

# Renewing Your Mind: Thinking Biblically

*Renewing Your Mind*

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2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

And so the idea that Paul conveys there is that we are in this world as believers, there is an ongoing pressure to conform to the thinking of this world and we have to resist that, we have to be proactive in actually trying to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. And so with that in mind, let's go ahead and go to the Lord in prayer, commit this time to him and we'll start this evening.

*Father, we thank You for the opportunity we have to come into Your presence and to come into Your presence through Your word and by Your Spirit. We thank You for Your grace that's at work in our lives and we pray that You would help us tonight as we study and as we consider, Lord, difficult and complex issues and we come humbly to You knowing that we need the mind of Christ, we need the word to be made clear to us that we might walk in truth. Lord, our desire is that we would be pleasing to You so help us. We love You and we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.*

What's that noise we're having in the back? That does sound like something back there. Anybody see somebody coming out of the baptistery after me, just give me a sign. Okay. Yeah. We may have an animal or something alive back there. Okay.

Well, anyway, tonight just to kind of remind us of a little more about the purpose of this study and kind of where we hope to get to, we are, you know, we're always as Christians subject according to that passage, Romans 12:2, there is an ongoing conforming principle that's always at work on us. The world system, that is, the thoughts and values and ways of thinking, the concepts and beliefs that are commonly held by people in this world, they exert a continual conforming pressure upon believers and that continual conforming pressure can rob us of God's blessing and God's power in our lives, and so we are charged with the responsibility to be actively resisting that conforming pressure and the way we do that is by being transformed which is also a present tense Greek verb which means we should be continually being transformed and that transformation happens by the renewing of our minds. And the idea is that we're renewing our minds by rejecting the actual

thoughts, concepts, beliefs that are present in the world, we're rejecting those and we're replacing them with the values and teachings of Scripture and that's an active process.

So one of the things that we've seen as we've thought about this last year particularly with so much happening in our culture, that there are areas where we're feeling that conforming pressure in a real and dramatic way. You know, certainly with COVID and some of the issues that came up with that. You have, you know, the reality of the danger of a virus that we need to think about, we need to be prudent about, we need to consider our relationships, but there's a temptation to adopt worldly priorities and values as we do that because the world is giving us its perspective on how you respond to a pandemic. And so the values and the ways of thinking, the ways of acting in the world are evident in that area and we want to think about that through this series. We're going to take some particular things and thought processes and try to reject unbiblical ways of thinking and replace it with biblical ways of thinking. Obviously the area of social justice, which I talked about some on Sunday and we want to talk about tonight actually, begin to look at some of that area of conforming pressure as well, that the world sees things that there really are issues in the world that need to be addressed but that the world's value system, the world's way of thinking about things is also then exerting a pressure on Christians to adopt its ways of thinking and so we want to resist that and replace it with biblical thinking.

Another area we hope to work through this summer is the area of technology and smartphones, social media, computer, how much screen time, and how that's actually exerting a conforming pressure upon the thinking of Christians. In fact, that's actually so profound in the way that that's working on us. We're working a lot on that right now and that will be something we work at on later in the summer, in fact, we hope to be able to spend some time with our parents talking and having some times where we get together as parents to talk about how we can shepherd our young people better, children, and also ourselves too because I know that's one of the things we struggle with. Somebody was saying, Bethany was sharing that she had seen a statistic that said that young people's attention spans are now getting, someone has come up with the idea that, I don't know what age it is but that a young person has the same attention span as a goldfish. It's like 6-7 seconds and then they can be thinking of something else and so I don't know what the ages are and I'm not saying that you are like a goldfish but apparently a lot of people are getting that way and the reality is all of us, all of us who have computers, who have a smartphone, are being pressured by those things. It doesn't mean it's all evil. No, we're trying to learn to think critically and biblically, but we want to really be more wise and think about how these things are exerting a pressure on us and we want to be thinking biblically in response to that, learning how we can walk with God, and what an opportunity these things give us. So many areas for opportunities for good gospel conversations, and that's what we want to do, we want to be people who are walking with God through the complexity of life with his word, and then able to hold forth the word of life to people around us who need the hope that's found in the gospel. So that's what we want to do. That's really the purpose of what we're doing tonight.

