

## **Matthew 21-02-28b**

I want to thank Dan and Anna-Lynn and Lori for Trust and Obey. That's our goal. We hope to draw closer to that ideal as we continue to look this morning at the truth of the Word of God and its pertinence to the day and the time in which we live.

There are great pressures and a sense of upheaval and change and conflict. Where should we stand? How should we then live? The Word of God is our guide. And as we continue our study this morning, if you will turn with me to the book of Acts.

I want to look at Acts chapter 23. There was a president who got in trouble. There have been multiple presidents who have gotten in trouble in my lifetime going back to the 70s with Mr. Nixon and then Mr. Reagan and Mr. Clinton and on down through.

Almost every president seems to have some moment where people are saying, well, what did the president know and when did he know it? Bush 43 got in trouble because he was visiting a kindergarten school when 9-11 happened and he was reading a book and somebody whispered in his ear that there was a potential terrorist attack and he didn't immediately get up and jump in the car and grab the red phone and start talking. He delayed because he was processing the information and trying to decide what to do. But we tend to hold each other to account based on what we know and when we know it.

In Acts chapter 23 we have an example of this. Paul has been arrested and he had been warned many times on his journey to Jerusalem that bonds and chains awaited him. You remember this? Agabus and others give him warnings from the Holy Spirit that trouble awaits.

But he's dedicated to go. But in chapter 21 verse 26, this is 21-26, back a page, Paul got into this purification ritual thing. James talks him into taking evidently some of the gift money that he was bringing for the poor saints in Jerusalem and using it to finance these guys who are taking their Nazirite vow.

And if you read the Bible, they are supposed to buy their own offering. And James talks Paul into buying their offerings for them and joining them in the vow to try to prove that he's a good Jew to the legalistic Jews in Jerusalem. Well, it backfires.

And the city ends up being disturbed and thinks that Paul has taken Gentiles into the temple. And in verse 30, the people ran together, seized Paul, dragged him out of the temple. The doors were shut.

They were seeking to kill him. News came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. And so he took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them.

And they stopped beating Paul. They would have probably beaten him to death. The

commander came there and took him and commanded him to be bound in chains.

He gives his testimony and he reminds them of his Roman citizenship in chapter 22, verse 25, as they're beating him formally and as a part of the punishment. And the centurion is a part of it. And when he finds out that Paul is his citizen, he has that stopped.

So then in verse 30 of chapter 22, just kind of getting a little background here for this episode, 22:30, the next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from his bonds and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear and brought Paul down and set him before them. So notice he's under arrest, held by the Roman authorities. The centurion, the commander, has asked the Sanhedrin to come down and explain what is going on.

This is a smart commander. He's trying to get all parties and figure out what is right, who is responsible and what should be done. So in chapter 23, Paul looking earnestly at the council.

Council means Sanhedrin. This is the 70. Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

The high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. He's already been beaten by the crowd. He's been beaten by the Romans.

And now the high priest commands somebody to slug him in the mouth. For what? For saying, men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. Good conscience.

What has proceeded from Paul's heart? He has endeavored to live in good conscience. Now, this is the Paul who used to be Saul. This is the Saul who persecuted Christians and was on his way to Damascus to hunt some down and bring them to what he thought was justice.

At the time, he thought that this was the better part of righteousness. He is going to find out later. And he says, you know, God's grace to sinners of whom I am chief because I persecuted the church of God.

Paul is going to look back on those days and realize that he was perpetrating a great wrong. But he did it in good conscience. And that's what he says here.

Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. Everything I did, even the things that turned out to be wrong, I thought I was doing them as the part of righteousness. Now, why does Jesus confront Paul on the Damascus Road and turn him into Paul from being Saul? Because his conscience is good and he is endeavoring to please God, but he is misled and misguided.

And when Jesus comes representing the Lord God and says, why are you persecuting me? That's all Saul needs to hear. Who are you, Lord? And when Jesus says, you know, I'm Jesus whom you're persecuting. That's it for him.

