



Gospel Lessons From the Old Testament – Part 6

The Paganism of the People

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If you were ever to sit in the cockpit of a fighter jet, maybe an FA-18 Hornet or an F-15, you would find as you sat there that there are a few things within reach that are colorfully painted in yellow and black. A lever here, a switch there, a button over here. And if you ever had a chance to learn to fly one of those jets and you were on a mission, deployed your ordinance, you're flying over enemy skies back to home, I would suggest that you don't mess with any of those yellow and black switches. And I know that's hard because they're so close, right? You've got that yellow handle right next to your knee there and it pivots on about a two-inch give, and if you decided to pull it, I'm just saying it would mess up your day.

That lever that's right there tempting you to pull it is going to launch that rocket under your seat and get you up and out of that cockpit in no time. And once you got over the two seconds of exhilaration of being catapulted straight up, there would be the realization as you hung vulnerable under the canopy of your parachutes wafting down to enemy territory, that it's not a good thing when you leave your jet behind. It would be an advisable thing not to mess with any of those. And the Bible presents to us the concept of sin, much like those levers and switches and buttons, they're clearly marked. God has been very clear about what is right and wrong. And as you live the Christian life and you cruise through the enemy territory of this world, God says, "don't mess with those. Don't touch those. Don't pull that. Don't push that. Don't flip that switch. That's wrong and it's going to cause a lot of trouble." And all of us have touched them and pulled them from time to time. We've had those immediate feelings of guilt and shame. But you need to remember, there's much, much more to it than that.

There's the vulnerability of stepping away from the safety of being ensconced in the will of God. There's the potential of you, as the Bible says, being held captive by the enemy to do his will. There are issues as the enemy wants to devour Christians. We have to see the bigness of what a big deal it is on a Thursday or a Friday night when you're fighting temptation and you think it's right there. Everyone else seems to do it. Everyone else is encouraging me to do it. I don't, I don't get it. Is it really a big deal?

But we wouldn't be the first generation to have what would seem to be an unthinkable reaction to sin and temptation when you see that there's every conceivable reason to do what we ought to do, because God has been clear and he's warned us of the consequences, and yet we find ourselves foolishly walking into the consequences of our own decisions.

Certainly the wilderness wandering is a case study in that and if you've been reading our Daily Bible Reading, we're on the schedule where we've seen this just chapter after chapter after chapter. It's like they should know better and you're kind of yelling at the pages of Scripture when you read, like, "What are you thinking? How can you do that? You just watched Moses do these miracles and these plagues and shown the power of God. You watch the Egyptian army drown in the Red Sea and now you're wanting to build a golden calf.



What are you guys thinking?" Just do what the prophet says. Do what Moses tells you. This is God speaking. He's made it clear.

And here we sit with the Bible on our phone that is filled with predicted prophecies. Every authenticated thing you would want to prove that God has spoken and this is his word, it's right there. I mean, we see that we have every advantage to know that the instruction manual that he's laid on our lap as we sit in the cockpit of the Christian life, it's like he's told us what to do. And yet you and I will go through this life this week filled with the temptations that we had last week. We're going to make decisions about what we do.

And I'm just saying this, that just like they learned that sin is a much, much bigger deal than they tended to think, we've got to have that sobering moment in Scripture here today as we study Acts Chapter 7. It's a big deal. There are consequences. They are more grave than we would think and I would want us to at least look at this text of Scripture today in Acts Chapter 7, beginning in verse 37 and say, OK, I want to find myself in the text of this Scripture and make sure I learn the lesson that that generation didn't seem to learn.

So take your Bible if you haven't already and turn there, because if there's anything I want from you this morning, it's to realize that the consequences of sin and what's in the balance in our temptations is probably a much, much bigger deal than you or I dare to believe. Some of us have learned that, but others have not. So I would ask you, please, to spend some time in this text beginning in verse 37.

And remember where we are, as Stephen is talking to the council. We know it as the Sanhedrin. They've accused him of rejecting the teaching of Moses, so he spent some time here. We've dealt with it the last three weeks talking about Moses and now the attention turns from Moses, this deliverer, to how the people responded to the deliverer. I've called this message "The Paganism of the People," which you wouldn't expect because they're the people of God, the covenant people, the beneficiaries of the promises of God. And yet they're acting like their pagan counterparts, that they just came out of oppression from. The Egyptians and their gods are now becoming their gods and the patterns of cultural compromise are rampant among the people of God, even though they're following Moses. In their hearts, they're not.

Look at how it's described here beginning in verse 37. Follow along with me, Acts 7:37. "This is the Moses who said to the Israelites," now he's going to quote a very important prophecy of the Pentateuch. It's a quotation from Deuteronomy 18:15, which I'm sure your Bible notes somewhere, in a footnote, at least it should, that "God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers." That's an oft-repeated line. And even though sometimes we see it quoted verbatim, like Peter quoted it in Acts Chapter 3 when he was preaching just a couple of chapters previously, he quotes that saying Christ is the fulfillment of this. There was a prophet who was expected and Christ is that prophet. When John the Baptist is out there gathering a following, they ask the question, "Is this the prophet?" And they don't mean just a prophet. They mean this prophet, the prophet of Deuteronomy 18.



Matter of fact, they would see Jesus do some things and would say, "I know this is the prophet that was to come." I mean, they knew that this was a message about someone greater than Moses who was coming. And of course, Stephen is building this parallel between the way they rejected Christ, saying, "Listen, just like they rejected Moses, now it's your turn. You had an opportunity here with a greater prophet, THE prophet." As it says in Hebrews, "God spoke through the prophets, in many portions and in many ways," in the Old Testament. "But he spoke to us in these last times by his Son." I mean, here is the ultimate spokesperson of God, God himself, God in human form. He is presenting the truth and they rejected it.

Well, this Moses who said to the Israelites, now he takes that, seems like a random quote, but it's not a random quote because that's the whole point of him standing before the Sanhedrin that had condemned Jesus to die just months earlier. He says, "This is the one," speaking of Moses, "who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers."

