

# The Christian's Warfare Part 6: Biblical Perspective on Power 2

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*The Christian's Warfare*

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 10. 2 Corinthians 10. We're continuing a series of messages that really deals with modern Christian spiritual warfare and we've called it "The Christian's Warfare," and we've used this passage as our starting point each week because it really identifies what spiritual warfare is and that is spiritual warfare is fought in the mind. It's about truth. Satan is a liar, he's the father of lies and so to fight Satan means you fight lies. How do you fight lies? With truth.

The Lord is so good, the blessing this morning to have some familiar faces back in the service. Some folks haven't been here in a little while, my mom and dad, John and Connie Blackburn. My dad's an elder here at Providence. Some of you may not have met him because of, well, we've all been missing each other a lot because there's so few people in the sanctuary each week. Some people are sitting out there and you don't get to see them and that's why it's good to hang around in the parking lot for a while, right, to catch up with one another. But so glad to have mom and dad back and they've been out for coronavirus prevention reasons and stuff. And Ray and Judy Marchman. Praise the Lord, they have been out through the coronavirus and those of you who have prayed for them, remember they actually both had significant bouts with COVID 19 and praise God that the Lord was faithful to you and you're back worshiping him, giving him praise and glory. I'm so glad you're here and what a blessing to be able to be a part of the body of Christ and rejoice in his work in our lives.

So good to worship the Lord together this morning and to remember that it is his word, it is his truth that keeps us, that gives us the ability to stand up to whatever we go through. As Ted read earlier in Hebrews 11, I mean, the life of the Christian, really the normative life of the Christian as you look at it in Scripture is that there are sufferings and afflictions to go through. As Job said, "A man is born to affliction surely as sparks fly upward." And so it's a part of life and the wonder of it is that in God's providence and wisdom, we get to know him in a deeper experiential way through the suffering so that it produces for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison; we come to know Jesus in a deeper way, the treasure of all treasures, and rest in him more fully.

So we come this morning to the title of the message, I said the series title is "The Christian's Warfare," and last week we began looking at the subtitle, "A Biblical Perspective on Power." A biblical perspective on power. It's a word that is very much in the cultural dialog in general and within the Christian dialog as well. This issue of power, the abuse of power, the misuse of power. I mentioned last week that it's something particularly discussed in light of the recent discussion of critical theory. Critical theory, it's a way of thinking about the interactions of people, group identity is a big part of critical theory, that each individual is considered to be a part of a group and I mentioned this binary, is that you're either part of one group, group A or group B. There's only two groups and no matter which way you cut society, you divide it into two groups and the two groups are distinguished by one group has power and the other group doesn't, and so one group is thought to be the oppressor and the other group is the oppressed. This is critical theory. It's a way of understanding social interaction, social dynamics, cultural realities, government interactions, and so it's kind of a paradigm that people look at the world through and it's really informing a lot of the ongoing discussion in the culture and therefore it's a part of what we're swimming in. And so we want to think biblically about this important issue. I mean, the Bible certainly has a lot to say about power and it talks about the abuse of power, oppression. It does talk about these things. It also talks about how we as followers of Jesus are to see power and so we are going to look at that again this morning.

We started that last time and I said that basically the two main principles that we're looking at, just to kind of remind you a little bit of last week, we talked about the sovereignty of God, that is, there's two points, the two main points are the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man and the sovereignty of God is the fact that God possesses all power and he dispenses all power according to his will. He makes people to have the power that they have. He puts, you know, kings in their place, governors in their place. The Lord does it. He gives people the individual personal power they have in society. He chooses whether you're male or female. So, you know, a lot of the interaction and discussion, you can cut that binary male and female, although it gets more complicated than that nowadays, doesn't it, but the idea is males have power, females don't, so males are oppressors, females are not in a patriarchal society. That's the way critical theory looks at gender but then it gets even more complicated because of the various numbers of the genders that they, you know, want us to believe there are and so people that are, anyway enough of that. But the idea is it's everywhere. You can cut society down into two groups, no matter which way you cut it and either you have power or you don't and some of that's legitimate, some of it is actually true and right. I mean, a right assessment of the situation and certainly if you're in the majority population in any society, in any society no matter where you go in the world, if you're in the majority population you will experience some elements of privilege which you could interpret as power. No matter where you go in the world, if you have wealth you have economic power. You have the ability to do things that other people don't have the ability to do. If you are a person that is gifted or created by God with exceptional physical giftedness, exceptional intellectual capacities, exceptional musical ability, whatever talents, you have power that other people don't have and what we see is the Bible pictures all of these decisions about who has wealth, who has ability and who doesn't, ultimately God says,

"It's My decision how those things are distributed." The sovereignty belongs to God. That's what we talked about last time.