When God points out that he is doing the wrong thing, he is transformed. And having been blind, the scales literally fall from his eyes. And when he can see again, he is now the Apostle Paul.

God points out the error of his ways. He is dedicated in good conscience to living his life to please God. That's what he has always done.

He was misled and misguided. He was trained up by Pharisees. He sat at the feet of Gamaliel.

They taught him that this was righteousness. He assumed it to be so. He was a man of prayer.

He was a man of scripture. He was a man of study. A man of dedication.

A man of zeal for God. But at that time it was not according to knowledge. Very important.

I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. The high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Paul said to him, because Paul does not recognize him, God will strike you, you whitewashed wall.

For you sit to judge me according to the law and you command me to be struck contrary to the law, i.e. hypocrite. What's the word Jesus uses in Matthew 15? Hypocrite. You use your tradition to transgress the commandment of God.

You command me to be struck contrary to the law. Those who stood by said, do you revile God's high priest? New information. Paul said, I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest.

For it is written, you shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people. Doesn't matter that he's not a legitimate Levite. It doesn't matter that there's a lot of things wrong with how he became high priest.

Paul would not have called him out as a hypocrite, according to scripture, if he had known he was the high priest. New information. He doesn't say, well, you're still a whitewashed wall.

You're just a high priest whitewashed wall. You're a bigger and shinier one. He doesn't say that.

So, what does Paul do? He points out the truth of the hypocrisy that's being perpetrated.

And you notice the high priest doesn't command him to be struck anymore, either. People like to say, speaking truth to power.

The question is, which truth? Is it the truth of tradition? Or is it the truth of God? That's the question. And there is tradition. There is moral authority that has been woven pretty much out of whole cloth.

Using some legitimate threads. Using some legitimate wrongs as a justification. But the question to ask, as movements and legislation and policies swirl around us in the modern day, is this based on tradition? Or is it based on the authority of the word of God? Is this right? Is this something that I can support and follow out of my heart because it reflects divine justice and divine truth? Or is this the tradition of the elders that defines its own standard of righteousness? Well, it is righteous to be woke to social ills.

And to justify all kinds of actions on that basis. Well, what does scripture say? Keep turning to the right in your Bible to 1 Timothy chapter 6. All of this, I hope, is illuminating and illustrating and tied to our study in Matthew chapter 15. What is the difference between the commandment of God and the tradition of men? 1 Timothy chapter 6. Let as many bond servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed.

Those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things. You've got more guidance for slaves and masters back in Ephesians.

We're well familiar with that passage. But this is a nice summary. Paul doesn't say, let as many bond servants as are under the yoke go to their master and say, but I'm a Christian and so are you, you should let me go.

Don't you realize that you're perpetrating a heinous moral injustice here by owning me as chattel? Now, this is harsh to the ears of many in the current culture. This is what the Word of God says. In a day when slavery was not a historical fact, it was a present reality.

How much more pertinent are these words written by the Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in a day when slavery was actively being practiced and all of the abuses that you hear about were in full display. An analogy that I've often used before is there are a lot of things that happen because of cars. Animals are slaughtered.

I don't know how many per minute, but judging by the road kill count that I see driving around our area, there's all kinds of wildlife that is killed, large and small. You cannot drive to town in any direction from here without seeing at least one deer on the side of the road. Not to mention all the smaller animals.

People's pets get run over. Distracted driving and disabled driving, people that are under the influence of various things, accounts for an enormous number of deaths in this country. So do we say, look at the evils that are perpetrated by cars.

Cars and anybody who owns them are under the gun. Well, I guess they wouldn't say under the gun. They've got to be addressed.

We've got to do something about these cars and get rid of them because they are used to perpetrate great evils. What does the Apostle Paul, what does the word of God say about the active practice of slavery by Christians in the Roman Empire? What proceeds from the heart? That's what you're going to be judged on. Slaves, treat your master as worthy of all honor.

As many bond servants as are under the yoke. Bond servants under the yoke. You're an animal.

