and we see things are wrong, they're not as they ought to be. We look at society, we look at history and we marvel that certain people are able to accomplish what they did and to do such oppressive things to so many people. The holocaust. Hitler and the holocaust, the Final Solution. Stalin and the millions that he murdered even beyond Hitler by starving his own people. Pol Pot. And that's just 20<sup>th</sup> century. You can go back through every century, we could talk about things going on now and we can talk about inequities and disparities and sometimes things that are actually rooted in sin, not just the sovereignty of God. There are sinful things being done every day because sinners sin. But the reality is that God calls us to think his thoughts after him. He calls us to think in a radically different way than the world thinks and this is one of the tough things because you look at things around you at times in different ways and you think, "How can it be like this?" And you can get worked up about it so much that you then become distracted from what really matters, you can become distracted from what you're really called to do and to be.

This is actually something I thought about in a number of ways but recently I just had this thought this last week. You know, Jesus when he came they were expecting something. They wanted the Messiah to be a deliverer from Roman oppression and I was thinking about one of his disciples, you know, the 12 disciples, one of his disciples was Simon Peter, there's another Simon, there's two guys named Simon, his disciples, the second Simon was Simon we're told in Luke 6:15, the one who was called the Zealot. Simon the Zealot. The Zealots were a group of people in Israel in the first century who were determined that to undermine Roman government and to throw off Roman oppression. They were working to encourage kind of a rebellion and they wanted to return to and they thought in many ways they're doing what God would want them to do, they're thinking that, "Hey, we want to go back and have it like David and Solomon, the glory days of Israel when we were our own nation, giving glory to God." And so Simon the Zealot, I wonder what he thought when he began following Jesus. He didn't write any Gospels or any books. He ministered for the Lord. He died a martyr's death according to tradition, but we don't know much about him, but I've wondered this week what was he looking for when he first heard Jesus teach and started to follow him? I can't imagine that he wasn't thinking, "Here is someone that might be the key to what I've been looking for." And in reality all of us tend to come to even when we've been genuinely saved, there's a sense in which we come with expectations of what we want in the Christian life, what we want God to do for us. So Simon the Zealot, he wanted to end the political tyranny, the economic oppression, the social injustice of the Roman hegemony over Israel and over the known world. He was hopeful, I'm sure like many of the followers in the crowd, the crowds that were following Jesus, who wanted to be delivered from the social political tyranny of the day. But Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world." And it's really staggering to look at how Jesus' ministry and the apostles' ministry happens.

Now I want you to listen to me carefully. I really believe that the implications of Scripture – listen to me carefully – the implications of the Bible, the implications of the Gospel when they are understood and lived out in the human heart, what happens is when they begin to change lives, it changes the way people think and it can change then, secondarily, social structures. Secondarily. Let me give you an example. The issue of slavery. There was slavery in the first century, in fact, there was slavery throughout the whole Bible. You read about Abraham. Abraham, you know, he goes to Haran, he leaves Haran with more slaves than he had before, it says more people, clear implication more slaves. Now is Abraham to be condemned for that? Are we to reject God because he allowed this to happen? Some would say we should and here's a time where the Scripture perplexes us, doesn't it? It unsettles us. It causes us to ask questions and the question we so often ask is actually in a statement more than a question: it's not fair. It's not right. That comes from the fact we're created in the image of God to judge. We were created in his image, he's a judge, we were created to judge, the problem is we're sinful and we're foolish and we're disconnected from the one who we were made to live in submission to. So you read that, you read through the Bible, you come to the New Testament and you see Jesus, he doesn't address the issues of slavery in the first century. He doesn't talk about it. Paul does not talk about it other than to say, "Slaves, obey your masters." Now listen to me carefully, what's going to happen is in the second order slavery is going to be undermined because God changes hearts and he helps people come to this point to see this: God made every single human being from one man, Adam. That's what Paul says in Acts 17:26, from one man he created all the peoples of the earth and he determined when they would live, their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation.