At first glance, that's not the message that, in fact, it's a message that is very offensive to fallen man. To say that God reigns over all, that God is sovereign, that he's absolutely in control of everything is offensive to the natural mind but to the mind that has come to accept it and embrace it, it's the most comforting truth in the world. It's sweet sovereignty but that is something that you really as you read your Bible you can argue with it but you're arguing with God, you're arguing with the word, and you argue with God to your own hurt, to your own misery. Submitting to God, trusting God, that's the path to life. That's the path to joy.

I was reading a book this week, "Putting Your Past in Its Place" by Stephen Viars, a very helpful book about how do you deal with things that have happened in your past. You know, you have real experiences, often everybody at some level has different types of these but some have profound experiences of being oppressed, hurt by people in power in their lives. And one of the most painful areas like that is when a parent abuses a child. That's where someone uses their power to do great damage. Well, how do you deal with that? This book is about that, putting your past in its place and helping you think biblically about your past, and the good news is that when you see things biblically, when you come to submit to God's word, it is the path to freedom and to joy.

In the book, Viars talks about how the way that we don't process our past, and I would add to this our present experiences of disappointment, disenfranchisement, however you want to look at it, if we don't process our present and our past biblically it has tremendous impact on us in the here and now. He talks about you can have an underlying sadness that dominates your life, subconscious anxiety, suppressed fear, secret rage that are under the surface because you haven't dealt with the things that have happened to you or that you perceive to have happened to you, or you think are happening to you, from a biblical mindset. You've not filtered that through Scripture and so you have an inner angst, an internal frustration that is a continual drain on your soul and we are all prone to this in various ways and degrees. And when you have this, whether it's manifesting in your life as sadness or this anxiety, fear or anger and rage, when you have this under the surface and you're not dealing with and thinking biblically about what has happened to you or what is happening to you, it creates this drain and like emotional drain on your soul and so that it leads almost inevitably to just kind of a depressed, lethargic, ineffective life, and it leads to a sense of misery. Christians who aren't dealing with their past, aren't dealing with their experience, aren't dealing with the wrongs that have been done to them in a biblical way are going to experience that and, of course, the other side of it is when you have power and you misuse it, then you are guilty before God and your guilt has the same kind, it's a different angle but the same kind of effect on you in a continual destructive way in your life, in your heart.

He uses the image in the book of being stuck. He talks about doing a work project he was on and they got stuck in the mud and the wheels are spinning and you can't move the vehicle, and you give it more gas and all it does is spin. So the question for us to consider

this morning as we start into the message is: are you stuck this morning? Do you feel like that the energy that you invest in spiritual things and sometimes you get motivated, you want to seek the Lord and yet it feels like you're spinning and you're not making any progress? If that's the case, then the good news we have in the word of God is God's truth can be the way out.

Viars talks about the way they got that vehicle unstuck, they were in the backyard, they'd been doing some work putting a pool in and the vehicle's stuck. They can't get it out. They've done the work, they've got a nice pool. "Do you mind if I leave my truck here for the rest of your life?" You know? People don't tend to want that. Well, one of the guys on his work crew thought, "Hey, what we gotta do is get some boards," and they laid boards down underneath the tire and the boards together gave it some traction and they were able to get out. So we need to lay some boards down to get unstuck and that's what God calls us to do. We can be stuck or we can be trapped. That's the metaphor that Paul uses in our text is that you can be trapped in unbiblical ways of thinking and kept captive and prisoner to lies that you're believing.

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.

*Our Father, we acknowledge our great need of grace. Lord, if You don't help us, we cannot see. We know that we by nature in and of ourselves are blind and stubborn and we need Your grace to open the eyes of our hearts to humble us before You and to help us see the beauty of Christ. So Lord, for Your glory grant us Your grace, grant us Your truth. Send forth Your lovingkindness and Your truth. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

A biblical perspective on power. We want to have a biblical perspective on power. Last time we saw that the Scripture clearly teaches the sovereignty of God. Power belongs to God, Psalm 62:11. Daniel 4:35, we heard from Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon's own lips when he said this, "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing before the Lord." All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing. "He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no

one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" And the Scripture is just so clear. God is on the throne. He is reigning and ruling.

