

Renewing Your Mind: Thinking Biblically, Part 2

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Renewing Your Mind

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Good evening. We're going to go ahead and get started. I think it's about time and so glad that you're here to join us tonight on Wednesday evening. We're in our second week in "Renewing Your Mind: Thinking Biblically." We're trying to apply some of the things we've been talking about on Sunday to our practical everyday lives and the issues that are facing us in the culture and in this last, particularly this last year or two in America, and just trying to take the Bible and see how does it speak to the issues that are confronting us so that we can think biblically. So let's go to the Lord in prayer and we will commit this time to him.

Father, we thank You for Your grace and for Your mercy in Christ Jesus. We thank You that You are a God who, Lord, who abounds in lovingkindness, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, keeping lovingkindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin. You by no means leave the guilty unpunished but, Lord, You are a God who shows mercy to those who humble themselves and we come tonight humbling ourselves under Your mighty hand that You might bless us and lift us up to walk in Your truth, to walk in Your joy, to not be conformed to the world but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. We pray that You would use this time for Your purpose in each of our hearts, in each of our lives that Christ might be exalted. We pray in His name. Amen.

Okay, so that verse really is Romans 12:2 is the verse from which the title of this series comes, renewing your mind, where Paul says, "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed." Resist the conforming pressure of the world by being transformed by the renewing of your mind. And I want to start in Colossians 2. You need to turn there, we're going to be there a little bit here at the beginning and then we'll move around in our Bibles. We've been here on Sundays the last few weeks and I just want to come back to the verse that ties in so well with our focus on renewing your mind, and that is Colossians 2:8 where the Apostle Paul says in Colossians 2:8, "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. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority."

So in verse 8, not being captive. Really Paul is saying the same thing he's talking about in Romans 12. He's telling the Colossians in the same way, "Don't be conformed to this world. Don't be captivated by worldly thinking," because he goes on to say you're taken captive by philosophy, empty deception, which comes from the tradition of men, the elementary principles of the world rather than according to Christ. So we want to root out philosophy and empty deception and we talked about how this is basically, Satan's strategy is to mingle and mix the melding of worldly thought forms, concepts, with the gospel. That's the way he operates. That's his strategy, to bring in unbiblical concepts, ungodly ways of thinking, and to bring them into the church because there is kind of ring of truth about them because these are the elementary principles of the world. They're not godly, they're not true ultimately, but they are so much a part of the worldly system, the system of this world, the way of thinking of this world, and they resonate with sin, indwelling sin in our hearts. So there's a sense in which when we see these things that strike a chord in our souls, and so it's very easy to bring these in, blend these in with the gospel, and so what we want to do is root these out and that is what Paul is calling us to when he says, "rather than according to Christ." What we need to do is keep our focus on Christ, who he is, what he has done, and what that should mean for us.

But these worldly truths. So these worldly concepts, elementary principles that seem true. We've talked about some already. Last week we talked about the worldly concept, it's not your fault, that is, that you're not responsible for your failure, you're not responsible for your sin, you're not responsible for your lot in life. It's somebody else's fault. And we saw how that's really goes all the way back to the garden of Eden, that Adam and Eve were blame-shifting and that's a part of the fabric of the human soul, the willingness to blame-shift. We saw that last time, so today I want to talk about another one of these elementary principles of the world and that is your ethnicity is your identity. Your ethnicity is your identity. This is one that is, you know, another temptation that has a ring about it because we have such a connection with our family, such a connection with our culture. And many of those things are good but for a Christian your ethnicity is not your identity. We're going to see this clearly in the New Testament but it is something that is very appealing to think that your ethnicity is your identity.

I'm glad that doesn't happen on Sundays. On the video they can't hear it at all because I checked that out to see. Praise God they can't hear it but it sure is loud for us on Wednesday nights. Anyway, must be an evening reality here.

But your ethnicity is your identity, that is, the defining characteristic that makes you who you are is your ethnic background. From time to time throughout history this has been the way people think and sometimes they will think that about other people, right, that's kind of a racist mindset, what we would call racism where you prejudge someone based on their ethnic background. So you can take that as your own identity or you can judge others based on their ethnic background and either way it's accepting a worldly premise that has nothing to do with the gospel.