So we're all equal before God and one of the things that happens when the Gospel goes forth, it is a great equalizer. Where the Gospel goes, the way women are seen is elevated. Where the Gospel goes, slavery is undone, injustice is undone over time but not directly, indirectly as a secondary benefit from transformed minds, hearts and lives. And you see this because Jesus did not come emancipating the slaves in society. Paul did not come emancipating the slaves in society. None of the apostles did that. Jesus came to emancipate all of us who were slaves of sin. You see, it's first order. It comes back to that analogy I used a few weeks ago, it's triage, medical triage. There's an accident, people are injured, they bring a number of people to different emergency rooms when this happens, you know, something happens, some tragedy, they'll send people to one emergency room and to another trying to distribute so they have enough doctors to care for them, and within each emergency room what happens? There's medical triage. They evaluate what is the condition of this person? How serious is it? Is it life-threatening? If it is, I must act on them right away. If it's not, even if it's a compound fracture, something tremendously painful, agonizing, even if you're having a kidney stone and you're in more agony, I've heard people say that kidney stones can be worse than childbirth from women. My wife says that's actually somewhere in the same range. She's had both. Obviously, she's had childbirth, we have two children, but she's had kidney stones too. And so kidney stone, you can go to the hospital and you're in agony with a kidney stone and you're thinking, "I need help! I need help! I need help!" And the doctor says, "Wait because I've got a heart attack person. I've got someone that's got a tourniquet on that I've gotta repair their

wound. I've got to deal with critical vital organs and your kidney stone can wait." That's a hard message to receive. I can imagine that's gotta be incredibly difficult. I don't like pain. I'd be like, "Doctor, doctor!" They'd probably have to, you know, gag me and put me out.

So I understand and, listen, when we look at injustice, when we look at oppression, social oppression, economic oppression, these things are wrong, and God will deal with all of it. Please understand that. Don't miss that. God will deal with every act of oppression, every act of violence. He's watching. He's recording. But you cannot escape the New Testament prioritizes the spiritual needs of people because that's triage. If Jesus just came to fix society, people would be more content and happy and they would die and wake up in hell. And so he comes and says, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world," to Pilate, "My people would be fighting for Me, but as it is, My kingdom is not of this world. You see, I can't fix this messed up world. This world's such a mess, I'm going to have to burn it all but I'm fixing souls. I'm fixing people. I'm changing lives. I'm liberating captives from what really oppresses them." The oppression of sin is far greater than even the oppression that we can do to one another as wicked and evil as it can be, and our country is filled with history of oppression and wickedness in many ways, history is filled with that in the history of every country is filled with that, but first things first. And if you get the first things first, the second things actually come. You know, Jesus says, "He who loves his life loses it." If you try to hold onto something, you want something and you're holding onto what God doesn't want you to, you actually will lose what you're holding onto. But he says, "He who loses his life for My sake finds it." So if your concern is justice in your life and you make that your passion, what you're going to find is you're not going to find justice, but if you will actually lose that, you will end up finding it in a more wonderful way.

Well, let me, I want to share one thing because I really believe that Christianity is what undid slavery. When you look at the history of American abolition and English abolition, it was Christians who led the way. William Wilberforce in England. Harriet Beecher Stowe. I mean, there were a number of people in America. Harriet Tubman. Harriet Beecher Stowe. But Harriet Beecher Stowe's book "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Amazingly, Uncle Tom is used as a figure of insult. I think it's by people who have never read the book. If you've read the book, which I read a few years ago, what you find is Tom is one of the greatest Christian heroes in American literature. I read the book wanting to be like this man. Yes, he was a slave. He was oppressed by a very wicked slave-owner. I mean, one of the most awful villains in American literature is Simon Legree, his owner. But Tom comes to faith in Christ and then lives in such a way that he is an overcomer in the midst of suffering and he shows the glory of God in his life, so that even this wicked man, Simon Legree, sees it, now he doesn't repent, he curses God when he sees it. But I brought her up because it was said that Abraham Lincoln when he met Harriet Beecher Stowe the first time, he said, "So this is the woman who started this war." Her book. How? Because Christians read it and they saw in Uncle Tom a brother that they would want to emulate, a man they would want to follow. But he was a slave. He was a black man but they saw in him, even though it was a fictional account, they saw in this idea a brother in Christ.