We saw that it's not only in the big things like who's in charge of the kingdoms of the world, it's in the small things. Acts 17:26, we saw that Paul preaching to the Gentile audience there, the Greeks on Mars Hill in Athens, he said that the Lord of heaven and earth having determined the apportioned times and the boundaries of their habitation. God has determined for every single person he's made on the face of the earth, their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation. It's not something that's an accident. Your place that you were born, the moment you were born, to the people to whom you were born, God determined and he's governing every movement of where you go. And again, I know that's offensive to the natural man but it is reality. In him we live and move and have our being. He upholds all things by the word of his power. He governs every molecule in the universe including every molecule in our bodies, every moment of our lives. He gives to life and breath to all creatures, Paul goes on to say in that same passage.

We saw that he determines who is born with disabilities. From Exodus 4, I think it's verse 11, "Who made the deaf, the dumb and the blind? Did not I, the Lord?" God says to Moses. So those who have less power because of their disability have less power because of their disability because of the sovereign choice of God. That's a hard thing to face but until you submit to it and put that in context of not only his sovereignty but the God who is sovereign is good, he's infinitely good. He has a gloriously wonderful purpose in everything he does. He's not a capricious deity. He's not a careless omnipotent lord. He is thoughtful and purposeful in everything he does and he's good to everyone who will open their hearts to him, and that's why all things work together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose. But his purpose isn't just to make you happy or to make me happy, his purpose as you read on in Romans 8:28 to Romans 8:29, his purpose is to make us like Jesus, to conform us to the image of his Son, and that is actually the very best thing that can happen to a human being is to be made more and more like Jesus. It's counter-intuitive but it is absolute fact. Life is in being truly human and to be truly human is to be like Jesus and everything that leads you away from likeness to Christ is robbing you of life. It is robbing you of joy. It is robbing you of peace. It is robbing you of love. And everything that leads you closer to likeness to Jesus is sent by God to fill you with joy, to fill you with peace, to fill you with love.

And to see things from God's perspective is liberating, just like we saw in that passage. We're captive. We have these wrong ways of thinking in our minds, thought patterns, mental constructs, belief structures that we've formulated by lots of input throughout our lives. All of the lies in the world that we've been told directly by people, the lies that we're continually inundated with in the culture, and we filter them, we think we're making sense of it but suddenly slowly, like I said, a fish doesn't know he's wet, we imbibe the thinking of the world and these belief structures, these thought patterns are like castles that are controlling our minds and spiritually denying access to the truth of God into our minds, into our hearts. And so that we're captivated by the lies and so that the goal for this series and really the goal for every interaction when we're talking to one

another, when we're meditating on the word, the goal is to demolish these wrong ways of thinking, to blow them up. As he says, we are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we're doing it by going deep into the real foundational thought structures. I mean, we're aiming at helping us think about how to think about what's going on in the culture. How do we deal with these things? So much going on in the culture but the way we're going to be delivered is by going to the source and the root and pulling out by the root unbiblical and ungodly things.

You know, when you're weeding your garden, you know, if you're gonna do it the old fashioned way which is actually to me is the most rewarding, isn't there something great about it? You know, when a root's really fighting you and you pull it up by the roots, I mean, a root, a weed is fighting you and you're able to get the roots, I mean, I have a sense of just satisfaction when that happens. I think that's mostly righteous. There's a little bit of sinful, I think, because everything's tainted with sin and there's some sense in which I'm enjoying it too much. But that's the way you really weed, you pull it out by the roots and you get rid of it. You don't just snip off the top. So that's why we're going deep into foundational kinds of thought processes.

So what does the Bible say about power? We're not talking so much about all the particulars of how the culture is saying and talking about the surface things, we're going to the root. How does God want us to think about power? What does God say about power? So the sovereignty of God, all power belongs to him, and then the second major point is the responsibility of man. So we're gonna have, I think, five points under this second point. So we really have five points, if you think about it. Really the message is the responsibility of man going forward. We started last week on this with the first responsibility of man. In light of the sovereignty of God, the first thing we were supposed to do we saw last week was to be humble. Be humble. We looked at Job. Job, though he was a righteous man, once God really dealt with him in a way that Job could not understand, Job suffered enormously and he understood it was from the hand of God and clearly the book of Job, you can't read it honestly without concluding that.