You're a bond servant under the yoke. Believer or unbeliever, count your master worthy of all honor. Why? Because he's better than you.

Because he's a different ethnicity than you. Because he's a different religion than you. Because he's richer than you, more powerful than you.

Why should you count him worthy of all honor? This is the same phraseology that's used for the elders in a church who labor in preaching and teaching, that they should be worthy of double honor. Same thing, time. Timothy's name comes from this word.

Worthy of all honor, why? What should be in your heart when you honor the master who has you under a yoke of bondage? Why? So that the name of God and God's doctrine may not be ill-spoken of. Those Christians are rabble-rousers. Those Christians are insurrectionists.

Those Christians cause trouble. Those Christians are rebels. Those Christians are destructive to society.

They're ripping the fabric out of the way things work. These are slaves. This is the Bible talking to people who are slaves in the present tense.

And the word of God, not just here but elsewhere, says, if you're a slave, be the best slave there is. Honor your cruel, inhuman, chattel-owning master. This guy may be splitting up families and sending them elsewhere and being cruel and inhuman.

Paul doesn't say, if he's a good master, honor him. He says, if you're under the yoke, honor your master. Why? This is your assigned circumstance.

And it is your job, in whatever circumstance you find yourself, to reflect the glory of God and His doctrine. If you're the master, honor God. That the name of God is not

blasphemed.

That the doctrine of God is not blasphemed. If you are a slave, honor your master for God's sake. That's become almost an epithet.

For God's sake, stop that noise. For God's sake this and for God's sake that. But the phrase itself has a legitimate idea at its core.

We should do what we do for God's sake. We represent Him. We are the body of Christ on this earth.

The Lord Jesus did not mount an insurrection against constituted authority. The Apostle Paul, even when he is unjustly accused. When he is wrongly beaten.

When he is wrongly arrested. When he's brought before the Sanhedrin by the Romans. And then is slugged in the mouth.

And he says, you hypocrite. You're here to judge me according to the law. And you're having me struck.

You're violating the law even as you're judging me according to the law. That's hypocrisy. And somebody says, you're talking to the high priest.

And he says, I didn't know he was the high priest. The word of God says, don't revile your rulers. Something Christians can take to heart.

You can disagree. You can point out policy failures. But reviling is prohibited in scripture.

However they got there. If you get bought and sold. And somebody is the ruler.

The word of God says, for God's sake. Honor whatever that authority is. However you may disagree with how it got constituted.

And how it is implemented. And there's all kinds of slavery. Bond servants under the oak.

Count their masters worthy of all honor. So that the name of God and his doctrine may not be blasphemed. What is coming out of the heart? What are you going to look at when you look at the master? To the extent that there is truth.

To the extent that there is justice. To the extent that there is something noble. To the extent that there is something admirable or lovely.

To the extent that there is something of good report. Focus on that. Our culture today has the exact opposite emphasis.

If you listen to the loudest voices that are talking. I think in many parts of the country it's actually not the case. People are still as believers living their lives to try to please the

Lord.

But the vocal shouting crowd and the vocal talking heads on all different kinds of media. Are making the case that we should find the flaw. We should find the problem.

It's an odd thing because in education. When I was a kid they had the big board of education hanging on the wall there. And if you fouled up in a serious enough way.

They sent you to the office and you got a paddling. And corporal punishment. And then they did away with that.

And they said no you don't use punishment. It's just like the dog whisperer shows. You don't ever smack the dog or use a paper to scare him or anything.

Use positive reinforcement. You should just focus on the positive. And don't pay attention to the negative.

This has been the liberal approach to education now for many decades. And for child training and child raising of all kinds. Don't make anybody feel bad about bad things that they do.

Just wait until they do something good. And then praise that and reinforce that and emphasize that. These same people that are pushing that form of education.

Are not following it when it comes to educating society. Instead of focusing on that which is good. And noble and pure.

They're looking for. Digging through. Try to get somebody confirmed to the Supreme Court.

Or nominated for a post. Are they looking for the accomplishments? Are they measuring the emphasis and the efforts and the attainments? No. They hire investigators.