And what you see in the early church is that it undid slavery and it changed society by, first of all, dealing with the hearts. What happened, think about this, you go to a church, you're the first church of Philippi, or the first church of Thessalonica, and you go and you find out, you know, like we're having next week, a guest reception for those of you who have been visiting for a while, and so you'll come and you meet. One of the things we'll do is introduce some of the elders and some of the deacons to you and get to know you a little bit. Well, so you're at the guest reception in, you know, 85 AD at the first church of Philippi, and they probably have a second church and a third church. Anyway but so hopefully it wasn't a church split. But the first church of Philippi and you meet an elder and you meet some other people in the church at the guest reception and what you find out is that the elder there is a slave who belongs to this man over here who's not an elder. Here's a man that the grace of God, the teaching gifts of God, the power of God working through his life, has caused him to be elevated to elder, to a shepherd, to a pastor, and yet he actually in the crazy economy of society is a slave to this man over here, and it shows what God has said. Now God said some wonderful things throughout his word and there are so many wonderful promises, things like Galatians 3:28, there is neither male nor female, there is neither slave nor free, all are one in Christ Jesus.

So the power of the Gospel, it transforms but it does it from the inside out. Now what this means is Christians, we're called to be faithful. It doesn't mean that we don't have a role, we do have a role because we have freedom as Americans to vote, to interact politically, but what it tells us is that the main focus, we must be, what we're called to be is faithful to the one who called you. So I'm going to talk about what faithfulness looks like. What does faithfulness look like and I want us to consider this under three points this morning. The biblical perspective on power, be faithful, three points. To be faithful you have to, first of all, understand who you are. That's our first point. Understand who you are.

There are a number of words in the New Testament used to speak of Christians, disciple, follower of Jesus, but some of the words, I want to focus on three of the words that are used as well and the first word is slave. Christians are slaves of Jesus Christ. You see, we go from being slaves of sin to slaves of Jesus Christ. Everyone is a slave. Every single person you meet is a slave spiritually. They are either a slave of sin and of Satan, and if you don't believe that, just read John 8:31 and following. Jesus says everyone who sins is a slave of sin. Then he says you're of your father the devil, basically saying, he's speaking to the Jews. He says, "You are slaves of sin and you are slaves of your father the devil. You're slaves of Satan. But if the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed." But what reality, to become free, you have to become a slave. Jesus said, "Unless you deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow Me."

You have to deny yourself and Scripture often speaks of us as slaves. In fact, Paul in 1 Corinthians 6 uses this powerful image. Redemption is one of the images of salvation that we see in the New Testament again and again. Redemption is the language of slavery. We are bought as off the slave market by God with the blood of Christ. But 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, Paul's encouraging these Corinthians in the first letter he wrote to them to sexual purity. He says, "Flee immorality. Every other sin," this is 1 Corinthians 6:18, "Flee



immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" You are not your own. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Look what he's going to say in the next verse, "For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." He says you are not your own, you're bought with a price. You have been bought with the blood of Jesus, redeemed off of the slave market but now you belong to God.

You're not your own. I'm not my own. And we need to see ourselves that way. In fact, that was the favorite way that we see the apostles saw themselves. Paul three times in his epistles introduces his epistles this way, "Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ." Often you'll read the New American Standard, other translations will say a bondservant or a servant but the word in Greek is the word "doulos" which means "slave." Paul three times says, "Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ." Peter, 2 Peter 1:1 says, "Peter, a slave of Jesus Christ. This is my authority, my reason for being able to write to you. This is who I am. I am a slave of Jesus Christ."