So your ethnicity is your identity. That is, your Asian ethnicity, your European ethnicity, your African ethnicity, your Latin ethnicity, that's what defines you and what we're going

to see is the New Testament makes it clear that is not the way we are to think, and so what we have to do if we're going to be not conformed to this world but be transformed, we have to take out unbiblical ideas out of our thinking and remove them, repent and resist them and be transformed by the word of God renewing the way we think about ourselves. So I want us to look at this.

Now, first of all, it's not to say that your ethnicity is not a part of your identity. It is a part of your identity. God in his infinite wisdom has made us all distinct and unique. This goes down to our individuality but also individual ethnicities. We see this in Revelation 7:9-12 when John sees a multitude gathered around the throne of God worshiping the Lamb from every tribe and tongue and kindred. He can see as he looks at it, that this multitude of worshipers around the throne of Christ are of different backgrounds, different tongues, different ethnicities. And so we're going to retain that even into the new heavens and the new earth, and so it is something that is a part of who we are and it's not to be rejected at all but the problem is when we take something that's valuable and we treat it with an inordinate focus. This is one of the real tricks of the devil, is to take good things and to make you inordinately consumed with that, that is, out of order. That you put it not where it should be in the hierarchy of importance, he tries to get you to take it above where it should be and this becomes idolatry because we end up not putting God where he needs to be, above everything else when we have inordinate affections.

We talk about this some when we think about just practical application of sanctification principles that, you know, sometimes we have desires for ungodly things. Those are easy to recognize. But other times we want good things too much and when you want a good thing too much, that's idolatry that leads to all kinds of defeat and dishonoring Christ. So that's what's happening here with ethnicity in the culture and we need to be aware of this. Our ethnicity is not fundamentally our identity. It's a part in its place, but when we look at the New Testament, what we're going to see in the New Testament makes it really powerfully clear that the identity for one who says they love Jesus, your identity is Christ and that is so far above everything else as if to make everything else of no value relatively speaking. Now that doesn't mean it's of no value, you understand that, but relatively speaking Christ is so far in preeminence for the Christian that that is our identity.

So let's look at this together. First of all, we're in Colossians, I wanted you to see this in Colossians, this idea that these things have a ring of truth about them. I mentioned when we talked about Colossians 2 on the last two Sundays and a little bit last week, that the Colossian heresy from what we can tell in reading the book of Colossians blended some Judaizing principles, that is, some legalistic Jewish thought along with some mysticism, some pagan mysticism apparently, and it brings those things in with the gospel and it has a ring of truth. And look what Paul says when you look at verse 20 of chapter 2, well, verse 16 of chapter 2 he said, "Therefore no one is to act," this is after he explains what Christ has done for us, who Christ is, what he's done, he says in verse 16 of Colossians 2, "Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day." He says so what was happening is part of the heretic's strategy, part of the false teachers, remember these aren't people wearing signs

saying, "I'm a heretic." They are people teaching in the church at Colossae and they're talking about Jesus but they're also doing things that are out of order with the gospel and Paul says, "Look, when they're telling you that, you know, you should not eat this food, not drink this, you should respect all the festivals, keep the new moon, keep the Sabbath day the way that we did under the old covenant, when they're telling you these things, these things are a shadow. And he goes on in verse 18, "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize." Here the idea is, "They're plundering you again." And what are they doing? "By delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God." Then he says in verse 20, "If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!'" So he says, "Look, if you've died to the elementary principles of the world, why are you submitting to these things?" That's the question he's asking and he makes a parenthetical comment, verse 22, this do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, these instructions that you're getting, he says, "(which all refer to things destined to perish with use) in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men." Look what he says in verse 23, "These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom." Paul is acknowledging the appearance of wisdom in the false teaching. The teaching that you are receiving appears to be wise. It strikes a chord in your heart and rings in some way to be true but you must test everything by the word of God. You can't trust your heart, he's essentially saying, but he's acknowledging that there is an appeal of the false teaching. Look, these are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

There is an appeal to all the false teachings that we're going to talk about, even this idea of ethnicity being your identity. There is an appeal of that. It strikes a chord. It seems to have a sense of worldly wisdom. It captivates your heart. It can but Paul says it doesn't matter that it appears to have worldly wisdom because what is the fruit of it? You can judge it by its fruit. It has no value against fleshly indulgence. The false teaching you're receiving is not making you holy. You find it titillating and interesting, he might be saying to them, but it's not making you like Christ because it's not according to Christ. It's not glorying in Christ, in who he is and what he's done. It's glorying in the things of this world that are passing away.