So I want to kind of then mention also as a continued introduction here, tying it together with what we talked about in Colossians 2 on Sunday, which I want to come back to on this Sunday, Lord willing, in continuing that message. But one of the things that I think that we see is this reality that the conforming pressure of the world isn't just out there when we're listening to what the world has to say. Satan tries to get that conforming pressure into the church, in here, among us through our teaching, through the teaching of people we love and value. He's trying to get it into the church and that's what we were talking about with all the false teaching stuff that we looked at on Sunday. And it's not always false teachers that are heretics that end up leaving the faith, it's when we ourselves can be miss-seeing something and this is why we're supposed to be Bereans, right?

You're to check out what you're hearing and when you have a concern, come to a pastor/elder or a teacher that you heard teach and share, "Hey, I'm not sure I see this. It seems like the Scripture says this. Help me understand what you meant by that." Because the false teaching comes into the church and like Colossians 2:8, in fact, we'll turn to that for just a minute because it's such an important verse. "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." So you're taken captive, you're plundered, you're made like the world when philosophy and empty deception are brought into the church mingled with biblical teaching. That's what's happening in Colossians. It's real biblical teaching about Christ, real biblical teaching about the gospel but there's some worldly concepts that are brought in and merged together with it and Paul's basically calling them to filter out the garbage that they've let in and to hold onto the fullness of Christ.

So a key concept in that passage is the word "elementary principles of the world." Tradition of men, elementary principles of the world. I think that's two ways of saying the same thing. The traditions of men are the elementary principles of the world and those are, the word here is like the most basic kind of foundational units that other things are built out of. In fact, this word "stoicheia" could be used of the alphabet. Think about the alphabet, you know, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, all the letters in the alphabet. The idea here is not just the letters themselves but even more elemental than that, the sounds that the letters represent is what this word would be used of. So like ah, A. Buh. Do you see how small a building block of language that is, buh. This is what the stoicheia were, the building blocks of language. So every paragraph or every oration, somebody gave a speech or every sermon is built on all of this, think about just to say a sentence, how many sounds you're putting together and it's that basic. You're putting all of these sounds together. That's the idea of this word, so he's saying the elementary principles of the world are now the thoughts and the beliefs that are so basic and fundamental that you put them, that they build up all of the worldly thinking in the world. And he's saying, "You've got to strain out all of those basic underlying assumptions, you've got to get them out of your thinking." That's the call of the Christian life.

In fact, another way that this word would be used, think about the word "elements," the periodic table, the table of elements. Remember that, having to learn that? I always hated that. But anyway, I'm sorry. Kids, in your school, it's something you should love. It was a

deficiency in me that I didn't love learning that. No, seriously, it is important and, you know, basically what you're learning is, you're taking compounds in the stuff of life broken down to the very smallest building blocks. I mean, it goes below that into the atom, it's talking about the atomic and the representation of each of these elements, right? So it's the very smallest building blocks of matter in all that we see around us, the stuff that we see broken down into its most fundamental elemental components. That's the idea he's saying when he says that, "See to it that no one takes you captive according to the elementary principles of the world." These basic fundamental things that people take and they are assumed to be true. They need no proof. Now the reality is they're not right. I mean, sometimes they're somewhat right, there's some truth in them, but because they are the elementary principles of the world they are laced with error and deceit that will kill you, and so that's what we're trying to strain out.

So one of the ways I think we're going to basically try to address these things the way that I have in mind because these are so many complex issues. I mean, talk about social justice is such a difficult thing to begin to talk about because there's so many angles that you need to consider, to talk about, how we should think about various things related to COVID, you know, is so many complex issues, right? So what I think would be the way that I want to do this is to try to take an elemental principle that applies in one of these areas and to try to look at it and how its there and then to try to root it out of our thinking with biblical truth.

So with that in mind, the one I'd like to look at tonight and this really is a part of so many things and it's a damaging belief system, but this is the essential elementary truth that's a part of the fabric of humanity. Someone else is to blame for my failure. Someone or something else is to blame. You could say, "It's not your fault." That is a fundamental elementary assumption that undergirds the way people, fallen man thinks about his life and experience. "It's not really my fault." Okay, so that's an underlying assumption.

It's there from the very beginning and we see it, in fact, let's turn to Genesis 3 and we see this goes back to the very beginning. When Adam and Eve are in the garden of Eden, chapter 3, the serpent comes to her, to Eve, and tempts her, contradicting the word of God. Eve takes the fruit, "saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate," that's Genesis 3:6. "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden." So they've sinned. Adam and Eve had both sinned. God made it clear, "Don't eat from this tree. Everything is open to you. The whole world, there's only one command that you must not, there's only one place you must not go, one thing you must not do, don't eat from that one tree." And think about how gracious God is, how good he is.