Now, here's the whole point. "He received living oracles to give to us." Just like Jesus wanted to make it clear he was the prophet fulfilling Deuteronomy 18:15 and they didn't listen to it. Jesus said, "You have someone that's going to judge you. Moses will judge you. Moses, in his writings, they speak of me." He kept telling the people. And here were the Sanhedrin listening to Stephen going, "You're rejecting Moses" and here's Stephen saying "You're rejecting Moses." Because Moses talked about Christ and you're not accepting and embracing Christ. And those words, those oracles, that's a weird word we don't use that much often, but it is the word it's related grammatically in Greek to the word "a saying" or the word "word." Right? The word "Logos" is at the root of it. And it means, you know, a statement. These are statements and they're living statements in the sense that they give life. Right?

We talk about the New Testament description of the Bible, talks about the Bible is a living and active sword. Right? "Living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword." So we have the truth given through the prophets, the word in the Old Testament in Hebrew, by the way. Prophet means a mouthpiece. God is speaking through the prophets. He does that in these periods of times in the Old Testament and even in the New Testament by authenticating that through the miraculous signs of the prophets. Hebrews Chapter 2 verses 1 through 4 talks about that, the idea that God is authenticating it.

And so we had these miracles that Moses did and therefore the people should listen to Moses. And you think, "Well, if I were there and saw Moses part the Red Sea, I would listen to him." Well, you got a book in your lap that has predicted prophecies laced throughout it, that there's no other explanation except God's fingerprints are all over that book. And it says very clear things about the way we should live our lives this week. And I think when we say, "Well, if we were there, we would do the right thing." We've got the same clear, authenticated, authorized, I mean, there's no question we have the word of God, the living oracles of God. The question is, what do we do with it?

Look what it says here they did with the words of Moses. Verse 39, "Our fathers refused to obey him and they thrust him aside." It was like not only we're not going to do it, we're not

going to sit here and listen anymore. This is the Greek word "to shove," "to push." We pushed him out of the way. Why? Because there was a problem in their hearts. "In their hearts they turned to Egypt." Now I'm in the desert following Moses, my body is here following Moses, but my heart is really is back in Egypt. And we've seen that in our Daily Bible Reading. Right? "It was great when we were back there by the Nile eating our, you know, our leeks and onions and all the things we used to do. And we had, you know, normalcy even though we were slaves. I don't know why we're following you, Moses."

And they go to his brother, Aaron, the priest, and they say, "Make for us gods who will go before us." This, by the way is Exodus 32 is the scene of the golden calf. How clear was Moses about what God said in Exodus 20? Do you know your Bible chapters? Exodus 20, what's in Exodus 20? Ten Commandments. Ten Commandments. Commandment number one, "There are no other gods before me." And then commandment number two, "No idols. Don't make any idols." By Chapter 32 they're going make us an idol. Right? And why? "We're not liking this prophet. Matter of fact, he's not working on our timetable, he's gone up on the mountain. How long is it going to be there?"

Look what he says here in verse 40. "As for this Moses who led us up from the land of Egypt, we don't know what has become of him." Verse 41. "And they made a calf in those days, and they offered a sacrifice to the idol and they were rejoicing in the works of their hands."

Now, God had given them living oracles, living truth. Here's the thing that I think you should do, here's the instruction manual for the cockpit of life. And you're there just flipping switches, pulling levers, pushing buttons any way you want. You don't care about what I said. You going to do whatever you want, your self-styled religion. You're going to do what you choose to do. So God's response, verse 42, "But God turned away," there's a passive response, right? OK, fine. "And he gave them over." Do you want to do that? Fine. You can do that.

There are going to be consequences at the end of verse 43, but OK. "As it is written in the book of the prophets..." You remember the categories of the Bible, the law, the prophets, the writings. In the prophets, the category of writings of the prophets of the Old Testament, there's a book called Amos and in Amos he's quoting it here, Amos Chapter 5, he's going to talk about the fact that the real diagnosis of what was going on, even though externally they were following Moses and they were doing the worship that Moses prescribed, really in their hearts, it was far from God. They were bringing sacrifices, but their sacrifices, even to the golden calf at the beginning, they're not sacrificing to God. And even when they got back online after Moses comes back down the mountain and straightens them out, it's still like their hearts aren't right.

And so in Amos 5, he asked the question, "Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the 40 years in the wilderness?" Key words "to me." Was it really to me, "O house of Israel?" Was it to me? No, it wasn't to me. In your heart, your hearts were somewhere else. Verse 43, "You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god, Rephan, and the images that you made to worship." And so what was the response? Well, at first it's backing away in verse 42 and then it was 900 years later, all of the accumulation of the idolatry and the going



astray in their hearts, he sends them off to Babylon. "I will send you into exile beyond Babylon."

In the initial prophecy Amos is talking about Damascus and Assyria because that was the first wave of God's punishment. And here's Stephen saying, but you guys know even the Southern tribes as he looks to the Judean leaders of Israel at that time and he says, you know, God sent them off to Babylon. Right? Ultimately, 900 years later.

It all starts with a reminder that the prophet had spoken, the mouthpiece. And the prophet speaks as God says to Moses, it's going to be as though you are God to them. God says, "When I give you this revelation, like the Ten Commandments or whatever instructions I give, like now's the time to cross the Red Sea or now is the time to move toward Canaan or no, we shouldn't go. When you give them those instructions, it's as though I'm giving those instructions. When they reject what you say, Moses, they're rejecting what I say." Why? Because you are providing revelatory information, living oracles. You are a mouthpiece, a prophet.

That's a good place for us to start because we sit here, just like the Sanhedrin sat there looking at things that God had promised regarding Christ, and we can either choose to listen to it or not listen to it. But we've got to say, God has been clear. I mean, from the beginning here in Deuteronomy 18, there's going to be another one's coming. And every prophecy beyond that kept building on that to say this will be the ultimate spokesperson of God. This will be the one to whom, as it says in Daniel 7, all authority of all the peoples ever made should be given to this one, like the Son of Man who's going to have all the authority over all people. This is the focus of humanity on this Son of Man, God incarnate.