So having said that, now even Paul has something to say about this, how we see each other related to our ethnicity. In chapter 3 he's calling on the Colossian believers now to live out the reality of who Christ is for them by putting off their old man and putting on their new man. He says in verse 8, "But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him." This the gospel way of sanctification is that as a Christian who's come to know Jesus Christ, you are now in union with him. To be a believer is to be baptized into Christ

spiritually, united to him. His death is your death. His resurrection is your resurrection. And so to live a holy life, what we do is the same way we receive Christ Jesus we also walk in him, that is, we trust in who we are in Christ to help us overcome sin.

So we can lay aside anger and wrath and malice and slander and abusive speech and the old self with its evil practices because of who Christ is. We know we don't have to live that way. His death is my death and you have to actually practically do that in your Christian life. This is where the power comes from. When you're tempted to sin, to cry out to God and remember who you are in Christ. I don't have to do this. I feel like I want to do this. This feels like home to me, this sin, whatever the besetting sin or the sin you're struggling with. It can feel like home but lay it aside, it's not a part of who you are in Christ and his death is your death and it's by faith that you believe that you don't have to sin, that it's no longer your master, you've been set free. And it's by faith that not only you believe that you don't have to sin but that you can walk in righteousness and put on the new man because Christ lives in you and you are in Christ and he will give you grace now to walk in holiness. One of the things that I like to remind myself, I think of it this way, is I'll say, "Lord Jesus, I'm feeling this desire to respond in anger, to fret and worry, to think a lustful thought, to be fearful, whatever it is, and Lord, I know that who I am in You, this is not who I am. I don't have to do this and, in fact, when You were here, You never struggled with these things and You're my righteousness. This isn't a problem for You so I'm going to walk in trust on who You are and that's who I am now in You." Do you see that? That's putting off and putting on. This is the glorious way of righteousness and his power is the same way. You're saved by faith from the penalty of sin and you're saved by faith from the power of sin.

Now he says this renewal, verse 10, you "put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him." How are you to see yourself? Look what he says in verse 11, "a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all." Then he says, "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion." So he's saying the renewal that you have entered into in Christ. In fact, the Greek, if you have the New American Standard does a good job of, like, putting in italics words that are added to the text. Now they're added to the text to help you make sense of it and it's fine to, you know, they're trying but the fact that they italicize it I really appreciate. They're letting you know it's not in the original and when you look at that if you have the NASB, if you look at the pew Bible that's in front of you in one of the pews, you will see that "a renewal" is in italics so it literally says, "created in Him in which there is no Greek and Jew." Actually the word distinction "between" isn't there either. Literally it says, "created in which there is no Greek and Jew, no circumcised and uncircumcised, no barbarian, no Scythian, no slave, no freeman, but Christ is all, and in all." In Christ there is no Jew or Greek. In Christ there is no slave or free. In Christ there is no circumcised or uncircumcised.

You see, your ethnicity does not define you, your identity. Christ is your identity. In fact, this is really powerful for first century believers. When he says, "no barbarian or Scythian," he's using words which conjured up in the minds of his readers those for

whom they found repugnant naturally, and with some reason because the barbarians and the Scythians were people who were well-known to be, you know, plunderers themselves. In fact, the Scythians even more than the barbarians. In fact, the word "barbaros" is actually the Greek word here, it means "a stammering, stuttering, unintelligible speech; one who speaks unintelligible sounds." It's talking about foreign speakers. They don't speak Greek. And the Scythian was a nomadic Indo-European group of people from what would now be Iran and Central Asia who were skilled horsemen, excelled in barbaric methods. They were outstanding warriors and when the Scythians came, everybody was terrorized. So Paul says, "Listen, in Christ all of these former distinctions." Now the force of this is in Christ all these former distinctions are obliterated because Christ is all and in all. The fact that Jesus is in your brother or sister is all that matters. That's what he's saying.