And they're digging all the way back to your college days. And did you do something at a party with a lampshade on your head? And we're going to dig that out. And we're going to beat you down and destroy you.

And cancel you for that. This is manifestly unbiblical. Look at Philippians 4, 8, and 9. Look at 1 Timothy 6. Look at the Lord Jesus.

Talking about the source of these things back in Matthew 15. So when you come to an article like the one I encourage you to read. It's very well reasoned.

As you know I like reading commentaries with which I wildly disagree. When they are well written, well argued, well documented. I want to hear the best foot forward for somebody that has a different point of view.

I can learn from that. And sometimes there is merit in some of the arguments. I may not agree with their conclusion or with their application.

But you can always learn. And there are things to be learned from the gentleman's article there in the Audubon magazine. I don't think that, and you can see some of the arguments that are being made now nationally in this country.

Well, should we take money out of the national coffers and do various things with it. In the light of historical wrongs. In an attempt to redress them.

And I wanted to give the man credit for his article again. His name is J. Drew Lanham. L-A-N-H-A-M.

And I think he wrote a very excellent article representing his point of view. It's balanced. It's documented.

It expresses what's on his mind very clearly. But I want to also mention that we have narrative that overcomes principle in modern discussion. And the problem, narrative is great in the scripture.

Because it is imbued with, it embodies, it reflects, and it teaches divine truth. But a narrative that someone spins or chooses to include or exclude details. You can make a narrative say anything you want it to say.

And I'm going to give you an example from this article. So, in one of his companion volumes to his great Birds of North America, Audubon wrote about his travels and told anecdotes. And so, he, the author here tells this story.

Audubon was out in the woods and he was chasing down some parrots or something out there. And Audubon shows his hand in The Runaway, a story he published in the five-volume Companion to Birds of America. Whether Audubon had any racial history in his ancestry holds little sway.

There's some notion that his mother may have had some darkness in her past. And did he try to pass for white even though he had some black blood. It's a side argument.

Anyway, he says, whether or not Audubon was black holds little sway to me considering his own account of a chance meeting in a Louisiana swamp where the Lord God birds still reigned and flocks of Carolina parakeets huddled in the hollows of thousand-year-old cypress trees. I can see Audubon there in the glow of firelight, probably with a sack of dead birds he intended to skin, eat, and paint. I wonder if he shared that flesh with the likely hungry and exhausted family he encountered, a family that had been enslaved, separated, and sold until the father reunited them all for an attempt at a free life.

They are all sitting around the fire. Their clothes have been torn and soiled, fleeing

hounds and slave catchers. The children are frightened, trembling, crying, cold.

They tell a distracted John James Audubon of the cruelties they endured. Audubon barely hears them. He is probably preoccupied with the birds he's seen and wants to see.

He needs to pose the empty skins and paint. But then there are these Negroes in the way. Their stories and pleas fall on the ears tuned in to hear a barred owl calling.

And then John James, who momentarily recognizes something human and perhaps even familial in the faces of the free black people sitting with him, tells the family that he will return them to their owner. I imagine he's convinced it is the white thing to do, and here in Louisiana he must keep the story straight. Imagine, if you will, the horror of the moment of being black and free but knowing you will soon be re-chattel'd.

I wonder in that moment what I would have done. If the story is to be believed, according to Audubon, the family was gladly imprisoned again. Notice the narrative where all sorts of thoughts and levels of attention and distraction and sensitivity and lack thereof are attributed to Audubon out of thin air.

None of this is in Audubon's actual account of this meeting. Many people think that it was a story he just made up. But the picture that is painted by this author is that these people have been split up as a family.

There's a mother and a father and some children, and they were sold by their owner to separate owners and the family was split up. And so the father engineered his own escape, the escape of his wife, and was able to recover the children. And they're fleeing through the swamp toward freedom.

They've gotten out there and they're in the Louisiana swamp. And where are they going to go? They run into Audubon. Well, according to this author, Audubon distractedly, insensitively, herds them back to their master and back into slavery.