It's the Lord who is doing everything in Job. He's letting Satan have and Satan's the one doing the evil but the Lord is letting Satan by pulling back the hedge. And really, if you really read Job carefully, chapter 1 and chapter 2, think about this: who starts the conversation about Job in chapter 1? Satan comes into God's presence and God says to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job?" And then Satan says, "Let me get at him." Job passes a test, loses everything but he praises the Lord. Chapter 2, Satan comes to God again and God again brings up, "Have you considered My servant Job? He maintains his integrity though you urged Me to afflict him." So what is that? God is directing everything. Satan is a puppet on a string. He's an active puppet on a string. He's really willfully doing evil and he will be judged for it, but in the big picture God is sovereignly ordaining everything for his purposes and Job understands that and he does well in chapter 1 and chapter 2, but we talked about how he for 35 chapters he struggles. And what is he doing? He's judging God because it's in the essence of men's sinful nature to have the audacity to judge, to stand in judgment of Almighty God. It's absolute and utter insanity but, listen, it is so basic to you and me in our basic make-up, that it's natural, and

humility, being humble, means coming to recognize that and to recognize that the Lord is God, we are not. He does just as Nebuchadnezzar says, he does as he pleases in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can ward off his hand or say to him, "What have You done?"

So be humble, but today we're gonna look at two more points, Lord willing. The first is, this first point this morning which is really the second point if you want to keep in line of the whole message on the responsibility of man, it was be humble, the second point, so the first point today is be thankful. Be thankful. The Scripture makes such a great emphasis on the foundational importance of thankfulness. It is hard to overestimate the power of thankfulness and it is hard to underestimate the destructive power of grumbling and complaining.

You could say two sub points here. Be thankful, that's our second point, right? Our first point this morning, second point in the series. Be thankful, but first sub point is thankfulness is the distinguishing mark of true faith. It is a distinguishing mark of true faith. It's one of the distinguishing marks of true faith. Believers are known by thankfulness. Now it doesn't mean that it comes natural in the sense that our flesh still resists it, but that the believer over time walking with God will be a person who will grow in thankfulness and you often, the way you experience that growth is you have things that happen that you aren't initially thankful for, that you don't want, that you would not choose, and your initial reaction from the old man is to resist it, to resent it, but the Spirit of God wants to work in our lives to help us be thankful.

There's so many exhortations to thankfulness in the Scriptures. I want you to turn with me, first of all, to 1 Chronicles 29, an Old Testament passage. King David is getting ready, he's getting preparations together for the building of the temple. Remember he's not going to be able to build the temple but he's gathering resources for his son Solomon to be able to build after he dies. And I want you to see, look at the sovereignty of God and the response to the sovereignty of God in this passage. Verses 10 to 16, 1 Chronicles 29:10-16. This is David's prayer. "So David blessed the LORD in the sight of all the assembly," 1 Chronicles 29:10, he blessed the Lord in the sight of all the assembly "and David said, 'Blessed are You, O LORD God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name. But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You.'" "Listen, the reason we're able to give this offering to You is because You gave it to us. Everything comes from You." Verse 15, "For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope." He sees himself rightly. There's humility right there. Verse 16, "O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build You a house for Your holy name, it is from Your hand, and all is Yours." "Everything we have has come from You." That

is the right way to see things. That is reality. Whether you acknowledge it or not, that's reality and the response is to thank God and this is a distinguishing mark or a distinguishing mark of believers and true faith, you see it throughout the Scriptures.

I want you to turn with me to the New Testament and we're gonna walk through some of Paul's epistles and just see how basic thankfulness is. Start with me in Ephesians 5:20. This is in the passage where Paul talks about being filled with the Spirit. In Ephesians 5:18 he says, "Don't be drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit." And what does a Spirit-filled life look like? And he begins to unpack that, "speaking to one," verse 19, Ephesians 5:19, after he said be filled with the Spirit, "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things to God, even the Father; and being subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." The Spirit-filled life is one in which people, we're speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, we're encouraging one another in our faith, we're singing and making melody in our hearts to God, we're praising the Lord. This is the Spirit-filled life and it's always giving thanks. When? Always. For what? All things. Not most things, not only the things I see as good, giving thanks for all things.