Perhaps even more striking than that, to me, is that James and Jude introduce their letters this way, "James, a slave of Jesus Christ. Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ." Why is that more striking to me? Because James and Jude were actually the half-brothers of Jesus himself. They were sons of Mary and Joseph where Jesus is just a son of Mary. His father is God. But when they introduced their letter, what they say, "Listen, if you want to know who I am as I write, what you need to understand is my relationship to Jesus is this: I'm not His half-brother. Of course, He is my half-brother but that's not the most important defining relationship. I am a slave of Jesus Christ." A slave has no will of his own. He does not belong to himself. His time is not his own. His resources are not his own. He lives at the mercy of another for the purposes of another and that's what all of us are. If you have come to Christ, you're a slave of Jesus, and if you've not come to Christ, you are a slave of sin. You're not free. You may think you are but you're not. The reality is that to be a slave of Jesus is to be free. It is to be free in wonderful incredible ways. To be free from sin. To be free from the dominion of darkness. To be free to love God. And to be free to live as we were intended to live, for his glory not our own.

So the Bible calls us slaves. In fact, you see this in Matthew 25, the parable of the talents. You see the sovereignty of God there too. Jesus says, "Listen, this is what it's like." He's getting ready to be crucified and he's telling his people things they need to know and he's basically saying, "Listen, be about My business." And this is how he does it, he says, "A certain man went to a far country and before he left, he gave his money to his slaves. He gave one five talents and another two talents and another one talent." Now this talent is a large amount of gold and so he gives one 5, one 2, one 1, and the first thing you should see is the master sovereignly determines how much you get and I get. We have no business, no say. It's not like we are, you know, bidding, "Can I have, I'd like 5." No, he determines. In fact, it's also true, write this down and look at this, 1 Corinthians 12:4-6. Paul talks about there that and he's helping the Corinthians who were always struggling with their envy toward one another. They were like always in a party spirit. You know, "I'm really a follower of Paul. I'm a follower of Apollos. I have this spiritual gift. You

have that spiritual gift. Don't you wish you had the gift I have?" All this kind of stuff, it's just rivalry was going on and 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 he says, "Listen, there's a variety of gifts but one Spirit. There are a variety of ministries but one Lord. There are a variety of effects but one God." He talks about gifts, ministries and effects and he says essentially that word "variety" means distinction and division, and the idea is God distinguishes, God divides, God separates, God gives the gifts, God gives the ministries, God gives the effectiveness. It's all from him. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are mentioned there, the Trinity basically in verses 4, 5, and 6 and it's all up to the Lord. He goes on in verse 18 to say the Spirit gives the gifts as he wills.

So again we're left with his sovereignty. He's the one that determines the course of our lives. Ephesians 2:10 says that when we were saved, that he saved us, Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that none of you should boast." This is salvation by grace, through faith. Then he says, "For we are His workmanship," we are his workmanship, "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk therein." That God has prepared beforehand the good works he wants you and me to walk in, the course that he wants us to be faithful on he's prepared beforehand. That word "prepared beforehand" is a really rich word. To prepare like this means to have a lot of preparations that need to get done and to have all of it done. It pictures a process that's many steps, many components, and it's all done. So what he's saying is, "Listen, God in laying out your life, it all needed to be planned out precisely because it's complex to figure out where you're going to go and what you have to do, but let me tell you this, if you're in Christ, God has prepared exactly where He wants you to be and what He's given you to do." He's foreordained it and what are you to do? You're to do good along that course. He sets the course, we don't. We're slaves.

Two other words that are important, I think, are servant and steward. This is in 1 Corinthians if you turn back over a couple of pages to 1 Corinthians 4:1-2. We're talking about who are you, who am I? Understand who you are so that you can be faithful. Paul says, "Let a man regard us," 1 Corinthians 4:1, "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." We're servants and stewards. This word "servant" is actually not the word for slave, it's a different word. It's a word that means to be an under-rower literally, those who would be rowing in the lower part of a boat. It means a worker who's under orders. Again, the emphasis is on the hard work that is being done but that we still aren't determining what we do. We're told what to do in the same way an employee is told what to do. You know, you don't make up your own agenda if you work for a company. "Hey, I'm just gonna do this. I want to do this." I mean, that's, you know, at some level they may give you an area, "Within this sphere, go at it." And this is the sphere and I say, "I want to go over here." You're not going to be working very long unless somehow you find a really good blessing over there and that's, anyway.

The third word is steward. He says stewards of the mysteries of God. What is a steward? A steward is a manager, someone that an owner who owns something put, entrusts it to

someone else to steward it, to manage it. The steward has what he has but he doesn't own what he has. He's simply keeping it for the owner.