Well, here's another article from the same Audubon Society magazine, a different article at a different time. Here's a different article. The man and his family had escaped slavery and were living in the swamp.

And as the tale unfolds, Audubon spent the night at the family's encampment, companionably but also, quote, quite at their mercy. It was the fugitives, however, who were really most vulnerable. The next morning, Audubon took them back to the plantation of their first master and convinced the planter to buy the enslaved people back from the masters to which the family had been divided and sold.

Reunited but still enslaved, the black family was, quote, rendered as happy as slaves generally are in that country. So what does Audubon do? Under the circumstances, what is best for this family? They can't live in the swamp. They've got no place to go.

Audubon makes the best of a bad situation, takes them back to the first owner, convinces him to purchase them back and reunite the family and take care of them at his own plantation. There's no indication that they were abused. The only time they felt like they needed to flee was when they were divided up and sold separately.

And that unhappy condition is reversed at Audubon's encouragement, and the family is reunited. He says that's about as happy as you can make people in this particular circumstance. You can't end slavery because you see this family in the swamp.

What can you do in the circumstance? What proceeds out of the heart? Audubon didn't stay in the swamp and say, well, you know, good luck. I got to go catch some more birds. He helps this family evidently make the best of a bad situation, as near as I can tell.

But what's the narrative? Well, who's telling the story and how is it spun? And you get books that are written by, you know, Washington insiders who say here's what went on when President Bush was doing this or President Obama was doing that or President Trump was doing this. There's just a lot of storytelling to persuade people based on the story sounding bad or the story sounding good. You can use this thing of children at the border and, you know, kids in cages is bad, but kids in containers is good.

You know, there's still children are being sent unaccompanied across the border, and when they catch them, what are they going to do with them? Well, they've got to put them somewhere. Well, if it's open air where fresh air will keep them from giving the virus to people, no, we can't have that. We're going to shut them up in shipping containers, which there's science to support the fact that the virus spreads a lot better enclosed.

This is why all of the—and I'm digressing, but I think this is why the lockdowns and the don't go outside and why institutions that have forced air heat and air conditioning have been rife with the spread of virus because containing it instead of being out in the open air seems to help it spread. Well, by keeping people sequestered in tight environments at home, they're still—it's starting to wane, but they had a big spike. And some of the places that did lockdowns and curfews and such had the worst spike.

And people that said, no, go out, you know, be careful, didn't have near the spike that those who stayed indoors did. Well, now, which story are you going to tell? Do you want to say open air is better for the virus, or do you want to say containers are better because they don't look like cages? It's all in the narrative. What does the Lord Jesus say? And as we conclude this morning, turn back to Matthew 15.

All of this boils down to how should we then live? What does Jesus say? When his disciples are criticized for transgressing a social more, a social norm, this tradition of washing hands in a ritual fashion is the basis for an accusation. And Jesus says, if you want to talk about accusations, are these disciples trying to perpetrate an evil? Are they

harming others? Are they perpetrating a moral wrong by not washing their hands the way you think they ought to wash their hands? You are transgressing the commandment of God based on your tradition. At worst, they're defiling themselves by your standard.

If they eat with unwashed hands, what have they done? Well, you consider them to be defiled. Well, okay, fine. But you're transgressing the commandment of God based on your tradition.

Which do you think is more serious? God commanded, honor your father and mother. You have found a workaround where you don't support your father and mother in their old age. You keep your money claiming that you're going to bequeath it to God when you die.

Hypocrites. Well, did Isaiah prophesy about you saying this people, these people draw near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. All of the talk, all of the flag waving, all of the issue haranguing.

What is in the heart? What counts that comes from the heart? How do you measure what proceeds from the heart? Is it good intentions? I just want everybody to be happy and everybody to have an equal chance. I just want discrimination and bigotry and hardship unjustly perpetrated on people to end. What is in the heart? Or is it, this is a means by which I can get a hold of the levers of power.