Now turn over to the next book of Paul, Philippians 4. A familiar passage on the peace of God which surpasses understanding. How do you get peace? Be anxious for nothing in Ephesians 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication." So the way you get over anxiety is you cast your cares upon the Lord. It's telling you when you're anxious, pray. Specifically pray. Pray and supplicate, that is, make specific petition to God. But look at that next two words, "with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." You're thanking God even as you pray. What are you thanking him for? The answer? Well, no, he hasn't given you the answer yet. You're thanking him for the fact that he's put you in a posture of dependence and the pressure that was leading you toward anxiety, you're thanking him that he's reminding you of who you are and how much you need him. You're thanking him for the difficulty. You're thanking him for the circumstance that has led you to be so desperate that you're crying out to him in prayer. So with thanksgiving you're always making your petitions.

Turn over to Colossians 3:16, the next book right after that. Colossians 3, another familiar verse. This is a real parallel with Ephesians 5:18, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God." The Christian life is characterized by this kind of, it's a life of worship, it's a life in which we try to encourage one another in the things of God, and it's a life that is marked by thanksgiving.

The next passage, turn over to 1 Thessalonians 5:18. Well, verse 16. "Rejoice always," 1 Thessalonians 5:16, I love that, "Rejoice always." Paul said the same thing in Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice," he says there. Here he says it again, "Rejoice always." Christians are supposed to be joyful, rejoicing, but they're not, we're not Pollyanna kind of rejoicing. We don't just pretend that things are good. That's



not the kind, that's not the Christian life. I've heard that from some people, like we're just gonna praise the Lord and just rejoice but there's no content and truth behind it and so it's just like putting a veneer of joy over a heart of misery. That is not Christianity. That's like Walt Disney Christianity. Walt Disney has nothing to do with Christianity, not to say that I don't mind going to Disney World myself but it has nothing to do with the gospel. Sorry, well, anyway, I didn't mean to shoot at Disney actually other than to say that like the Pollyanna movie, it's kind of, well, enough of that.

Okay, the point is, the point is that we have real joy. We have a joy that looks at life as it is realistically. We don't pretend. It's not a call to pretend. That's not the gospel. The gospel is rooted in truth. It is rooted in ultimate reality. So we look at life as it is. We face the misery, we face the difficulty, we face the challenges. We look directly into the face even of death itself and yet we have joy because we also know the reality that other people can't see, that Jesus Christ is reigning and ruling over everything that is happening to us, and by knowing the truth of that, we really are just reacting to things as they really are. The tendency we have is to live as though these ultimate things are not true. We forget them. We see all of the things around us that the world is at times looks like it's going to hell in a handbasket, right? It's such a mess. And we look at that and we fret over that and we become miserable because we forget what's really true.

Thankfulness leads to joy. In fact, that leads us to our second point, second sub point. Be thankful, the distinguishing mark of true faith was our first sub point. Thankfulness is that. The second sub point is the dynamic power of thankfulness, that when you become thankful, it's a turning point. It's a hinge upon which everything changes, everything turns. When you can move from resentment and bitterness to trusting thankfulness, everything changes. It's like suddenly the color comes back in to the screen. You now see it. Or maybe a better image, things come back into focus. You go from being murky and confused to now suddenly you see. Thankfulness is that hinge.

The dynamic power of thankfulness. You see this, I think in a powerful way actually in Romans 1 and you see it here from the vantage point of the opposite taking place. Romans 1:18-32 is a picture of the degradation that sin brings and the power, the ongoing power of sin to destroy. This is the familiar passage where it talks about unbelief in the heart that then gets worse and worse and worse, and a key verb in the passage is repeated three times in verse 24, verse 26, and verse 28, and it is "God gave them over." Because they would not worship God and honor him as God and give thanks, from verse 21. Verse 24, "God gave them over to the lust of their hearts, to impurity so that their bodies would be dishonored among them, for they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever." You see, what happened was when they would not worship God, you have to worship something. We're made to worship. If you won't worship the true God, you will worship something and this is everyone worships something. This is why people, they worship athletes. They worship musicians. They worship movie stars. Why do they get so carried away with, you know, these people, you know, are just like us. I had a friend in high school who used to say they put on their pants one leg at a time just like I do, you know, which is true, right? Really that's true. Every human being is a human being but why do people worship other

people? Because you must worship and if you won't worship Jesus Christ, you'll worship someone, you'll worship something. So they won't worship God so they exchange the truth of God for a lie and they worship something in the creation, and because of that, that's why God gave them over to lusts, so that they're now consumed with sexual immorality. But it doesn't stop there. Sin does not stop. It is a devouring power.