When the Lord, it keeps talking in these terms about the Lord, setting his feet down on the Mount of Olives. Well we're not talking about God now having feet unless we're talking about, oh, the second person to the Godhead taking on humanity and in his incarnation, coming and having toenails and being able to touch the ground of the earth. Here's the picture of this incarnate God who is supposed to be the focus of our attention and the ultimate mouthpiece, the ultimate prophet that was to come that is greater than Moses. And all of that cumulates itself in Christ. We have this information.

And not only that, he said to the apostles, you're going to be able to recall what I said and you're going to give that information, I'm going to lead you into all truth. Now they've codified those 27 books of the New Testament that we have on our phones and on our iPads and in our printed Bibles. You have all that information from God leading up to Christ, from the Old Testament, explaining Christ in the New Testament and he gives all the instruction about how to live in the cockpit of the Christian life between here and there as we fly through the enemy territory. That is what God has said. It's there and it's clear and I just want us to affirm that.

If you're taking notes, jot it down. Number one, you need to have very clearly in our minds this very simple fact, "God Has Clearly Spoken." We need to know that. Know that God has clearly spoken. There's just no confusing this in the pages of Scripture. There is a doctrine



about the clarity with which God has spoken that has been called into question today. There are many people writing books in the last 20 years or so, and it's almost an understood thing among people who don't even think clearly about the Bible, but they buy this philosophy that, you know, you can't be clear about what the Bible says. We can't really know what God says. Matter of fact, they want us to say you should never be certain about anything that you read in the Bible.

Which, by the way, they're very certain about telling us we should not be certain about what God has said. As a matter of fact, they say you ought to be able to think through whatever issues are going on in your day, and if it seems right and feels right and you think it's the right thing, you should be able to look at Scripture and interpret it that way. The doctrine of the clarity of Scripture has been completely ignored in our day to where most people, they say, if that doesn't jibe well with how I feel, if that's not the kind of thing I think God would do, well, then I can look at the Bible and kind of read it however I want.

I heard a sermon this week, or at least part of a sermon, from a guy in a church, in a pulpit, in a worship service, telling us that the story of Joseph getting a coat of many colors from his dad was really his dad giving him a colorful dress and he was really transgender. And the whole point of the story of Joseph is affirming transgenderism in the book of Genesis. And my response logically to all of that is to look at the transcription of your sermon, put it down, and then be beginning to go on Twitter and Facebook and wherever I want, and to give MY interpretation of what you said. And maybe I can weave it into some, I don't know, some pro-Trump political statement because I'm going to treat your words the way you're treating God's word. But no one wants that, right?

You want me to understand and apply what we call hermeneutics, the ability to take simple common-sense rules to understand what you're saying. You want me... Every book written by Brian McLaren or anyone talking about you shouldn't be certain about God's word, they are very certain about what they're saying and they're very clear about you should be very careful to read my sentence carefully. If I wrote a review of that sermon and made it out to be something he didn't mean, or if I took any review of any book telling me that I should not be certain about what God says and wrote a review about it that was completely opposite of what they intended, do you think I'd hear from them? Oh, you know I'd hear from them if I had any voice or platform, I would hear from them. Why? Because they would say, "You're misrepresenting me."

That today is the norm for Christians. You need to know this, that's not what the Bible teaches. Matter of fact, let me turn to this passage, Deuteronomy Chapter 30. Deuteronomy 30. Here's what God says to the people who were coming through the wilderness about what God has said. I mean, it started with two tablets and God had initially said, "Well, let's just start with these Ten Commandments. And let's start with this, 'No other God before me and no idols.'" Well that went away in a matter of 12 chapters. They were like done with that. But here's the idea. God says, I've been super clear and now my prophet Moses is going to extrapolate and give you details that I'm giving him about how you ought to live, what you ought to do, how you ought to function, the civil code of the people, what moral laws there



should be, how the Levites should function, what's holy and what's not. All of that clearly given by God.

And at the end of all this, the Pentateuch in the first five books of the Bible is the Pentateuch, the book of Deuteronomy, here's what Moses says. Look at Chapter 30 here in the book of Deuteronomy. Drop down to verse 11. He says, "For this commandment that I command you today, it's not too hard for you." I mean, we're coming with all kinds of reasons for not doing what he's saying. "It's not too hard for you. Neither is it far off," which is exactly the post-modern view of looking at the precepts and propositions of God's word. People claim, "It's too cloudy. How could we possibly ever know it?"

"It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it down to us, that we may hear it and do it?'" No, it's already been given to you, right? Heaven has come down through the prophets to give the voice, the authoritative, authenticated voice of heaven and he's inscripturated it, they are living oracles, they're written in Hebrew and in Greek and a couple of places in Aramaic, he's given us this truth. There it is. "Neither is beyond the sea," well, we don't have it, it's way over there, "that you should say, 'Who will go over to the sea and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it.'" No, "The word is very near to you." As a matter of fact, I've been telling you to say it and recite it and Moses has been reading it to you. Matter of fact, I've said that people who are going to lead a nation they got to write their own copy of it, they got to read it all the time. They got to keep it with them. They got to know it. They got to say it. Well, it's right there. It's in your mouth and it's in your heart. You understand it so that you can do it. But we continue to fight in some philosophical way that God is not clear.

God has clearly spoken. There'll be no excuse for us to stand before God and say, "Yeah, you're right, I wasn't clear on that." Every water cooler discussion, all the hot buttons, and I know there's just a handful of them in every, you know, couple of years, and our hot button topics God has been very clear on. Are there some secret things that belong to the Lord? Right? Deuteronomy 29. Sure. Are there some things we wish we had greater clarity on? Yes. But the things that people say there is no clarity on, which are the hot button issues, are the things that God anticipates in every generation. They just recur every cycle of every generation and he's been clear on them. They're not confusing. It's just that we have a problem hearing them.

Now, I understand hearing them is a gift. Jesus talked a lot about, you know, having eyes to see and ears to hear. And maybe that's a good place for you to start if you're struggling with the things that God has said or you think they're not clear, let's start with just saying, God, I want you to give me ears to hear them. I want to be able to at least reasonably stand back, just like I would want someone to stand back and listen to what I say and reasonably interpret it. That clarity. There's a Latin word that was used to embody this doctrine in church history that comes from the Latin word, "transparent." It's transparent. You can look past the words to the meaning and the truth of it.