Let's look at Galatians. Turn back past Philippians and Ephesians to Galatians 3. One of the beautiful truths of the New Testament is that we who were Gentiles, most all of us are Gentiles in this church. I think we have maybe one or two people with some Jewish lineage. But the reality of the New Testament teaches us that we are now all children of Abraham because the children, the true children of Abraham are those who have the faith of Abraham and these were the ones that God was always looking ahead to when he promised Abraham that he would bless his seed, that is Christ and all who are in Christ.

Galatians 3:26 says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise." Similar to what we read earlier, no Jew, no Greek, no slave, no free. He adds no male, no female. Now here again like I pointed out, ethnicity isn't ultimately obliterated. We're going to see it around the throne of God in heaven. What he's saying is relatively speaking it is so far below your identity in Christ that it seems as of no worth. Relatively speaking.

This is kind of like what Jesus said when he said, "Unless you hate your father, your mother, your sister, your brother, you are not worthy to be My disciple." Remember when Jesus said that? "Deny yourself, take up your cross, follow Me, and if any man loves his father or sister more than Me is not worthy to be My disciple." Now and he uses the word "you must hate them." Now let's interpret that correctly biblically. Does God tell you to hate your father and your mother? No. We know that. It's the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and your mother." In fact, we're told that even if our parents are unbelievers according to 1 Timothy 5, if we don't care for our own, our family, we're worse than unbelievers. We're supposed to care for our earthly family and take care of them and we are to honor our father and mother. We're to love, husbands are to love your wives as Christ loved the church. So how could Jesus say, "Unless you hate your spouse, you're not worthy to be My disciple"? It's a relative thing. He's basically saying, "You must, you are to love your spouse, you're to love your parents, but you are to love Jesus with such an intense and focused and exalted love that in comparison your love for others seems as hate." That's our ethnic identity as well. It's not that it's totally unimportant. No,

it's not totally unimportant. It's something that God chose to make for us to delight in his creativity just like all the differences we see in the world that are a picture of his marvelous and beautiful artistry. And we are to celebrate those things but we must resist the temptation that we see in the world to make ethnicity inordinately important. It should be in the same way that we just said about loving or hating relatively speaking, loving Christ so much more that our love for our family seems like hate. Loving Christ so much more that our valuing of our ethnicity seems like hate and we see this right here in the New Testament just being so clear.

Another place to look at this, turn back to Philippians, back toward Colossians. You got Ephesians and Philippians and chapter 3 and just see how Paul thought about his ethnicity. Philippians 3:3, he says, "for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh." He's talking about false teachers here in chapter 3, verse 2, "beware of the evil workers, the false circumcision." They are those Judaizers who were troubling the Philippian church, false teachers there, and he says, "Look, we who believe, we are the true circumcision. We have been circumcised in our hearts, those of us who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus put no confidence in the flesh." And then he says, look what he says in verse 4, "although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh." Now he does this because the Judaizers are coming wearing their badge of ethnic superiority. They're Jewish believers and they're coming trying to infiltrate the Philippian church and to lead the Philippians astray from the purity of the gospel, and Paul is basically saying, "Listen, if they want to list their ethnic and religious qualifications, I'm happy to compare mine with them." And look what he says, "although I myself," verse 4, "might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more." This is true of Paul, "circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel," he's a Jew, "of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews," he's not just a Hebrew, he's a Hebrew of Hebrews, "as to the Law, a Pharisee." That is a word that those first century Christians did not have a negative view of like we do. Pharisee meant a truly religiously zealous exemplary person.