The only restraint on man in the garden is this one area but Eve and Adam both sin. But then when the Lord comes in verse 9, "Then the LORD God," this is Genesis 3:9, "Then

the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' He said, 'I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.' And He said," that is the Lord, "He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?'" Straightforward question. "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

Look what Adam says, "The man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.'" It was a yes or no question. "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" Adam didn't answer it with, "Yes, I have. I sinned." He answered it with, "The woman. It's the woman." He didn't even just say that, "It's the woman that You gave to me." Adam is passing the buck. He is blaming his wife and ultimately he's blaming God for his sin. "It's the woman You gave to me. You're at fault, God. She's at fault. You're at fault. I'm not at fault." That's essentially what he's saying and it's not just with him.

The next verse, "Then the LORD God said to the woman," verse 13, "'What is this you have done?' And the woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'" There is no acceptance of responsibility on the part of either one of them. I mean, there's an element, "Yeah. Hey, but it's not my fault. I ate but it's the woman You gave me. That's why I ate. I ate but it's the serpent who deceived me."

So there's the tendency in man from the very beginning, part of sin is to want to blame others for our failure. "It's not my fault. Someone else is to blame." This is a basic part of the make-up of man in sin and so we should expect that this is something we want to guard ourselves from as we go through life, and one of the things that happens to us when the gospel comes to us, I mean, think about the beginning of the gospel too, what is the beginning of the gospel? Remember what Paul when he's asked to, I mean when he sends the letter of the book of Romans to the church at Rome, one of the things about the book of Romans that is so wonderful in the providence of God is that Romans is a letter that Paul wrote to a church to whom which he had never ministered. He had never been in Rome before to minister to this church and most letters he's writing, he's writing to people to whom he already ministered. He was already in Ephesus and so he wrote Ephesians. He was already in Corinth and so he wrote the Corinthians. He was already in Philippi, ministered there and he writes back. Thessalonica, etc. But Rome had had never been to and so the church in Rome, he wants to write to them, his heart is burdened for them, and so in writing to them what this results in is he gives them the whole gospel that he's preaching. This is why those 16 chapters are such a treasure trove of truth, because he had never been there and he gives them everything he has to say about the gospel and he tells us that is his purpose in Romans 1:16 and 17 when he says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and afterwards to the Greek," to bring about the obedience of faith. So then he starts in chapter 1:18 into his gospel and that's what he essentially does in Romans, is he lays out the gospel, the way of salvation, the good news of God's salvation, the good news of what Jesus Christ has done to save sinners. That's the gospel.

So Paul lays it out. Where does he start? What's the first thing you need to know to receive the good news? I mean, think about that, "I've got good news for you. I have come to proclaim good news to you. I'm not ashamed of the good news for it's the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes." If you were hearing that for the first time and you didn't know anything about the book of Romans, you're there and you're hearing that message, what do you expect that's going to come next? "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life, or Jesus died for you," which these things are true but that's not what comes next. He says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation," and then he says in verse 18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."

I mean, the good news isn't good news at the very beginning. He launches into an explanation of how God's wrath hangs over all mankind. The anger of God, his holiness. You have offended him. He basically here is calling out idolatry. He's basically saying, "Listen, everyone who hears this message, you already had enough knowledge of God to worship Him and you didn't worship Him, you turned away and you worshiped the creation, you worshiped yourself, you denied the Creator, you're under the wrath of God." He doesn't stop there, he keeps on going, verses 24 to 32. He talks about the downward degradation of humanity. God "gave them over to the lust of the impurity of their hearts" in verses 24 and 25, "they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever." Then he talks about homosexuality in verses 26 and 27. Then 28 to 32, the depraved mind. He says, "This is what the Gentiles are like, the ones who have not been under God's covenant blessing of Israel. Look how awful they are in their wickedness." This is the good news.