And that concept of what that is, is what we need to get back to in our own minds, and say, "God, maybe there's some kind of internal problem with me." Which, of course, is where the text goes next. There is a problem if your heart is not in the right place. Matter of fact, go back to Acts Chapter 7, and in verse 39 you'll see the diagnosis. Even though he's giving living oracles, Moses is, even about to the Sanhedrin that there would be a prophet that is coming who is Christ, here you guys are much like they were in the desert and you're not desiring to hear it.

Look at verse 39 again. It says, "Our fathers refused," there's a volitional decision, an issue of what I don't want to do. I don't want to do it. As a matter of fact, I take the avenue through which it comes, this Greek word is "to shove," I push it out of the way. I shove aside, I thrust it aside. I don't want to hear Moses anymore. "For in their hearts they turn to Egypt." Now there's the real problem. Their hearts are not where their bodies are. Just like a lot of people are in church today all across the country but their heart is not there. They don't hear the preaching of the word. They want to hear a fanciful interpretation that will affirm what they want to hear.

And you shouldn't go to church to get what you want to hear. Even though there are things in the Bible you probably do want to hear. We need to come to church to hear what we need to hear because we're going to face temptations in our lives. When you look at the cockpit of the Christian life and God says, "Don't flip that switch, don't push that button, don't pull that lever, you need to stay away from those things because there are consequences involved." But I need you to know that there's a problem that can very much be and reflect the problem of the Israelites in the desert, and that is a problem in your heart, an internal issue. And that's why they said, "Well, I know God was very clear about, you know, making sure we don't have idols back there in Exodus 20, but, hey, Aaron, can you make some gods for us? I want something clear, like we had in Egypt. In Egypt, we had gods in Egypt, they were very visible. You could see them, they were idols. We'd like to have something like that."

And you should know, by the way, if you study the golden calf, the Israelites probably likely had this view of a hybrid, a synchronistic view, we call it, of taking the Egyptian gods and saying, "Well, we want this God of Yahweh that is our national identity and we'd like to kind of merge him. As a matter of fact, we might want to see him in our worship as kind of riding on the back of this golden calf. But at least we can have the object of worship. We can kind of feel like the culture and everyone can give us a high five that we're kind of doing what we saw back there in Egypt. But really, we kind of put our own twist on it, our spin on it. And it's still kind of the God thing of Judaism, but it kind of is a hybrid. I know God said don't do that. And it's a compromise, but this is how we want to do it."

And that's what they did. They thought, "Because you know what, I'm not liking the timetable of Moses, I don't even like the fact that he's slow in giving us the information that we need." "This Moses who led us out of Egypt," I mean, we're here now, but "we don't know what's become of him." Where is he? And they made a golden calf and they offered a sacrifice to the idol and they rejoiced in the works of their hands.



Well, you can say that's a passage about non-Christians. I just want to warn you. It's easy for us to have the same kind of response as non-Christians have. Non-Christians at your work, you go and share the gospel, you share the truth, you share all the moral code of God and say, "This is how people ought to live. God made us. He can set the instruction manual and you ought to live like that." They're going to reject that and you're going to go, "Wow, look at them. Total non-Christian. What pagans." Well, the paganism that is so easily a part of our own lives, it doesn't come from our heart if we're real Christians. I say that because Ephesians Chapter 2 says God has made us alive inside. We were dead to him as Ezekiel said, "We had a heart of stone. Now we have a heart of flesh." We do have a relationship with God. In that sense, you can say you have ears to hear.

And in that sense, I say at the core of your being, if you're a real Christian here today and you really put your trust in Christ, you've repented of your sins, you have ears to hear what God says. There is the core part of you that resonates with the revelation of God when it is read and when it is taught, when it is read in the book, even if it makes you tremble a bit, even it makes you say, "Gulp. That's a hard truth." You want to follow that. You want to believe it because God is speaking and you're born again. You have the Spirit of God in your life.

Well, if that's the case, I just want you to know this. We still have a problem. And the problem is we're still encased in this flesh. And this flesh, as the Bible puts it, is at war with the Spirit and they don't jive with each other when it comes to their desires. Their desires are pitted against each other. So in that sense, I just want you to know there's a part of you that does not want to listen to what God says. Matter of fact, that'd be a good way to put it, just like the Israelites here didn't want to listen, I think we need to be aware of, I put it this way, "Beware of Your Desire Not To Listen." Not at the core of your being if you sit here as a Christian. But your flesh is not going to want to hear these things.

And by the way, let's just build some concentric circles. Your flesh isn't going to want to hear those things like "there should be no idols in your worship" because the culture doesn't want to hear those things and they don't have a heart that beats in sync with God, they do not have ears to hear, and they're always putting us at odds with them and they give us pressure. So the pressure of our culture, the Bible calls it the world, is pressing in on our flesh, this part of our humanity that doesn't want to listen, and so the culture and our flesh are both kind of in sync here and the one presses upon us.

The reason that there's a problem there is ultimately because there is a tempter who sits outside of all of that, who is actively involved in steering the culture. Put it this way, the Bible calls him the God of this Age or the power "that is at work in the sons of disobedience," to keep quoting Ephesians 2. Or the one, as the apostle John says in First John, "The world lies within the power of the evil one." And what was his whole point in Genesis 3 when he's introduced to us in Genesis 3? He says to Eve, "Did God really say..." What did he want to do? Question the clarity of God's word. Here God gives living oracles, "Don't eat of that tree and everything will be fine." There's a lever. Don't pull it. There's a button, don't push it. And he says that here, "I'm in charge. I make the rules. Here's the instruction manual." And Satan comes along and says, "Did God really say that, Eve? Let's think about that."