Now as they read in the gospels and they see the sect of the Pharisees miss Christ by and large, only a few of them were saved, Paul, Nicodemus, but he's basically saying, "Look at, let's talk about my ethnicity. I am a Jew, the nation of Israel, the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless." Look what he says next, "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ." Whatever I would have valued about my ethnicity, I have counted it as worthless compared to Christ. Verse 8, "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish," refuse, "so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own but that which is through faith in Christ." So Paul who had every reason to glory in his ethnicity chose not to. In fact, what was gain to him he realized was actually loss because that could become, why was it loss? It could become a barrier to keep him from Christ and there was a sense in which he said, "Get that away from me! I want Christ."

I mentioned Luke 14:26. Look what Jesus said in Matthew 10:32. He's talking about the cost of discipleship in this passage. It says in verse 32 of Matthew 10, "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven." And look what he says next and think about this in relationship to family relationship and ethnicity. "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." Isn't it amazing how Jesus had such a way of shocking us because what did he come to do? He came to make peace. We read on Sunday Ephesians 2:14, he himself is our peace. He's made the two into one. He's broken down the dividing wall of hostility. What did Isaiah say was his name? "You shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." But here he says, "I did not come to bring peace. Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it." To follow Jesus for many will mean conflict in a family, rejection, war, he's saying. It will be so that a spiritual war is going on in your family and he's saying, "Choose this day whom you will serve. Whom will you identify with? Will you deny Christ and identify with your family or will you deny your family and identify with Christ?" And if that's true of your family, how much more of your ethnic group which is just a larger version of your family?

These are hard words and the reality is that we see when we pass from death to life, when we become a believer, when God circumcises our heart, when he makes us new, gives us new life, Jesus becomes everything to us, then we are now light in the midst of darkness and men who are evil hate the light and love the darkness and Jesus is saying, "Listen, how much do you love Me?"

One other passage, 1 Peter 2. This is where Peter talks about our being living stones in the spiritual temple, a passage we've looked at a number of times as we've been talking about Ezra/Nehemiah and building the temple and that kind of thing, that the spiritual temple is the church. After he talks about that in verses 1 to 8, he says in verse 9, now he's speaking to people, let's just stop for a moment. Go back to chapter 1, verse 1, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." He's talking to peoples from these five different Roman provinces. Roman provinces, Rome in governing the nations they conquered tended to try to govern them around people groups, ethnicities, and so that basically these were ethnic groupings of people. And so Peter's writing to five different ethnic groups in these different areas or even more a blending of different ethnicities and those are areas where you had a lot of different migration from other places as well, but he's talking to all kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds including Jews who were there. Many of the Jews had been

dispersed there through persecution by Rome, and so now those Christian Jews, he's writing to believers, though, to Christians but from different backgrounds and he says to them in verse 9, chapter 2, verse 9, "But you," you plural, all of you I'm writing to, all of you believers from all these different ethnic backgrounds, "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." He's saying what defines you is not whether you're from Pontus or Galatia or Cappadocia or Asia or Rome or Ephesus or Colossae, what defines you is who you are in Christ.

You are a chosen race. You are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. You belong to God so that you can proclaim his excellencies. Verse 10, "for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." He's basically saying, "Listen, once you were not, as it were, an ethnicity but now you are. You have become a people group and this people group is the real people group that you are. No matter where you started.

He keeps helping them work this out. He says in verse 11, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul." He's basically, I love this, aliens and strangers. Because you are now the people of God and you're a part of that people group, you are now aliens and strangers in the world. I've lived here all my life, somebody in Cappadocia might be saying. "I was born and raised here in Cappadocia. My father was born and raised in Cappadocia. My grandfather was born and raised in Cappadocia," however long you want to go back. We go back to the original Mayflower guys that come over the Mediterranean Sea and settled in Cappadocia.

Thank you, Sally.

And Peter says, "Relatively speaking, that is irrelevant. You now have become the people of God. That's who you are. That's what defines your eternal destiny and your fundamental identity. So live now because that's who you are, you're going home. Your place is not Cappadocia, it is the new heavens and the new earth worshipping Jesus forever. That's who you are. How could anything else matter compared to that? So live as strangers and aliens who are merely passing through the world. You're like a stranger who's not putting down roots and counting on all of the earthly connections. No, you're passing through with other brothers and sisters, a part of your people, and you're heading home." This is how you understand that even the fleshly lusts that war against your soul, you can lay them aside because Christ is who you are.