Then in chapter 2, he turns to the Jews and he says basically you are the same self-righteous people, and then also the Jews, "You who have tried to live according to the law, you also are condemned." And he ends up in chapter 3, verse 20, saying this, "because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." Actually verse 19, "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." He basically says the first part of the gospel is every single human being on the face of the earth is accountable to God and under the wrath of God. He doesn't say you can blame your sin on someone else. The first part of the gospel is to know that we are sinners, that we all have offended a holy God and that I am under his wrath without hope, without help. Okay, if that's what you need to know to be saved, then things which propagate the idea, it's not your fault, someone else is to blame, work against a thought process that make you actually hardened to the

gospel, in a sense, inoculate you to the gospel. You don't think you need a Savior when someone else is to blame for all your problems.

So this is one of the reasons that Satan sows this lie so much. You're not at fault. Now the reality is of course people do horrible things to other people and there are many things that happen to people that you're really not responsible for that reality, and there are injustices done. Yes, that's true. There are evil things done and God tells us he takes note of those and he's going to deal with those who oppress other people. He's going to right every wrong. But the way that he deals with individual people whether you have been oppressed in incredible ways or whether you lived a fairly normal life that's not been super-oppressed, whatever your station, the thing that God wants every single person to know is the most important thing for you and I to deal with is our own sin. It doesn't say that he doesn't care about oppression, he doesn't care about injustice. He does but he cares most about the oppression and injustice in our own hearts because that's the most, that's the reality. Every one of us have thumbed our faces at God. We have turned away from him. We have spurned him. That's the primary issue and it's so much the primary issue that we have to resist things that would make us deflect attention from what God wants to look at. The issue is our heart, our life.

This is one, I think, of the real problems that it's unintentional when Christians are bringing this in but it's a part of the underlying thinking behind the social justice movement, and when I speak of social justice, that's in itself a complex subject but essentially when you look up the definitions, when you read the folks that are articulating and advocating for it, it's basically social justice is concerned with equity and equality of outcomes, equal results. The idea is everyone deserves equal like benefits in life and it thinks about it in terms of groups. It links equity between groups so that in all spheres economically, politically, vocationally, social justice believes that everyone should be, every group should be represented equally, proportionately across the spectrum. That is, if there are 53% of Americans are white then only 53% of the doctors should be white. 53% of the lawyers should be white. If there are 13% blacks, then there should be 13% black lawyers, 13% black doctors. They look at this and they say when they see that's not there, they assume disparity means discrimination and they believe that the system has created some kind of barrier in that therefore something is unjust in the system. That's the thinking of social justice. This for instance, this is why you'll hear sometimes things about rates of incarceration. The idea is that if 13% of the population is black, then 13% of the prisoners should be black, and if 14% or 25% are black, then it must be injustice. That's the thought process.

Now we're going to talk about disparities and discrimination, Lord willing, next week. It's a complex subject and I think when you look at it, just to say something quickly, disparities don't equal injustice. It's not a 1:1 at all, in fact, you never find any situation in all world history where benefits and blessings are distributed equally among ethnic groups in any society at any time. There is much research through history that shows this. You've got historians saying it, talking about this issue over hundreds of years. You just don't find it and there are so many other factors that come into it.

Let me give you an example. Since I brought that up, I'm just going to go here for a moment. One of the studies, Thomas Sowell, I don't know that he's a Christian, he certainly doesn't write as a believer, he writes as an economist. He's an African-American economist who, I guess he's now about 90 years old. He's up in his 80s. He's written a lot of really good work on economics and how things work. He wrote a book "Discrimination and Disparities," and he points out how disparities, basically the thesis is disparities don't show discrimination. There may be discrimination but disparities don't prove it and so it's a flawed way of thinking to say disparity equals injustice. Do you see that? So you want to reject that thought process. That doesn't prove anything. There are other reasons for disparities and he gives this example. Hang here with me for a minute because these things get, when I even start explaining them, they start sounding complicated to me as I say it. I think, "Man, this can't be good for people listening because it doesn't even make sense to me as I say it even though I thought it made sense before I said it." Have you ever had that feeling? This makes so much sense, you say it and you're like it just didn't really get there.