And so she said, "Well, maybe I'm missing out on something." That person, the tempter, is engaged in the culture and the culture is pressing in on our humanity, our flesh and our flesh is going, "There's a lot of me that doesn't want to listen." And that's the problem. And can I kind of personalize it here in terms of everyday conversation we hear every single week? When there's conflict between the core of what I know is true, hearing the words of God, knowing this is what he says and I listen to the culture say, "Well, that's a fundamentalist, bigoted, narrow-minded, Bible-thumping thing to believe." Right? I just want to retract and my flesh goes, don't do that. Don't make them feel that way. And they don't really see beyond that that the tempter is the one who's basically saying, "God didn't really say that. God didn't really say that." I'm just really not wanting the conflict.

To put it in more practical terms, our day has become a day where we are really concerned about what everyone feels. Right? "I don't want to hurt your feelings, man. I don't want to offend you. I don't want to emotionally wound you with my words." OK? And that's the problem, because I can say I heard what God said. It's very clear. I read it. He's given us living oracles. The prophet has spoken and I get it.

But in my flesh, "I don't really like a lot of that, 'the desires my flesh.'" And then the world says, "You can't possibly believe that." And I'm saying, "I just don't want to hurt you, and as a matter of fact, I can quote Bible verses about how I should love you and love, I think, mean that, I shouldn't offend you, I don't want to hurt you. I don't want to insult you. I'm for you. I care for you and I want to nurture you." And we have this inner debate with ourselves, which is really our spirit arguing with our flesh about how what we say about God's truth may affect other people and we don't want to do that. Matter of fact, if we offend them, we want to say, "I'm sorry. Oh, I'm sorry. Did I hurt you with that? I didn't mean to wound you with that. Matter of fact, if you say that then that's the loving thing to do, because that's, of course, what Jesus would do." That's, of course, what Jesus would do.

Since we're trying to learn the living oracles of God, let me turn you to a passage where Jesus is offending people. John Chapter 6. There are many of them. You know that, right? Many passages. I wish someone would have talked to Jesus and worked out his Christian life a little better, so he wouldn't do that all the time, but it seems like every other chapter he's offending someone. And all I'm concerned with right now is how does he respond when he offends someone? Because I can look at evangelical luminary leaders, best-selling authors, who, when they offend someone about saying what is clear in the Scripture, they go back and say, "I'm really sorry. I'm so sorry. I should have been better at loving you and caring for you. And I didn't want to offend you. And I didn't want to hurt you. And I'm sorry if my words wounded you and I shouldn't do that. We've got to do better, man, we've got to do better. We got to do better. I don't want to hurt you. I don't want to offend you."

Now, if that's the pattern that I'm supposed to follow, I just think at some point I'm going to see Jesus doing that. AT SOME POINT! Right? I mean, give me some template to follow if First John 2 says I'm supposed to "walk as Jesus walked." I just want to know what he does when he stands up for truth and offends people. Well, I got a passage for you. One of many and we



could spend all morning. Do you want a five-hour sermon? We could spend five hours looking at the gospels, Jesus interacting with people and when he says something that rubs them the wrong way, that hurts their feelings, that offends them, that wounds them emotionally, that's not a safe space for the conversation, I just want to tell you, this is one of many examples. But let me give you this one.

Look all the way down to verse 60, scroll down to verse 60. John 6:60. Let's pick up the conversation here. This is the king. This is Christ. This is the God we are following, not the best-selling authors of our day who claim to be representatives of real loving Christianity. But let's see what Christ says. I don't know, I'm just guessing it might be different. John 6:60. "When many of his disciples heard it," they're talking about the bread of life, all that. Well, here's the response, because I'm interested in the response and Christ's response to their response. "This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it?" Oh, man, we did not like that sermon. Verse 61, "But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, he said to them, 'Do you take offense to this? Oh, man.'"

Look at verse 62. "I am so sorry. I didn't know that offended you. If that wounded you I am sorry. Can I write a letter and retract what I said? I should do much, much better at saying things in a way that is loving and caring and nurturing and uplifting and edifying. I should never say things to you that might in some way harm your feelings." Can you see all that in verse 62? He says, if you were offended by that, "Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?" OK, there's the Daniel 7 reference. "The Son of Man coming on the clouds before the Ancient of Days," presenting himself and all the worlds are called to submit and obey to everything he says, all the allegiance of the world going to this Christ.

You know this truth, by the way, got him crucified before the Sanhedrin that Stephen is talking to. Matter of fact, the regalia of the high priest were torn that day when Jesus made clear this reference regarding the Son of Man, and the high priest tore his very expensive clothes, saying it's blasphemy. "What other testimony do we need?" Crucify this man. Because that was offensive. Now it was biblical truth, everything in the Scripture was leading up to that, the coming of the Lord in human form to redeem us as a suffering servant and then to be exalted from death and to be the King of kings and Lord of lords. All that was in the Bible. And yet it was offensive to them. And he goes, I'm talking about the bread of life and all of that, maybe connected to the manna in the wilderness. Hey, if that was hard for them to take, I just want to say, what if I went to Daniel 7 and started applying that?

Let me truncate this for you. They said that truth offended us. Jesus said, you ain't heard nothing yet, right? And if you want to get offended, let me just go further into Scripture. You're going to be really offended. Why? Keep reading. "It is the Spirit who gives life." Now underline this, "the flesh is of no help at all." Now they have no spiritual life in that they're dead, according to Ephesians 2, in their transgressions and sin. The people listening and, of course, the disciples just passing along the complaints, they're just forwarding the emails to Christ. But the non-Christians that are hating this teaching about the bread of life, they are offended and he's going, "Well, they don't have the Spirit." This is the First Corinthians 2 truth that if



you don't have the Spirit, these are truths that are spiritually appraised. You cannot even possibly comprehend them if you don't have the Spirit. Of course, you're going to be offended by it.

"And the flesh is no help at all." Well, they're of the flesh and in the flesh. But here's my question. Read the book of Galatians. Read the book of Romans. My question is, do you have flesh? Are you in the flesh? Well, I'm encased in flesh. So the battle is there. And that's all I'm trying to get you to do with the second point. Beware of your desire not to listen. Now, I know the guys at the water cooler don't want to listen to biblical truth. They don't want to hear you quoting John 6 or any other passage. But I'm just wondering, in your flesh, do you want to quote John 6? Well, your heart does because it's alive to Christ, but your flesh doesn't. Can you see that battle? Just know it's going on. "The flesh is of no help at all." The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. Those are things that are only rightly understood, not by fallen human beings, but regenerate human beings.