We're to see ourselves as slaves, as servants, and as stewards. Paul in verse 7 of chapter 4 of 1 Corinthians 4 says, "For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive?" Everything that you have and I have, we received. And he's saying, "Why would you be boasting in what you have because you only have what you were given by God?" He says, "And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" Why do you boast and act like it somehow belongs to you intrinsically? Everything that you have and I have, we have from God.

Job was essentially acknowledging this reality when he said in Job 1:21 in a very vivid way, remember when he loses everything in Job 1 and he says, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return." He said, "I came into this world naked. I came into this world having nothing and I will leave this world with nothing. I will take nothing with me. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD." So whatever I have in the meantime, I came in with nothing so whatever I have is what I've been given.

This is the way to think biblically about your life. That's why then you are humble and grateful. Whatever you have, whatever the course that God has laid out, he is wise, he's all wise, he knows what he's doing, he's good, he has a perfect plan, his plan is much better than our plan. We constantly wish that his plan was not our plan, I mean, we wish his plan was our plan, don't we? We'd like to be able to, you know, make a list of things that you want to happen today and just give it to the Lord. Kind of like, "This is what I'd like to have happen." I mean, you don't really do that but really in our hearts we kind of do. But that's not the role of a human being. We weren't made to make the agenda, we were made to follow his agenda.

So we are to see ourselves as slaves, as servants, as stewards. So who are you? Understand who you are. You're not your own. You're called to steward what you have for someone else, for God. Now secondly, not only understand who you are, secondly, understand what you're called to do and strictly speaking, in a word, you are called to be faithful. You're called to be faithful, to be trustworthy. When God entrusts something to us, we are called to be trustworthy means to do with it what he wants done. To do his will. You could say that being faithful, I think the New Testament would help us fill this out a little bit that to be faithful to God means to do good to others. It's to take whatever resources we have, take whatever gifts we have, whatever physical abilities you have, and ability is a good word to think about with power. It's actually synonymous in Scripture. The word "power" in the New Testament, *dunamis*, means "achieving power." It's often translated "capable; able." So whatever abilities that you and I have are powers that we've been given by God. We came into the world with no power intrinsically. I mean, if it was just up to us, we would have no power but God has given us everything that we have, and so now how do you use that power? What are you called to do? You're called to use that for his glory. You're called to take your physical abilities and use them for his purposes. You're called to use your intellectual abilities for his purposes, your spiritual gifts for his

purposes, your position, your opportunities that are given particularly by just the specifics of where you're born, what kind of situation you're born into, what kind of opportunities you have educationally. All of those things to us, there are lots of disparities and inequities apparently as we look at it, but ultimately God is the one who's placed you where he's placed you and it doesn't mean he's not concerned about the injustice that may be happening but the first things first for you and me is will you and I be faithful? That's the first thing first and if you won't and I won't, not only are we going to be complete failures before the Lord but we're going to be miserable because the way of happiness and joy is to do what God called you to do, what God created you to do, and what God created you and me to do is to worship him and to give him glory and to do good unto others for the glory of God.

That's what we're made to do. When you are doing good unto others for the glory of God, you are doing the very thing that you were made to do. Such joy in doing what you're made to do. You see someone, an artist who's just incredibly talented and you see their work, you see them doing their work, if you're able to watch them do their work, the joy that they have in it. You watch an athlete, you watch a musician doing what they're able to do, the power they have to do it and they harness it and they do it and you can look at it and say, "Wow, look at the unique gifts that they have, the unique abilities that they have." And it's not just natural abilities, they've also been given by God the strength and the wisdom and the teachers and the coaches to develop them. From God's perspective, all of that came from him. It doesn't lessen their responsibility. Some athletes have incredible ability but never make what they could of themselves because they don't work hard at it and God says it's their fault because divine sovereignty does not negate human responsibility. But even when you're able to use the human responsibility well, you should know that even that's a gift of the grace of God for from him and through him and to him are all things.