Anyway, this does make sense. If I don't say right it's because I didn't say it right. But he says, listen, there have been all kinds of studies throughout history and particularly a couple of different places he cites where if you look at successful people and you ask some questions about things about them, you'll find some interesting data. Like he says, if you ask people who might be, like say an astronaut, "What's your birth order? Were you a firstborn, a second born, a third born, a fourth born?" What you find is that in all the leading areas of society, firstborn are incredibly over-represented. Now for those of you that are firstborn, hey, all right. Those of you who aren't, you're a bunch of losers and you've got no hope. No, I'm not saying that at all but now just bear with me. Let's think about this for a minute. Do you know that 22 of the 29 original astronauts who worked to get us to the moon, 22 of 29 were either firstborn or only children. Now is that because NASA said we are discriminating against second born and third born and fourth born and fifth born? No. They had no idea. That's not a question you probably have ever filled out on a job application, "What is your birth order?" Then he goes on and he shows how many Nobel Prize winners, how many professors, how many lawyers in the state of Michigan. It was like 23% of all the lawyers are firstborn and when you add up the second born, third born, fourth born, fifth born all the way down, and some of this was done when there were a lot of big families back in the old days, it's like, "Okay, what's happening?" And think about this, were they discriminated against? Well, they grew up in the same socioeconomic situation as their second born brother or sister, and their third born sister or brother, their fourth born. They grew up under parents who had the same socioeconomic background themselves, the same level of education, the same level of, you know, of interest in their children. So all of these situations, the same environment, and yet how do you explain the different level of success? And you're probably thinking about it already, right? Well, apparently we look at that and we say it must be that the firstborn had the undivided attention of their parents. This must be something about the way the world works. You see, if you concluded that discrimination is happening, you would be wrong. There are other factors. There are other things going on that create disparities and so we can't be as foolish as those who want to apply a simplistic solution to complex problems.



This is one of the things I mentioned the verse, 1 Thessalonians 5:21 on Sunday as well. It's interesting, 1 Thessalonians 5:20, Paul says, "do not despise prophetic utterances. But test everything and hold to that which is good." At that time in the early church, Thessalonians is one of the early letters of Paul, God had ordained that they didn't have the whole Canon they needed to have prophetic utterances, that is, the Spirit of God would come upon a prophet and he would speak and they were to basically receive his word as almost Scripture. They still could test it by the word but that they were to not despise prophetic utterances. They needed that. They didn't have, remember in the other church you only had, like the Thessalonians only had the book of 1 Thessalonians and they didn't know it was 1 Thessalonians when they only had one. Paul didn't say 1 Thessalonians when he wrote it. And they didn't get other books until they got passed around to them. So the Canon took a long time for everybody to get back Canon in hand and so he said, "You're going to need prophetic utterances," and God made provision for the people by giving this short-term blessing until the Canon was fulfilled and I think that prophetic gift becomes something slightly different after that but, anyway, we won't go into that more.

Then he says test everything, hold to that which is good. Think about that, test everything. So you're in the church but you need to test everything and the word is "dokimazo," it means "to prove; to try; to put through a test to see if something is genuine." It's like a refiner's fire. You test it and you prove it and you prove it's genuine. He says that's how, even though you're to be ready for prophetic utterances, you're to be glad to receive them, you're to be open to them, you still test everything and hold to that which is good. Now if you're supposed to do that in the church, how much more are you supposed to do that with what you hear in the world? I mean, how much more are you to test what you hear on a newscast or on the internet about what's happening in the world?

You see, we need to be critical thinkers. It's different than critical theory. We need to be critical thinkers, that is, we're to test everything and to hold to that which is good within the church and outside the church. We are to be people who are constantly trying to evaluate is this true? Graciously, we are not to be cynics and know that everything is allowed all the time and go around. No, we are to be people who just know the standard of the word of God, we know how to think and we understand that the devil is at work, we understand that unbelievers, you know, they have some truth, in their best moments they have some wonderful insights and we can benefit from those, but that we go through life with a sense of healthy skepticism about the claims that people make and the truths they assert. If you are to test everything in the church, how much more in the world?

So this idea, then, these ideas related to justice are the same thing. I mean, you know, disparities, like he said, it sounds at first glance like, yeah, disparity equals injustice. Well, wait a minute, is that really true? Does that really stand up to scrutiny? I think this is the one area that as I have opportunity to talk to more and more of our brothers who are, I think, getting caught up too much in the justice movement, like I said, social justice, justice matters to God, yes. God doesn't want us to be participating in evil or oppression but to uncritically take in assumptions like disparities, differences in numbers

of people that have a certain thing, or incarceration or whatever, proves injustice is just very naïve and it's dangerous to the church because then you're taking in and you're now assuming that we need to do things based on that and the reality is you haven't even diagnosed the problem.