But there are some of you here, even among the top echelon, because the disciples were coming to him and the apostles were there. "There were some of you, you don't believe, for Jesus knew from the beginning those who did not believe and who it was who would betray him." Judas, of all people in the upper ranks of the apostles, he's there as the treasurer and he knows he doesn't even have the Spirit. Verse 65, "And he said, 'This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father,' you need new life. Verse 66, "After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him." Oh, the numbers are shrinking. So Jesus said to the twelve, man, get them back quick. Write a letter. I will make sure to apologize to them.

No. He turns to them and goes, "Oh, what about you guys, because I ain't changing what I said, I cannot back down on the living oracles of truth. I am THE prophet and I'm going to tell you what is true. Do you want to leave too?" "Simon Peter answered, Lord," this is the right answer, "to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life," the living oracles, "and we have believed, and we've come to know that you are the Holy One of God." "You are Daniel 7. I know that. So I don't really have a choice," which means Peter's going to have to suck it up, man up, and get offended by what Jesus says. It all started with this, verse 60, "That was a hard saying, oh!" A lot of people were offended. Jesus said, "Were you offended? You haven't even heard all the truth yet." And he says, "Peter, you want to leave? Guys, you want to leave?" And Peter says, "Where are we going to go?"

The living oracles are what they are. The instruction man for the Christian life is sitting on your lap. You cannot change that. And he says, "Don't pull that level, don't push that button, don't toggle that switch. They're painted very clearly yellow and black. Don't do it. Don't eat of the tree." You going to have people saying, "Is that really what God said?" You'll have Christian publishers saying, "Is that really what God said?" Because it's going to resonate with the flesh, because the flesh now can be in sync with the culture and we can all be a part of this movement that's more affirming and more loving. I get it. I get it. But behind it all is the tempter who is taking the words of God and having you doubt them. And I'm saying we've got

to be resolved to know, even though inside of me somewhere there is a desire for me not to listen, I got to listen.

Why? Back to our passage, Acts Chapter 7. Because if nothing else, we need to think of this. How does God respond when his people don't listen? Verse 42. Look at the last two verses of our passage this morning. "But God turned away and gave them over to the worship of the host of heaven." You mean the people that he redeemed out of slavery from Egypt, he gave them over to sin? Yeah, as it's written in the book of the prophets. Amos said, "Look, did you bring your slain beast to me during those 40 years, O house of Israel?" Not really, your heart was somewhere else. I just let your heart be somewhere else. You set up your tent and in your heart you were worshiping Moloch or your star god, Rephan, and the images. I mean, I let you do it. I could have stopped you, I could have zapped you.

And then all that accumulated warning came through the prophets, prophet after prophet after prophet. And then in the end, when you didn't listen, I sent you into exile into Babylon. Ultimate humiliation. Nebuchadnezzar cleans out the place, strips the altar, knocks it to the ground, burns it with fire and you guys are slaves again, not in Egypt, this time in Babylon. So you got punished for it. Number three, jot this down. You and I, we need to "Consider Sin's Consequences." I need you to think it isn't just about a couple of days of guilt and shame when you pull that lever. There are other things that are going to come cascading on the heels of those compromises. We've got to say, that's a good thing for us to think about.

Now, look, there's a passive dimension in verse 42, "But God turned away and gave them over to worship." "Well, I'm glad that doesn't apply to us." Doesn't it? Doesn't it? Doesn't it? Think about it. When in James Chapter 4, he calls the Christians "spiritual adulterers" and they need to weep and mourn and wash their hands, purify their hearts, he says this: "You need to draw near to God," because he's waiting for you right where you left. Is that what it says? "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." I don't want to make too much out of the spatial analogy, but it looks a lot like this. Right? "Here are my people. I brought them out of Egypt. I've redeemed them and now they are going astray in their hearts. And so guess what? I'm backing off."

God stepped back. God turned away. Gave them over. Do you want to go sin this week? You want to pull some levers, push some buttons. OK. But let me just motivate you without that concept. Do you want God further away from you or closer to you? I'd like God close to me. I'd like, as it says in Nehemiah and Ezra, I'd like his good hand to be upon us. I'd like to have a close relationship with God. I'd like to walk in fellowship. First John Chapter 1. I would like to be in the light as he is in the light. I don't want to go away and follow these temptations and then have him step away. I don't want God to step away just an inch from me. I would like to be close to him. I'd like to abide in the vine.

That's what I'd like because I don't want him stepping back. It's not a good thing when the God who is the God of every good and perfect gift, I don't want him stepping back for me. I don't want him giving me over to some kind of habitual sin in my life. He gave them over to habitual sin. They came to church, so to speak, but they weren't really worshiping God, they



were worshiping their own desires and pleasures and what they wanted, this synchronistic kind of "I'm going to kind of want a little Egyptian worship in my worship and can't we kind of have the best of both worlds?" That's all passive and it's bad, even though you say, well, you said he'd never leave us or forsake us. I understand that. The condition of my redemption in Christ in terms of justification, I am never going to be an orphan. But you know what? My relationship with him may not be that close this week based on my response to temptations. I don't want that passive giving me over to these sins.

And I don't want this, the last line of verse 43. I don't want the active response of God in a negative way. "I will send you into exile beyond Babylon." You say, "Would God ever send his kids back into slavery? I wouldn't do that." It's exactly what he did. "Yeah, but come on, God's for us, man. I've read those books about the guy that apologized to the Washington Cathedral. They said, God's never going to leave us. You preach that Pastor Mike. You said, God is never leaving us."

There are so many verses. Think of a verse you've quoted, "God is opposed to the proud, but he gives grace to the humble." How many times have you quoted that? Just think of that one verse. That's a verse given to Christians in the epistles. It was, of course, a quotation of the Old Testament. But he's saying to Christians, you need to be humble. Why? Because God is opposed to the proud. Let me ask you this question. Can God oppose you this week? Absolutely.