And he continues talking, "Listen, you need to submit yourself," verse 13, "to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right." You see again the New Testament seems to be saying keep a focus on Christ and who you are in Christ and don't be so preoccupied with this world. Do you see the tone of that every page throughout the New Testament? So people who are telling you differently are bringing in worldly thinking into the gospel. It doesn't mean that there's never any importance on

that. Like I said, ethnicity is important and there are things that we ought to be earthly good for the glory of God, but we must keep Christ so far preeminent and we must see ourselves as he says, we are to see ourselves which is really just seeing ourselves as we truly are.

Verse 16, he says, "Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God." Whatever freedom you have, don't use it as a covering for evil but realize that whatever freedom you have is so that you can be a slave of Christ. Live as a slave of Jesus. That's true freedom and that brings glory to your Savior.

But look at verse 17, "Honor all people, love the brotherhood." Now how do you see your ethnicity versus your identity? You honor all people, including those of your ethnic group, including those of your family, but you love the brotherhood. He goes on to show this difference, "fear God, honor the king." Do you see that? "Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king." You're to honor all people. You're to honor the king but you are to have a greater love for the brotherhood, believers. You're to honor the king but you are not to fear the king, you are to fear God. You see, he's elevating who you are, you belong to God. Fear God, honor the king. He's saying honor all men, love your brothers and sisters in Christ. That is to transcend by far even our earthly family relationships. You're at home when you're with your brothers and sisters in Christ. That doesn't mean, we are to care for them. Like I said earlier, we are to honor our parents even if they're unbelievers, we're to care for them until they die and to preach the gospel to them, and we're to love our children and we're to love our families, we're to love people, extended family. Yes, that's right but comparatively we are to love the brotherhood far above. It doesn't mean, it doesn't take this down, it means to take this up. God would say it's evil not to honor your parents and care for them. Jesus, remember, chastises the Pharisees for that. You had these rules about tithing your spices and yet you neglect the weightier matters of the law. He's talking about caring for your parents.

This means that we are, this is we're to labor at seeing ourselves the way God says we're to see ourselves. How are you doing with that? Are you loving the brotherhood while you honor all men? Are you fearing God while you honor the king? I mean, let's get practical. Everything in your life, you're to think of yourself first as in Christ. That's the first thought. That's the first priority, who you are in Christ, and everyone else who is in Christ, truly in Christ is your brother, your sister, your family. So it's to apply in every area of life. When you see things that happen in the world, we're to have compassion for all men. We're to honor all men but we should be most concerned about the Christians in the news story we're looking at. When we see something that's happening across the world, we should have compassion when we see tragedies striking. You know, an earthquake somewhere, but there ought to be a sense in which we're even in those moments praying, "Lord, for my brothers and sisters in Jamaica. For my brothers and sisters in China. For my brothers and sisters in South America. Lord, I want to lift them up to You. They're the ones that I'm concerned about and everyone You might call to Yourself in this situation."

How do you think of yourself? Do you think of yourself as a part of the people of God first? When you think of yourself in relation to the political system? Think about this. Now when you vote, do you vote with your ethnic interest first? Is that your priority? Do you vote with advancing your ethnic interest, your perceived ethnic interest, and the reality is that so often it's just our perception. We don't know. It seems like you're kind of rolling the dice when it comes to politics anyway, doesn't it? You think your candidate wins, you think it's going to be great and later you're like, "Well, that wasn't so great." You think it's going to be terrible when the opponent wins and it's not so bad. Sometimes you think, "Hey, there's some good stuff," or whatever, right? But the point is think about when you vote, are you thinking as first about your ethnic relationship or are you thinking as a Christian, a follower of Jesus? Are you trying to please Christ in the voting booth? I'm not giving you the answer for what that looks like but I'm asking are you asking that question? And if you are, you're asking the right question. "Lord Jesus, what do You want me to do? May I do this to advance Your purposes and Your kingdom?" It's a real challenge for us to learn to think like this. It's not going to happen naturally because the world system is conforming us into its image all the time, and the world system wants to pit groups against one another, and what we must see is not in God's house is that going to happen, and if we let it happen in his house, Lord help us.