So simplistic diagnosis and that's why there's all this talk about you've got to change the system, and so that gets us back the point of this particular thing, is people want to blame the system for their lack of success. And here again, listen, people struggling and there are a lot of people struggling and there's a lot of generational struggles that go from one generation to the next, and people are living in misery and they're living in poverty and we should be concerned about that as we have opportunity to minister to people. We should be concerned about that as Christians and holding out the light of the gospel but we're not to assume that the social justice mantra and the way of thinking about how to fix the problem is the system is the problem. I'm not arguing for the system, I'm not trying to argue, no system is perfect. You cannot find a system in history any place or any time that was perfectly just. We know that by definition, don't we? We're in a fallen world. Heaven will be like that.

So the system has, of course, got flaws and, in fact, you would, doesn't it make sense that every system in every country, that you would have some favored status being a part of the majority? Is that not just obvious? I'm not saying that it should be that way, I'm saying it's just, that's just human nature. That's something you can't fight against. I mean, if you move to Korea, if I moved to Korea, I would expect that I'm going to have some struggles being a person that's not from Korea, that doesn't understand the culture, that's an outsider, the people are not going to give me opportunities that other people, and I can understand that.

So I'm just saying we just step back and we critically think about these things but the underlying problem, though, is a spiritual problem. When we start to want to put the blame for everything outside of us, the system, we start to look at and what happens is it appeals to our flesh in ways we don't even anticipate and we become, we turn our anger and our guilt, I think our real guilt at times, out into blame, and this is what I think what motivates a lot of the intense emotion.

It's really a profound thing. You know, the Lord has made us in his image, to have a conscience, Romans 2:15 talks about we have the law of God written on our hearts and some people respond to that better than others, some people just ignore it, other people try to live somewhat by it as Paul is talking about in Romans 2, and when we sin, even though a person doesn't know God, they have offended God and there's guilt that comes with that and God has given that as a gracious gift, really. What if you sinned and didn't feel guilty? You wouldn't know you need to be saved. So he's made the soul to feel guilty. People can sin and sin and sin and where they sear their conscience. That's a horrible place to be. He's given the conscience, the conscience is not a perfect infallible guide because of sin, in fact, as believers we have to keep informing our conscience to think biblically. A lot of times your conscience will misinterpret things for you. It will make you feel guilty about things you shouldn't feel guilty about. It will make you feel

not guilty about things you should feel guilty about. Your conscience is not a perfect reliable guide according to Scripture because you can't trust your heart. That was another thing we talked about Sunday.

But the conscience is basically something that's very helpful and so when people sin and they feel guilty, this is especially true, I think, in the area of like explains the intensity of hatred that people will feel and let's go to some other areas here, leave social justice for a moment to think about like I remember being puzzled as a young believer at the intensity of the anger that pro-abortion people felt toward those who were opposing abortion and demonstrating. Why do they care so much? You know, why are they so angry? Why are they so enraged? Have you ever thought about that when you think about, you know, homosexuals are the same way at times. Not all of them. I'm not saying all but you will see in certain circumstances where there is someone who is just saying, "You know, this is what God says. God says that marriage is a man and a woman and that's His design." And the emotional outrage that can come seems disproportionate to what you said. What is that? What that is is guilt that has been suppressed that then is coming out in a sense of blame. "I feel terrible because of you! You are making me feel like this!"

And that's exactly what the culture believes. It's our presence, our saying, for instance, that God made two genders. He made man male and female. That's what the Bible says. That's what is true. The fact that people feel differently, we can be sympathetic with, we can mourn with them over but we cannot give in to say it's okay to change your gender. We can still love people that do, still care about them, but we must care about them enough to say the truth. "Listen, I know you feel like that. There are things I feel. My heart feels that I want to do things, I feel like I should do things or I need to do things and the reality is my heart is lying to me and I can't follow my heart. The Bible says the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." And so we tell that person, "No, God says this." Well, why do they get so enraged and angry and why do they blame even with more intensity? Because of the guilt that's in their own souls.