Matter of fact, open your Bible, this is the last passage, go to Revelation Chapter 2? Do you know what we're in once I say Revelation 2? We're in these seven letters to the seven churches that Christ writes to these churches of Asia Minor. And as he writes to these churches, he's saying, "Here's who I am. Here are the good things you're doing. Here are the bad things you're doing. Now, if you don't stop those bad things, here's what's going to happen." So that's the pattern of these. And he encourages us with you don't need to overcome, you need to hang in there and you stick to it. You need to do what I tell you. But there's that little penultimate thing that he says of, "You'd better make sure that you stop touching the levers I told you to stop touching." It's called repentance.

Now, who are these people? The churches. What does he think of the churches? Chapter 1 says he's walking among the lampstands of these churches. He loves these churches. He's given his life for these churches. He receives the worship of these churches. He fuels the angel or the messengers of the churches is to preach the word in those churches. He's for these churches. Now, I can say, "God is for us, who can be against us." But I guess the answer to that question in this passage is God himself can be against us. And I don't want that. You need to consider sin's consequences.

Look at Chapter 2, let's just go through a few of these. Look at verse 5, the church at Ephesus. He says, "Remember therefore from where you've fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first, if not, I will come to you and..." bless you because I'll never leave you. No, "I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."



You keep pulling the lever, you keep pushing the button, you keep toggling the switch, he said, don't do it, don't touch that, don't eat from the tree. "If the day you do you are going to surely die." There will be punishment. There will be discipline. There will be consequences. Has God ever shut his churches down that he loves? Absolutely. God wipes his churches out sometimes. "I will come to you," Christ says.

Drop down to the church of Pergamum, verse 16. To the church of Pergamum he says, "Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth." You have people in your church who are going to be warred against. Well, that's huge. I don't want Christ coming against me or people in our church. Well, I'm speaking to the church, the gathered church. Right? Hundreds and hundreds of people here this weekend and I'm saying to the church, pushing buttons, flipping switches, pulling handles, you shouldn't push, pull or flip, then here's the thing. I don't want Christ coming in warring against you. That's the warning.

Drop down to Thyatira, the next sections 22 and 23. Revelation Chapter 2 verses 22 and 23. "I will throw her onto a sickbed." Talking about this immorality, sexual immorality. "And those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation," he's talking about his church here, "unless they repent of her works and I will strike her children dead." What? Sickness and death? That's not a treatable line from the Bible this week. I mean, I'm not going to put that on my Facebook page. But think about it, think about it. That's exactly, exactly what Paul said to the church at Corinth. He says, you know, here are people taking the Lord's Supper in an "unworthy manner." They're not doing what I said. They're abusing this worship service. And he says, "That's why some among you are weak, some are sick and some have even died." Who's killing the people in Corinth? I don't know, you think God can't oppose us because you've heard some one-liners from people that sound godish and you've read Christian books that tell you, you know, he's all for you and never can do anything to oppose you. You've got to read what God says. Here are the living oracles of God.

Look at Chapter 3, the church of Sardis. Look at verse 3. He says this, "Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it and repent." These are words that are written, given to us, in this case by the apostles. This is the last book of the New Testament that's written. "Keep it and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief." That's never a good thing. If I say, oh, I got a thief come to my house tonight. Bad. "Taking stuff I got, taking it away. I don't want that. I want to keep my stuff. I have stuff in my room that I like and stuff in my house that I like, stuff in my garage I want to keep. I don't want a thief coming and taking it." That's a bad thing.

Christ says, "I'm going to come to your church like a thief." And it's going to hit you blindsided. "You're not going to know what hour I come against you." I come against you, I come against you. Can you consider sin's consequences when you're tempted to pull that lever? "It keeps knocking me on the knee. I just want to pull that lever. Everyone else is pulling the level. I don't know, just let's see what happens, maybe I get away with it."



How about the most famous one? Drop all the way down to verse 16, the church at Laodicea. Talk about idolatry, the perfect picture of idolatry, "I want a foot in the world and I want a foot in the church. I kind of want to be right here in the middle." Jesus says, man, I wish that you "were hot or cold," verse 15, "but because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth," if you want a really vivid picture of what Christ feels toward his church when they are engaged in idolatry. That's why John ends his epistle of First John by saying, "Little children, just flee from idols." He says it makes me sick.

And I hope you know, if you've been around church, that the word "spit" is not like spitting something out of your mouth because, you know, whatever. You got a sunflower seed in your mouth. This is the word, you could look this up, is the word "to vomit." I'm nauseous. You want to talk about my negative response to the church, I mean, that's it. Your church makes me vomit. That's not going to make those poetic books that are going to sell well in Christian bookstores. But you know what? It's the living oracles that remind us to choose life and to choose God's blessing and to choose his hand of favor, which means fight temptation this week, church. That's what it means.

And I get it. If we sin and you say you're not sitting, then you're "a liar. The truth is not in you." "We all stumble in many ways." I can think of so many passages. Of course this is a problem. I'm just trying to mitigate it. I'm trying to slow it down. I'm trying to get us to commit ourselves this morning to say, "I'm not going to do that. I'm struggling with that."

I remember when we've read our Daily Bible Reading recently after they sent the spies in and only Joshua and Caleb, we read it this week, came back. Do you remember what happens in Chapter 14 after Moses says, "OK, the indictment is you're all going to die in the wilderness, I'm going to lead you through it, and your kids are going to go into the Promised Land. Your grandkids are going to Promised Land. But you are not. So we're done. We're not going to go in. You said we couldn't take these people in Jericho and Canaan, and so we're done." It's almost a super sad, it's one of the saddest parts of the book of Numbers in Chapter 14. They all show up the next day. Remember that? And they said to Moses, "OK, we're going now. We'll go now. Can we go now? We'll go now. We're sorry. We did the wrong thing."