So we're called to take all of the abilities that we have, the particular position, opportunities, and we are called to use those to do good to others, to do good to others for the glory of God and we're called to be active. We're not to be passive. We're to use our wealth to do good for others for the glory of God. We're called to use our energy to do good for others to the glory of God. That is what we will answer for. Jesus Christ, your Master, you will stand before him and I will stand before him and we will answer. That is the way that we are to think about these things and that changes everything.

You know, we see this emphasis on good works, to do good works for the glory of God in a number of places. Let's look at Titus. Turn with me past Ephesians and 1 & 2 Timothy to Titus, right before Philemon and Hebrews. And you read in chapter 2 of Titus verse 13 that we are to be "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." Look what Jesus did. He "gave Himself for us to redeem us," that's to buy us, to purchase us, who "gave Himself to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession." We belong to him but how, what does it look like when you belong to him? What are you supposed to be about? Look what it says next, for his own possession "zealous for good deeds." I wish the NAS said "good works." That's really what it says in the Greek, good works. You're

not saved by good works. No, you and I could do nothing to earn our salvation. We are powerless to do good works. "There's none righteous, no, not one. There is none who does good," Romans 3:10-13. None who understands. But Jesus Christ has fulfilled the law. He has done good. He did good every moment of every day of his earthly life as human, born under the law to redeem us from the law. He did good. He satisfied all of God's demands. Every negative commandment, "Thou shalt not," he did not. Every positive commandment, "Thou shalt do," he did. Every single time. A perfect record of righteousness and then he offers himself as a spotless lamb and on the cross the sins of everyone who would ever believe are credited to him, imputed to him, put upon him and God pours out the fierce wrath of his holiness upon Jesus that you and I should've experienced, should experience, and Jesus says, "It is finished." Paid in full on the cross and then he dies. He's paid the sin debt. At that moment, the veil of the temple is torn in two, the way to God is made open. Sinners can come to God now and it's proven because he rises from the dead on the third day. Death cannot hold him. It's impossible for him to be held in its power because he has no sin in himself and he makes a way for you and me to be in heaven, and he purifies us for himself. He buys us back and now he calls us to follow him and to be like him, to be zealous for good deeds.

So we're called to do good for others to the glory of God. Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who's in heaven." This is what the mission is. So wherever you are, wherever you find yourself, no matter where you find yourself in your life, and you know, so often, isn't it amazing how we never thought we would be where we are right now? Think about that. What your plans were 10 years ago to where you are now. What your plans are now for where you'll be 10 years from now. If anybody finds yourself where you are 10 years from now where you thought you'd be, please call me. I want to know about it. You see, we're not laying out, a man plans his way, the Lord directs his steps, Proverbs 16:9. It's okay to plan your way but plan your way tentatively and plan your way as a steward, plan your way as a slave, plan your way as someone who's trying to make the maximum difference for Jesus Christ in this world no matter what you have, no matter you've been given. And this means your mission never changes. So no matter what happens, no matter where you find yourself unexpectedly, the mission is the same, do good to others for the glory of God. That is so freeing. This is why Christians are truly free. We can be oppressed, we can be mistreated and they can't take away our reason for living and they can't take away our hope of heaven. So we're free. The Son shall make you free. You shall be free indeed.

So know what you're about and know then, thirdly, how do you do it? Know who you are, a slave, a servant, a steward. Know what you're to be about, what you're to do, be faithful by doing good to others for the glory of God. How do you do it? Two sub points here. How are you faithful? You know, it's one thing to know what to do but how do you do it? First sub point: fix your eyes on Jesus. You could say this is also follow Jesus. Follow Jesus by fixing your eyes on Jesus.

The call to a Christian really is to follow Jesus. That's the thing that he says to the disciples initially when he calls them, "Follow Me. If any man would be My disciple, let him take up his cross, die daily, and follow Me." We're called to follow Jesus. We're

called to do what Jesus did, to be like Jesus but you can only be like Jesus by looking to Jesus. That's what the author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 12:2, "fixing your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith." So we're to run with, Hebrews 12:1, he says, "Run with endurance the race that is set before us." Now the race that's set before us, you and I don't get to call where we're racing. God sets the race. God sets, "This is the track you're to run on." But what are you to do when you see that track? No matter how it changes, you may be going this way today and you're over here tomorrow but the call is still the same. What are you to do? Follow Jesus. This is so freeing no matter what happens.