Verse 26, he gave them over a second time to degrading passions, "for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error." Move from sensuality and increased just lustfulness, heterosexual sin now to homosexual desires. This is talking about the cultural movement of depravity. You can experience it in a microcosmic way in your own life but this is talking about the big picture of how this operates.

Well, when that goes the next step in verse 28, God gave them over, "just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper," and essentially what they end up doing as you read through verses 28 to 31 is they call evil good and good evil, and they heartily approve of evil and they reject good. You see this in American society, don't you? That's what's happened in the last 50 or 60 years. We've seen and this is one thing you can praise God for even as you watch it happen, and we pray that the Lord will stop it, that he will bring about spiritual awakening and revival. That's appropriate, that's right to pray for the souls of men and the glory of God. But if he chooses not to, we can praise him for the perfection of his word and we can praise him for the revealing of his wrath. "You, O Lord, are worthy of worship. Look at You, people have spurned You and turned away from You and You are visiting their iniquities upon them just as You said You would and Your name is to be praised. But Lord, we ask You, send forth Your light and Your truth. Capture souls for Christ. Jesus is worthy of more worship so bring people to salvation."

So we are to keep praying like that but even in it, we keep praising God as we see things as they are biblically, but you know what the turning point was in verse 21 and it was repeated in verse 25 which we looked at. Verse 21 of Romans 1, "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." The turning point was when they would not honor God, glorify God as God and give thanks to him, and when you will not do that, you will descend into darkness at varying degrees and varying ways, just depending on what's going on around you, what kind of opportunities you have and the common grace of God.

So the turning point for us, for the believer who has come to know Jesus Christ, the turning point is when we honor God as God and give thanks in whatever circumstance we find ourselves. You know, when you put your past in its place like Viars talks about, you come to understand that even horrible wicked things that God hates because God hates evil and the reality is the Bible says that this God who is sovereign, who allows evil to happen and does it somehow for his glory and our good, everything that happens he's

ordaining, he's foreordaining, he's sovereign and yet at the same time he hates the evil and he comes to the aid of those who are oppressed and misused if they will humble themselves and receive his help.

So he hates the evil. You know, he keeps our tears in a bottle. Every man that's ever lived, every woman that's ever lived is going to have to stand before God and answer for everything they've done in the body. Every idle word. God has written it all down. He's going to take care of it. "Vengeance is Mine. I will repay says the Lord." And so we rest in that. Paul's gonna say that in Romans 12. You know, "Vengeance is Mine. I'll repay. Don't return evil for evil." The reason you don't is because God will deal with that. God will take care of their evil. Leave that to God. He will do a much better job of dealing with them than you or I ever could.

You think about the things that have happened in our lives and some of you have been through some really awful experiences that are heart-breaking and incredibly painful, that are hard to even talk about. Some of you may not have talked to anybody about some of the things you've been through and the Bible says that God does not approve evil, he does not tempt men to evil, he hates evil, yet somehow he always can bring good out of whatever evil happens and he actually had a purpose in allowing it before it even happened somehow to bring glory to his name and good to your soul. Our God is so infinitely wise. Just like Joseph said, "You meant it for evil," Genesis 50:20. He's talking to his brothers who hated him. They were filled with bitter envy, murderous jealousy. They wanted to kill him, remember? They wanted to tear him apart and then go back and tell their dad, "He was torn apart by wild animals." What murderous rage. What incredible, what a dishonor to their dad, even. Their hearts were filled with evil. They were determined to kill him. God didn't let that happen, though. He let them sell him into slavery and they thought they would never see him again and they thought to themselves, "What'll become of your dreams now?" And God laughed. Evil does all it can do and yet the purpose of God continues forward and God used their murderous rage to send Joseph to Egypt to be a slave for a while in Potiphar's house to continue his on-the-job training so that he would one day be ready for the position that God was going to put him in. Then he was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, again an abuse of people in power abusing and misusing him. Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. When Joseph resisted because of his purity, she then yelled out and accused him of doing what she had done. God let it happen. He was put in the dungeon, the king's dungeon. Potiphar, his master, enraged because he believed his wife. I wonder how much he really believed her but he believed her enough to do what he did and Joseph spends years in the dungeon. We know that because, remember, he has some guys that come down in the dungeon have dreams, the cupbearer and the baker for Pharaoh and he interprets the dreams. One of them is gonna die, one of them is gonna live, and when the one's gonna live he says, "Hey, remember me when you get back to Pharaoh. I've been here, I'm unjustly here." You read in the story for the first time and it's like, "Okay, Joseph's gonna get out." And then these words at the end of that chapter, so I think it was the cupbearer that was restored to his position, the cupbearer is restored to his position but he forgot Joseph. Two years pass. It wasn't time.