Like I said, it's more than just the two days of shame and guilt, and then we confess our sin. Moses said you're forgiven, right? Confess and follow God. That's good. Which they weren't willing to do as we continue to read our Daily Bible Reading. But you do understand that the consequences lingered on. And if you're still, and there are so many overlapping consequences to the sins we commit as Christians, if you think about that, sometimes you just grow weary. You may be tired. You may be at the place now, like, "I'm just tired of the fight. I'm tired of the culture pressing in on me. I'm tired of the Satan tempting me. I'm just tired of it all. I mean, those yellow and black levers and buttons and switches, I just, I can't. I just, I don't. I can't. I don't if I can fight another week.

Let me turn you to Psalm 119 just to close. I know I said Revelation 2 would be the end, but... I want to take you here because in the discussion questions, I take you to Psalm 119, actually take you to the next section here, which is, this is an acrostic poem. You know what an



acrostic poem is, right? Every sentence in these groups of verses starts with consecutive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. That's why they're marked with those strange words, Aleph, Beth, Gimel, Daleth, He. He comes next and that I want you to ponder in your small groups this week.

But let me get to Daleth, the section just above it. They all start with the letter Daleth in Hebrew. And that doesn't matter neither here nor there, but the theme of this section I think is so identifiable for some of you who may hear a sermon like this. "You're always talking about this. I get it. I've heard it. I don't trust God and I don't obey God enough. I'm just tired of it all." I want to encourage you that the thing that we're focusing on trying to maintain, the decision to do what God has said, the power to have that capacity, I know in terms of ontologically, there is a sense in which the new birth gives me that capacity, but the fuel to get there is the word itself. The word is not only the goal, I want to know the word and keep the word. It's the word that is going to get me the power to get it done. That's the good thing. The solution is simple - Bible. Right? We get God's living oracles and we learn it and we know it and we recite it and we think according to it and we get the strength to be able to do it.

Let's start in this section here, Psalm 119 verse 25. I guess I didn't give you numbers, did I? But you found it. Psalm 119 verse 25. Daleth. "My soul clings to the dust." Here's a guy who is struggling. You see that, right? But here's his hope. "Give me life according to your word!" I mean, I even think of Isaiah 40, we quote it all the time, right? "Young men, they stumble and fall." Right? They get used and they grow exhausted. "But God renews your strength." It's that verse itself that reminds us of God's willingness to give us power and to give strength to the weak.

"My soul clings to the dust," but I know this about the Bible, "God gives me life." He can empower me. "When I told of my ways," when I was honest, I confessed my sins, "you answered me; teach me your statutes." I need more of your truth. "Make me understand your precepts." I need that. I know spirit and life is everything. I need your spirit. I need your illumination. The flesh is of no value at all. God help me understand this. Get my Bible open, understand it, and then let me think about it throughout the day. "I will meditate on your wondrous works," not just the precepts and the principles, but look at the history that plays out how it all worked in history.

"My soul melts away for sorrow." So whatever's going on here, this is a picture of grief and struggle and he goes, "My soul melts away for sorrow," but, back to the means, "Strengthen me according to your word!" I think of the word, I recognize the truth of your word, I see the promises of your word. That gives me strength.

And then, God, I need your help, like Jesus said, "Lead me not into temptation." Look at verse 29, "Put false ways far from me." Now I know some temptations are never going to go away. They'll be right there banging against your knee. Right? And it'll be yellow and it'll be black, it'll be striped, it'll be warning, don't pull this. And it's going to be right there. But at least let us get it far away from our hearts, right? Just OK, I got that constant chronic temptation, but, God put it away from me.



If you can, if you can move it, great. There are some things built into the cockpit of the Christian life that aren't moving, they're right there. I want to make sure there's a buffer. There are hedges, there are fences and "graciously teach me your law." I need to make sure I don't do what you tell me not to do, I need to do what you tell me I should do. Here's the volitional part, verse 30, that "I have chosen the way of faithfulness." God, I don't want to do these things you tell me not to do. "I've set your rules before me," even when Satan's saying, "Did he really say that? He didn't really mean that, did he? That just seems really confining and harsh." No, no, no. God, I'm going to believe it, "I've chosen the way of faithfulness, I set your rules before me. I cling to your testimonies, O Lord; let me not be put to shame!"

I'm not thinking laterally here, not thinking about... The world's going to shame you. Your non-Christian family members are going to shame you. Satan's going to shame you, the accuser, the brother, you're going to be shamed by a lot of people. What I care about is the ultimate shaming. I don't want to be shamed before God. "I cling to your testimony, let me not be put to shame!" That's called vindication. So here's my commitment: this week, this month, this year, let's all resolve to this, verse 32, "I will run in the way of your commandments." And here's the synergy here, "when you enlarge my heart."

What a great truth. God enables, he strengthens, the truth of his word gives me that power. It gives me the means by which I am able to do the objective of what this sermon is all about. If Moses says don't create a golden calf, then don't create a golden calf. I know your heart wants to do one or at least the fleshly part of your humanity wants it, but don't listen to the tempter, don't give in to the pressure of the culture. And if nothing else fails, just reread Revelation 2 and 3. Just remember, there are consequences when we do and I don't want that. I don't want that for you and I don't want that for me.

Let's pray. God, the paganism of the people in the desert. Such a transparent look into their lives. Just like if I were be able to put up on the screen here the sins of our church, all the people who sit here right now singing Christian songs, with Bibles, taking notes. If I put their sins on the screen, it would be hard for us to take, we'd see a lot of paganism right here in our congregation, a lot of compromise living like the world.

But God today we want to say that we are sorry, we confess our sins. The great news is the offer of repentance. You say to Christians, repent, "be zealous and repent." We need to quote the passage, but at the end of that letter to Laodicea, Christ, you said "Those whom I love, I reprove and rebuke and discipline." I think that's the word, discipline, reprove and discipline.

God, we are thankful that sometimes we found ourselves in Babylon as an act of your discipline, that we've been captured and that we recognize that the consequences help us remember that you love us. Now let us get out of Babylon. Let us get back to serving you. Let us sincerely recognize that it's worth it for us to obey you. Give us clarity about the fact that it really makes a much bigger impact on so many things than we would ever dare to think when we pull the levers we shouldn't be pulling, push those buttons, flip those switches. God, give



us a resolve together to run in the way of your commandments this week in a new and revitalized way.

In Jesus name. Amen.