So if you find yourself, God forbid, if one of us finds ourselves tomorrow the victim of some accident or stroke, we find ourselves paralyzed where we can't even speak. I mean, you think about that, that's one of the hardest things you can imagine, right? But listen, what's your calling even in that moment? If you're not able for a while to communicate with people, if you're sitting there, the calling is follow Jesus. Fix your eyes on Jesus. "Lord, You've given me this path. I'm going to trust You. I'm going to even if I can't seemingly do good, I'm going to be praising You, worshiping You, and somehow following You, clinging to You, fixing my eyes upon You." And you will give glory to God somehow in that.

I mean, that's what Joni Eareckson did. I mentioned her a few weeks ago. If you still haven't looked at her testimony, I encourage you to do that. Joni Eareckson Tada. She didn't choose her course. She would never have chosen her course to become a quadriplegic instantly but what did she do when she found herself a quadriplegic? Well, she struggled with it for a long time. She fought against it for a long time. She was badly taught for a long time. She thought that if she had enough faith, she was taught that if she had enough faith she could be healed but that's just not biblical. God has a purpose in giving affliction. Sometimes his purpose is for the glory of God to heal people. He can do that, of course, but it's not normally his plan. It's really the exception. His plan normally is to make us more than conquerors in the midst of the affliction, not to deliver us from it but to deliver us in it and through it because that gives glory to God. And listen to her testimony and you'll see what I'm talking about. He set the course and finally she quit fighting against it and she started running the course spiritually, fixing her eyes on Jesus. And listen, that's one of the things I love about hearing her teach. She has such an intimate communion with Christ. She talks about how she wakes up in the morning, I think I mentioned before it's a four-hour process, three- or four-hour process her getting ready in the morning. She has to have ladies in the church come over to help dress her, you know, bathe her, help her go to the bathroom, all the things that have to be done that she cannot do on her own. And she wakes up and realizing she's still not in heaven and it's another day of not being able to move, be completely dependent on others and she says it's not getting easier and what does she have to do? She cries out to Jesus. "Lord Jesus, You have a purpose for me having another day and so help me today to smile. I don't want to be here. I don't want to have to have other people serving me like this. I wish I could serve them. I don't like being in this position but, Lord Jesus, it's the position You put me in and so give me grace to somehow smile, to speak words of blessing and encouragement, to serve the sisters that are coming to serve me. Help me look like Jesus

would look if He were quadriplegic." Cling to him until he is living out his life in you. This is what Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God." The key to faithfulness is faith. You can't be faithful unless you're trusting, believing, unless you're faithing, as it were, in Jesus. You trust in him and he makes you faithful and that's what she does, Joni Eareckson. She's learned how to trust Jesus like that because she needs Jesus like that.

And so no matter where we find ourselves, that's the call, fix your eyes on Jesus, and then, secondly, fill your mind with his word. How do you do it? You fix your eyes on Jesus and you fill your mind with his word. I'll give you another homework assignment. Psalm 37:1-10. The passage has meant a lot to me and many times but especially in recent months and in that Psalm, we're not going to turn to it, I'm just going to summarize it for you and give you some thoughts to maybe frame some time in it yourself. There are 18 imperatives in the first 10 verses, at least 18, maybe it's 20. Well, I'm not sure. It's like between 15 and 20 imperatives. Three times it says, "do not fret." Do not fret. Fretting is stewing and being angry and worked up. The first in verse 1 says, it starts off the Psalm, "Do not fret because of evildoers." You look at evil-doing around you, you look at what people are doing around you and the tendency is to want to fret, it's to want to burn, it's to want to be angry about what's happening out there.