So when we see what's going on in the world, the question is not, we should not be thinking about it from our own perceived political interests and our own perceived ethnic interests that relates to politics. We should be trying, "Lord, help me see what is Your interest, Your purpose, Your priority and how can I bless my brothers and sisters and Your kingdom." Because in Christ there is no Jew or Greek, there is no slave or free, there is no circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian or Scythian. Christ is all, and in all.

You know, when Jesus prayed in John 17, the high priestly prayer, such a glorious prayer and you see the heart of the Son and you think about the fact that Jesus is praying this prayer, we don't know exactly how the timing exactly works out, if he's praying this in Gethsemane or before they get to Gethsemane, but we know it's around the same time. So he's facing the cross and what he prays for is so instructive. He says in verse 9, chapter 17, John 17, "I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours." He says, "Listen," he's praying, Christ is praying as a high priest. Now what he's doing here is just like the high priest would offer a sacrifice and pray for the people, he would pray for the people and then he would offer the sacrifice and take the blood into the Holy of Holies. This is essentially what Jesus is doing. He's praying his prayer and then he's going to offer his sacrifice on the cross and then upon somehow in the crucifixion, Hebrews tells us, he's taking his blood behind the true veil in heaven to the throne of God, that somehow the ark of the covenant and all of the things in the temple are a shadow of the real substance which is in heaven. Read Hebrews 8-10, those chapters, and you'll see this. Jesus is going to take his own blood behind the veil as our high priest, but before he offers the sacrifice, he's praying and who is he praying for? He's not praying for all the people in the world.

This is one of the passages that really teaches limited atonement or particular redemption, that when Christ before the cross, he's thinking about the elect. Do you see that in verse

9? "I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours," I am praying for those whom You have given Me, "for they are Yours; and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are. While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word," he's talking about all of us. "I don't just ask about My disciples and the ones that You've given Me out of the world at this point in history," Jesus says, "I ask for all those who will believe in Me through their word." And what is he asking? Verse 21, "that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me." "Father, I'm asking that they may be one. All these people that You're going to give Me from around the world from every tribe and tongue and kindred, My prayer is that You would make them one in the same way that You and I and the Holy Spirit are One, three in person, one in essence. May they be one even as we are One." And the only way that we can be one is as God is one, is that we must be loving Christ and knowing who we are in Christ and celebrating who we are in Jesus and that will make us one.

And he says that when that happens, when the world sees this kind of unity, when the world sees people of different ethnicities, different socioeconomic circumstances, different backgrounds, different experiences, and he says when the world sees them as one, different distinct people now as one, then they will know, they will believe that you sent me. The most powerful adornment to the gospel, the most powerful evidence for the gospel is the oneness of the body of Christ. He goes on to say, "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

That is the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. What a calling. But that is not something that's accomplished through earthly wisdom, human cleverness. That's accomplished by prayer and by the power of the gospel, people who live truly in the gospel, knowing who

we are in Christ. Different people, different circumstances, different ethnicities, different backgrounds, different experiences yet all loving Jesus. That's what we have in common. We have in common we love Jesus, we're children of the Father in heaven, we're going to the same place. Why should we be divided? And when we remember this, when we don't let the world fit us into their mold, nothing can stop the church. This is the church triumphant. This is the church that will in the midst of an increasingly dark world, what an opportunity to shine with the light of Christ but we have to remember who we are. May God help us do that.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for the high calling with which we've been called. We pray that You would help us to walk in a manner worthy of that high calling, that we would with humility of mind regard one another as more important than ourselves, that we would not exalt ourselves, that we would not be self-focused, self-advancing, but that we would be servants of one another, that we would love each other just as Jesus loved us, that we would lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters, that we would honor all men but we would love the brotherhood. Lord, make us like You. Make us people who because of our great love for You, our intensely growing love for You, love everyone who belongs to You and are willing and joyful to serve everyone who belongs to You, and may You shine Your glory in the midst of this crooked and perverse universe and may, Father, may You be pleased in the exaltation of Your Son. We pray in His name. Amen.

All right, thank you guys for being here tonight.