So what happens is if you, now then what happens is, like say for instance a person that has gender issues and they change their gender and they're feeling guilty because what they've done, it's really a profound sin by acting as if they were God to change their gender. That is a profound impact upon a soul. There's a profound load of guilt and then what society says is the reason you feel guilty is because of all those, we are called cis gendered now, right? They've given us, let's don't say that. All of those who believe there are just two genders and we believe we're the gender God created us, they're the problem. It's their oppression. You see, the majority is oppressing you. Your problem is you're a victim of oppression. And so what happens is the guilt that they really feel for what they've done is then vented out in blame and rage, and what does that do? It makes them feel a lot better for the moment but in reality it adds a deeper load of guilt because God and the conscience they have in their hearts knows that they are the ones that are guilty. And not only are they now guilty for what they've done in changing their gender, they're guilty now for the hatred and the evil that has come out of their hearts toward other people.

And so the world keeps saying it's them out there and they get in a cycle of guilt and blame, guilt and blame, guilt and blame, and they become more and more, their souls are tortured more and more and more, and then they wonder why suicide rates are so high among people who have done that. They're in despair because they have struck out against God and the thing they need is the gospel, that God can take a person who's done that and rebuild their life in some way that they can never imagine. We can say that to the person who has done that. "Look, I know you've done some things, you've reversed some things that may not ever be able to be changed in this life but God can do something beautiful in your life if you will follow Him now and submit to His Son Jesus Christ."

So now think about this cycle of blame and how pointless it is. It keeps the focus off the thing that needs to be dealt with. It doesn't mean there's not legitimate blame out there and circumstances, there is but the Christian life is people learning, we are called to be people who are not always blaming others for our problems. We will confront sin and call it sin, yes, but no blame for what is my problem. My problem is 100% my problem even if someone abuses me. Now listen to this. Someone abuses a child, if you were abused as a child, you were not responsible for that abuse. No, you're not and there will be false guilt that you feel that is wrong. Your conscience will condemn you. That's why you can't just listen to your conscience. The Bible tells you what's true and you are a victim of someone who oppressed you. That's true, you were a victim but the only hope for you is to accept God's way now dealing with that, and it's not to continue to blame that person for what they did to you and how it's now marked you forever that you're a victim. No, the Bible does not see us as perpetual victims. You are not defined by what has happened to you according to Scripture. You are not defined by the color of your skin or the place that you were born in life. You are not defined by that according to God's word. If you are in Christ, you are a new creature. Old things are passed away. Behold, all things have become new. You are set free. And as you walk in the truth, you can walk in increasing victory and part of that is learning to deal with the fact of what's happened to you in the past and to put your past in its place biblically, to come to terms with the fact that God sovereignly allowed this evil to happen. God did not condone it. God hates it. God's going to judge it. If the person who did it to you does not repent, they will suffer in hell for that sin among all the other sins that they committed.

God is grieved. His heart aches when he sees man do that. That's what he's talking about in Genesis 6:5, he was grieved that he had made man when he saw all the violence on the earth but we have to accept the fact that God, though Satan meant it for evil, this person meant it for evil, somehow God meant it for good and we come to the place where we don't blame our present struggles on past realities. We know that Christ has made me new. God is sovereign. God is good and I'm going to allow his grace to restore me, and what Satan meant for evil God means for good. The scar is going to become an avenue of blessing and power in your life. Where you were weak, then you're strong in Christ.

God wants to use that to make our message so powerful and when you come to that point where you're not defined as a victim, you're an overcomer by God's grace, you're free. You're not in a perpetual cycle of blaming. You are free and it doesn't mean, there's a complicated issue of dealing with someone who needs to repent and a person who has

been abused can go with someone else to confront that abuser and maybe they need to go to jail if they did something. God wills that. But we don't have to be in bondage. God sets us free.

So you see this mindset is very closely related to that. This idea of everything is about redressing old issues and everything's about blaming my present circumstances on past realities or on other people and what they're doing to me. That's not a Christian way of thinking. Do you see that? It's not a gospel way of thinking. It's a way that doesn't intend to because there are many wonderful people who are still messed up in this right now. I think it's happening in disturbing numbers but it's inconsistent with the gospel. Now people don't see that but it is. Just think about it. Like I said on Sunday, the fact that Jesus when he came, Paul and the apostles did not address Roman oppression directly. They never talked about it. What did Jesus say? "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's." Paul didn't deal with it. They didn't say slavery is such an evil thing. It is but they didn't say that. Why? Because there's something more profound. Remember I mentioned the issue of triage? If you were in an accident and you had a broken arm and you had a broken leg and you were bleeding, you had internal bleeding, you don't want them to spend time, a lot of time on your arm and your leg first. You know, I think about this like this has happened in war. Can you imagine like a guy who is a doctor, he's an orthopedist and he's a military doctor and he's on the front lines and he has a guy come in with this compound fracture, and he's been an orthopedist, he's been trained with orthopedics and he knows that this compound fracture has to be fixed or this guy is never going to walk right. And, "I can do it." But he's got to first of all stop this guy's bleeding and then he's got another guy who's about to die, and another guy who's about to die, and another guy who's about to die, and he has to let that leg wound sit and go over there and deal with it tomorrow because there's more pressing urgent needs. And you can't be distracted by the urgent, real, ultimate need, you can't be distracted from that by something that's secondary.