Two more times it says that in verse 7 and verse 8. Do not fret. Verse 8 is interesting. It's parallel to verse 1. Verse 1 said, "Do not fret because of evildoers." Verse 8 says, "Do not fret; it leads only to evil-doing." Do you see that? If you fret over evildoers, you will become an evildoer. You will get off of the role of being faithful follower of Jesus and you will become complicit with the diabolical destruction of the world that Satan's trying to bring about that you're actually upset about. Because we can look at the world and we look at what's happening around us and we can really genuinely be grieved but the Bible says don't fret. Face it honestly.

But then there's other imperatives, basically it says things like this, "Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord, He'll give you desires of your heart. Trust in the Lord. Commit your way to Him and He will do it, He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, your judgment as the noonday. Rest in the Lord. Wait patiently for Him. Cease from anger. Turn from wrath." So don't be angry, don't be wrathful, don't be filling your mind with all that you're seeing around you that's wrong. Don't be wrong, be focused on all of that but rather trust in the Lord. Do good. Dwell in the land. Cultivate faithfulness.

Now let me just share with you, cultivate faithfulness, interesting phrase because we're to be faithful, right? Cultivate faithfulness. Literally the word in Hebrew is "shepherd faithfulness." It sounds like, you know, you would be hoeing or planting a seed. Cultivate like a garden, right? But it's really not that. It is agriculture language but from shepherding and it means "to lead out to pasture."

So that is for faithfulness to be developed by, in a sense, feeding faithfulness, pasturing faithfulness, and I think what he's getting at and when you look at that in context of what he's saying around that, he's saying, "Listen, the way that you develop faithfulness, the way that you shepherd it and bring it out in your life is you feed it and you feed it with the truth. You feed on the truth. You feed on the truth of God's faithfulness." The way you become faithful is you feed on the truths of God's faithfulness. You feed on the promises of God, a God who cannot lie, a God who always does what he says, a God who is true to his word. But in this situation whatever it is, he's at work for his glory and our good and you meditate on that, you immerse yourself in that, and you think on that and what happens is you become more and more faithful. Faithfulness flows from being full of faith. Faith comes from the word of God, the promises of God.

So the Lord wants us to use our power, whatever power and abilities we have not for our own purposes, not for our own pleasure, not for our own agendas. No, we're to see ourselves as those who belong to Christ. Everything I am belongs to Jesus. Everything I have belongs to Jesus. Everything you are belongs to Jesus. Everything you have belongs to him. What we're called to do is to take whatever he's given us and to use it to do good to others for the glory of God and we do that by trusting in Jesus, by fixing our eyes on him and following him. And you know, when you think about this, Jesus, the wonder of it is he calls you and me to do things that we would never choose to do and he's going to do that. If you belong to him, you're going to find yourself in situations probably again and again that you did not choose, or you would never have chosen, and some of us will find ourselves in situations where we are really profoundly so, just like I mentioned Joni Eareckson.

But think about this: the one who has called you to that says, "Follow Me." He is the one who left the glory of heaven, he left the glory of heaven. He was rich and yet for our sakes became poor. He left the glory of heaven and became a slave according to Philippians 2:7. He took the form of a servant. In the Greek it says "doulos." He took the form of a slave and he did not live for his own purposes. He did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many, and the course that he walked was the most miserable course of all. A man of sorrows acquainted with grief, like men would hide their faces from him because of his disfigurement, the ugliness of his circumstances. He walked that course to save you and me and he says, "Come follow Me." And Paul says there's nothing sweeter than knowing the fellowship of his sufferings, that to suffer with Jesus along that blood-stained path is the most delightful place in the world. It's the place of freedom. It's the place of joy. It is the place of faithfulness and the place of effectiveness and that we may one day be able to hear him say when we get to heaven, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we praise and honor You. Lord, we acknowledge that we are so far from what we ought to be. Lord, so easily distracted, so easily discouraged, so easily set off the path. Lord Jesus, help us keep our eyes on You. Help us to be more overwhelmed by Your great love for us so that our lives are just lived out as an expression of love to You,*



*not to earn anything from You for we can earn nothing. In our flesh dwelleth no good thing but that we might live our lives spending ourselves, using our resources, our time, our energy, our lives, spending them to love You by doing good to others for Your glory. Lord, be pleased to do this in our lives. Make us faithful. We pray in Your name. Amen.*