You see, God had a reason to allow that cupbearer to forget Joseph. God had a reason for allowing his brothers to have murderous rage and envy and to try to destroy him. God had a reason for allowing Potiphar's wife to try to seduce him and then to abuse him in her anger over being rejected to try to give it to him by accusing him of something that he could've been killed for. But God didn't allow that to happen. They wanted to kill him before, God didn't allow that to happen. Potiphar's wife wanted him killed, God didn't allow that to happen. Only what he willed to happen happened and all throughout that story the beautiful refrain that you will find again and again when he's a slave in Potiphar's house and when he's in the dungeon, these words, "The Lord was with him." The Lord was with him as a slave. The Lord was with him in the dungeon. The Lord was working out a perfect plan and then when the time was right the king has a dream, Pharaoh has a dream and now that cupbearer remembers. "Oh yeah, I remember something about guys who can interpret dreams. There's this one guy in jail. I gotta tell you about him." The exact moment that the Lord wanted Joseph to be moved into position was the moment it happened. No accidents. Not only every event happening, the timing is perfect.

So now that means that for you and me that's also true, even for horrible, wicked things that have happened in our past. I mean, even for things that are unspeakable, in a sense, somehow God, he's true. He allows evil to happen so that he can show his glory to you and if you can embrace and trust him for whatever you've been through, if you can come to the point of not resenting and you can come to the point of saying, "Lord, thank You that even though I'm not thanking You for the evil that was done, I'm thanking You for the murderous rage." Joseph didn't thank God for the murderous rage of his brothers. "Thank You that You were working, that whatever they meant for evil, You meant for good, that everything they did You somehow meant for good for me." And when you make that movement from resentment to thankfulness, everything changes. Now suddenly you're able to see, you've gone from resenting and resisting God to worshiping God. Thankfulness is the essence of worship. "Lord, You have done it. You have a purpose. I don't know what it is yet." And how Joseph had to be doing that when he was a slave, when he was in the dungeon. We don't get a window into all of his thoughts. I'm sure he wasn't every day was perfect. No, I'm sure he had times of wrestling and doubt and discouragement because that's the way of being a human being in a fallen world, even one who has a new heart.

But if you'll thank him and you'll trust him, that's the turning point. Even your own sins that have happened. You know, we're guilty of our sin. We've done evil. Some of us have done very evil things and you may have done things that you've never shared with another brother or sister in Christ. It's not that you need to go around, you know, broadcasting our past sins. That's not what I'm, what we're, but listen, even the things that you've done, God still, you need to repent and confess but even the evil God can bring good out of. The evil things that you think there can be no good come out of, God's word is true. In a group as big as our church, some of you have had abortions or you were with someone and you may have encouraged or allowed abortion as a man, and you think back on that and your heart is grieved and you have trouble even hearing people talk about that

because of the guilt in your heart. Listen, you come to Christ. Jesus forgives everything. Jesus died for everything and somehow even that scar in your soul God meant for good.

Now listen, like I said, God doesn't tempt us to evil. We can't blame him for what we did. No, that's not it at all. We're responsible 100%. But the Lord had a purpose in allowing you to be in a circumstance where you had that choice. He had a purpose in allowing you to be around people who would encourage you in that choice. He had a purpose in allowing you to carry out that wicked choice and it doesn't mean that you still didn't sin and you need to hate your sin, yes, but receive the full forgiveness of God and now understand that even that scar somehow God allowing that to happen he had a good purpose for. He wants that to be an area and this is essentially it, I think he allows terrible things to happen to us and us even in our own experience to have done terrible things to come to Christ with a measure of brokenness. It's like it hollows out the soul. You've been misused, you've been mistreated, you've been abandoned, maybe you've been the victim of divorce where you really did everything you could best you could to build your marriage and your spouse left you and abandoned you, and you've been wounded and hurt and, in a sense, what you have to come to understand is God sovereignly allowed that. Yes, it's evil. Yes, it's wrong. But he allowed it for somehow to bring glory out of it and it comes when you understand that what he does, the pain is like hollowing out your heart so that he can fill deeper deeper crevices of your heart with grace and you come to understand that Jesus, like Corrie ten Boom says, no matter how deep the pit in which you find yourself. I love this. Corrie ten Boom was in the Nazi concentration camp as a Christian who helped Jews escape the peril of death in the Nazi, you know, being caught by the Nazis. She was, "A Hiding Place" was the book about her life and she experienced the horror of losing her father and her sister in the concentration camps. She lived years in the concentration camps seeing the evil of Nazi Germany and the Final Solution, and she said this, "No matter how deep the pit you find yourself in, Jesus is deeper still." There's something about our Savior that the sweetness of who he is comes to us in need. The more broken we are, the more ready we are to receive of his fullness. This is his way in a fallen world. Brokenness is a part of life and God is allowing every time something is broken, God is allowing that with a view toward the beauty of how Jesus can restore it.