It's not unimportant but it's secondary and that's the issue, I think, of social justice in the New Testament. There were injustices and the beauty of the gospel is when the gospel comes and it transforms hearts, it always has like a rock thrown into a pond, the ripples move out, and as the ripples move out over time what happens is justice begins to become more and more a part of the fabric of society in which the gospel has come. And as people keep staying focused on Christ like Colossians 2 says, if we don't get trapped with the philosophy of men, the elemental principles of the world rather than according to Christ, if we stay with Christ and who we are in Christ and all that we are in Jesus, what happens? Think about this. Think about how this and this should have been what happened in America, you know, after the Civil War, after the evil of slavery is ended, in the complexity of a society now trying to move forward in that, if Christians had led the way and I know they did, they really did, there were a lot of people who did. They weren't the majority and there was a lot of bad ugly scenes like I mentioned, you probably read about the issue in Tulsa as I mentioned on Sunday. Tragic circumstances, evil that happened, and those things are complex. It's not always as one-sided as even we hear but that was a terrible wicked thing, I mean it was 250 black people killed, as many

as 50 whites killed in this race riot that happened. It started with a lynching, a proposed lynching of a black man and that's evil.

So these things happen but had what God's plan was and this is what is for people to be transformed by the gospel, and as they share unity in Christ, to come to a reality, to know that this person that I thought was so different from me, this person that I assumed was less than me or the thought that they were more than me, or whatever it is, that I felt inferior to or I felt superior to, this person is just like me in Jesus. We're the same. We're one. The one who died for me died for them. His blood was shed, this is my brother, this is my sister. Let's walk through life together whatever comes.

That's what God wants to do. Then with those things primary, those things where they need to be, then secondarily as citizens in America, let's talk about how we can help the society address issues through voting, through political means. But you see, it's got to be far secondary. The gospel is the thing that must be way above everything else, that's why I said it's not a gospel issue. It's an issue that comes secondary and out of the gospel and when Christ has truly changed you through the gospel, it will change the way you treat other people individually. That's the primary focus too. It's not about systems, though. Jesus didn't deal with systems.

That's a lot to think about and this is a conversation we're starting. I want to continue to have, I want you to give me pushback, let's talk about it. If you'd like to discuss these things with the other elders, we're all kind of working through this together. We're working through it ourselves as leaders. You know, we're talking about these things because this complexity, even as I say what I say, there may be things I said that need to be tweaked tonight and I hope that you will share that with me. We've got to keep helping each other but the good news is we have all that we need in this precious book. This can equip us to live today in the midst of a complex world with so many questions and we can have answers that we can say to people, "Listen, this is the book. This is where you find freedom. This is where you find life." And our unity that we build together as we keep rooted in Christ, not in elemental traditions of men and the elementary principles of this world but in Christ, the unity that we will have will testify to the world of the glory of our Savior. May the Lord help us do that.

Let's go to him in prayer.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for Your word and for the gospel. It truly is the power of God unto salvation. You speak into the darkness of our hearts, You spoke into the darkness that was in our hearts, and You speak forth the word of life and You bring life out of death. Thank You, Lord, for Jesus. Thank You for His precious blood that washes us clean. We're all under your wrath but He has through His blood paid in full the sin debt. He has taken the wrath of God out of the way. He has put an end to it. It is finished, He said, and therefore we have access into the very presence of God, nothing can stop us, and if we can come into the presence of God, we come united in the presence of God as brothers and sisters in Christ. God is for us, who can be against us? Lord, help us love one another fervently from the heart. Help us understand one another, care for one*

*another, help one another, encourage one another, admonish one another, speak the truth to one another, and love one another for the glory of our Savior. Make us worthy of so great a salvation. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*