I can control. I can get rid of things that I personally, according to my tradition, don't like. What is in the heart? Can you support issues? Can you support different points of view? You can.

And if you find somebody that supports a view that is different than your own, they're not automatically wrong. Right and wrong is judged by God and it's based on what is in the heart. Now, can someone, let's say that I think a particular movement and a particular piece of legislation and a particular action to redress social wrongs.

Let's say, I think that's great. And you don't. You say, it's socialism.

It's an excuse for people to grab power and keep it. What's the matter with you, Sam? Why would you support that? Well, maybe I don't have the same information that you've got. Maybe I have believed a narrative that has twisted the truth or leaves out some important details.

Like Audubon didn't just send these people back into abject slavery to a cruel master. He went back and talked to a guy that he thought was a good guy and who was good enough to repurchase these slaves and reunite this family. So, what is the basis on which decisions are made? My point being, the Lord Jesus' point.

You can draw near and say that you support righteousness with your mouth and with

your lips, but where is your heart relative to God? Faithful people can disagree because they've had different experiences. They've got different pieces of the puzzle in their hand. God is not as nearly as concerned with which side of a social issue do you come down on or that I come down on as He is with where is your heart.

Is your heart seeking God? Is it drawing near to God? Is it looking to reflect God's glory and God's doctrine? Remember Paul in 1 Timothy 6? Don't let the name of God and the doctrine of God be blasphemed because of the way you act and the way you live. The glory of God and the truth of God are the issue. And you may see that working out in different ways.

We are in different places in different circumstances with different connections and different experiences. And we may have different views on social issues. It doesn't necessarily mean that one of us is right and one of us is wrong.

God may put somebody with one view in one place to work for His glory in a particular sphere. I may have a different conclusion. I may draw a different political or social notion where I am and what I see and where my connections are.

And I should not judge my brother and my brother should not judge me or my sister. What counts? Am I doing all to the glory of God? Whatsoever you do in word or in deed, do all to the glory of God. If you're doing something that is out of line and is actually not a part of God's plan and purpose, you're going to get the Damascus Road.

You're going to find it hard to kick against the pricks. God will correct us. We don't need to run around trying to correct each other.

That is subjectivity. That is taking our eyes off of the prize. I've got my hands full living my life in a way that is pleasing to God, glorifying to God, that reflects the truth of God as I understand it as best.

And to understand it, I need to spend time thinking about it. We've emphasized that. It's all about the bread.

You've got to digest that bread. Every plant, verse 13, which my heavenly father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone.

These people that are hung up on ritual hand-washing and who are criticizing the disciples and claiming that they are impure and defiled. What does Jesus say in verse 14? Let them alone. He doesn't say, you know, we need to start an organization here.

The anti-anti not hand-washing club. We're going to be the non-hand-washers. And we're going to go and straighten out these people that insist on hand-washing.

What does Jesus say? Let them be. Let them alone. Notice, it's the Pharisees who've

come all the way up from Jerusalem to find fault and to persecute the disciples.

Jesus doesn't say to the Pharisees, hey, let my disciples alone. He talks to those who are willing to hear and live by divine truth. Jesus tells the Pharisees what they're doing wrong and points out their hypocrisy.

But in terms of a command and in terms of action, he talks to his own disciples. Verse 12, his disciples came to him. He answered and said, if my father has not planted them, they're going to be uprooted.

Leave them alone. Kind of like going back to the parable of the wheat and the tares. Leave it alone until the harvest.

It'll be uprooted at the proper time and in the proper way. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into the ditch.

The blind leading the blind. Let them alone. Now, this doesn't mean, you know, turn on, tune in and drop out or whatever they used to say in the 60s.

It doesn't mean that we shouldn't be engaged, that we can't speak up. Jesus spoke up and elaborated the problem with this wrong point of view. He spoke up and, you know, again, this thing that's just, you can't listen to anything without hearing.

Well, we've got to speak truth to power. Well, Jesus spoke divine truth to those who were supposed to be religious leaders. Jesus didn't go to the court of Herod and say, you know, you shouldn't have chopped the head off of the forerunner.