So freedom comes when we become thankful, when we trust God on the front end and we say, "Lord, I know there's a reason that You've allowed this. I know You're good and I'm going to praise You. I'm going to choose to praise You. I'm going to see that everything comes from Your hand and whatever they meant for evil, You have meant for good and I will see, in due time, even if it's not until heaven, I will see." And the fact is most of us begin to see in this life, we can begin to see the beauty of what God has done because when you start thanking him, you start having eyes to see and over time you start seeing the beauty of how he's giving you more of Christ. Like Corrie ten Boom said, I wouldn't trade anything because no matter how deep the pit you're in, Jesus is deeper still. But I think when we get to heaven we're going to be blown away as we really see what God has done and we're going to, you know, he says he wipes away every tear from our eyes. I think he wipes away every tear from our eyes partly because we will be in the presence of Christ, we will now be aware in a deeper and more amazing way that everything he did was good and right and we will mourn in that moment over our

accusing hearts. How could we have doubted him? Had he not proved his love on the cross? Has he not shown us that he's given us everything, every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ? God did not withhold his own Son but delivered him up for us all. And if that's the case, we can know that he's freely giving us all things. Romans 8:32, if God did not spare his Son, his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not together with him freely give us all things? Paul's argument is from the greater to the lesser, if God didn't withhold Jesus as precious as he is to the Father, if he would give Jesus for us, the Father would give Jesus for us experiencing the agony of the cross, dying in our place under the Father's righteous wrath, God would put his Son to death to pay for the sins of everyone who would ever believe, if God would not withhold his Son, how can you doubt that he's not in this moment, no matter what your moment is, he is not in this moment freely giving you all things. He is blessing you if you're in Christ. No matter what happens, his hands are open blessing you and blessing me. We can't see it. That's why we need each other to help one another. We look at our circumstances, we look at our pain, we look at our past, and we don't understand but look at the cross. Look at whatever you're looking at in your life in the shadow of the cross and thank him. Trust him. Give him the praise that he's worthy of not only for what he did on the cross but give him the praise for what his worthiness in what he's doing right now. "What You're doing right now is good, Lord."

So whatever it is you fear, whatever comes about tomorrow or in three months or in six months or in 10 years, whatever he brings, may God help you and me to in that moment to be reminded in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Always giving thanks for all things in the name of Christ. Give him the praise that he's due and when the heart turns to praise like that, communion with God is reestablished in a deeper way and joy comes. That's where the joy comes. It's not a joy that ignores reality and pretends that things are good. It's a joy that faces reality and understands, understands that things are truly good. That is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. No matter what Satan brings, no matter what the world brings, our faith overcomes. Our faith is trust in him. May God make us people who are mighty in faith, grateful and joyful.

Let's pray.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for Your amazing love, Your amazing unfathomable ways. Your ways are not our ways, Your thoughts are not our thoughts. Lord, Your ways and Your thoughts are so much more gloriously wonderful than our ways and our thoughts. When we get glimpses of it, Lord, it's too much for us. We can't process how good You are, how wise You are, how loving You are, how kind You are, and how willing You are to work through the most surprising things that evil that is real in this world and yet You whatever Satan, whatever blows Satan strikes is exactly the blow that You ordained for Your glory and our good. We pray for those that are really struggling, Lord, that have some things in their lives that are areas of brokenness, bitterness, confusion, despair. We pray for freedom. We pray that they would know the joy that if the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed, that the truth makes you free, and the truth is that God, our God reigns and our God is good. Lord, make us a people who are not bound up in*

*the lies of this world. Set us free. Make us joyful by making us thankful and may our joy be like the joy Jesus had for the joy that lay before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame. Make us faithful in following our Savior's example. For His glory, we pray in His name. Amen.*