But when religious leaders came and confronted him about religious matters, Jesus pointed out their error. And then he said, leave them alone. Leave them alone.

They're blind leaders of the blind. The blind follow them. They themselves are blind.

And when you go to John 9, if you say you have no sin, your sin remains. If you were blind, your sin problem could be solved. But because you say we see and don't acknowledge your blindness, your sin remains.

Hypocrisy. Well, I hope this is at least an idea starter or a place to help find the point of contact between what we learn in the Word of God and the current roiling, broiling, changing society in which we live. I think we're on solid ground to say that if we look to our own hearts and seek to please God in what we do, not try to fix a society that cannot be fixed until the Lord Jesus is running it.

But to the extent that things are true, to the extent that they are pure, to the extent that they are noble and lovely. Everything around us has been built by people who are a mixture of good and bad. Which bad things are you going to focus on and say, well, because this person has a bad element, I can't listen to their music.

I can't enjoy this thing that they built. I can't be a member of the club they started. I can't participate in this parade because the people that made this float are in some category of immorality that I want to call out.

The world is built and run by flawed people. Scripture calls us, God calls us to cling to that which is good and to depart from that which is evil. If there is evil in the present day and I find myself a part of it, I want to disconnect from that.

Touch not the unclean thing. Hate the garment spotted by the flesh. Absolutely.

In the present day. I can't change history. I can't change other people.

I can only tend to my own heart. It is a full-time task for each of us to ensure that what proceeds from our heart is pleasing in God's sight and doesn't cause him to be blasphemed or his word. I have full rulership over my own heart, my own domicile.

And that is what we are called to. Now you say, well, but wasn't it Christians that helped get slavery abolished? Yes, it was. And where did they work? Where did they act? That was a present evil.

And if we find a present evil in our periphery, something over which we have control, something that we suddenly find ourselves supporting like Paul did on the road to Damascus, and we've begun to suspect that we're a part of something that's unhealthy and unwholesome and isn't biblical and isn't doctrinal and doesn't reflect the glory of God. Sure. Do what Paul did.

Stop chasing Christians. Join with them and benefit them. Be a blessing to them.

Teach them. Be an apostle for them. Build and establish churches and so on.

But who showed Paul the error of his ways? It was the Lord Jesus Christ himself. We come in contact with the Lord Jesus Christ through the word and through the spirit. We appeal to him.

Try me. See if there be any wicked way in me. Purge me with hyssop.

Open my eyes to where I can be different and I can be better personally and in those things that I am personally attached to and involved with. But the starting point has to be what proceeds from our heart and that it is for the glory of God, not for the betterment of society or culture or unknown strangers in a different place or people off on a border that I don't live near. Where can I personally affect change if change is needed to the glory of God? Reflecting the word of God.

And in many cases, the flaws and the wrong things in society cannot be changed and we can only find to the extent that there is good, to the extent that there is something supportable. That is the path to peace. As far as it is up to you, Paul says, live in peace

with all men as far as is possible.

If it's up to you, pursue the path of peace. So we don't necessarily try to argue people out of their social positions. Hopefully our lives will reflect God's position.

And those who are seeking God, those who are susceptible to God will be planted by God and not uprooted. So, food for thought as we have ongoing developments in our political and social climate. But we'll close here in a word of prayer.

And when we return, we are going to see a wonderful woman from Canaan. She's got three strikes against her at the very beginning in a Jewish culture dominated by men. She's a Canaanite woman.

And if you want to see how God handles a social issue, we'll be seeing that coming up in Matthew 15, 21 and following next time. But we'll close for this morning in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the light and the truth of your word.

It strengthens us. It gives us clarity of vision and of focus. We pray that as we reflect on the things we've seen in your word this morning, that your Holy Spirit will give us a right understanding and guide us into proper interpretation and application.

So that we can indeed shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. That others will see our good works and glorify you. And that we can properly and usefully represent the Lord Jesus as his body on this earth in the time that remains to us in this life.

We ask and pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.