



Gospel Advance – Part 5

The Challenges of Discipleship

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Well, we are halfway through an eight-part series in studying Acts Chapter 8. It's a series I have entitled Gospel Advance to try and advance the gospel in our community and our generation. I was engaged in that on Friday afternoon personally with a man named Danny. We were talking about some foundational issues as I was leading into the gospel and talked about truth and the nature of truth, the Bible as God's self-disclosure, the reliability of the Bible.

At one point he interrupts me in that conversation and he says, "Well, I have a problem believing some of the things in the Bible." He said, "You know, like that story of that guy who lived in the belly of the fish for a thousand years." I thought I didn't hear him right and I looked at him, and I said, "Huh?" He said, "You know, the guy that lived in the fish for a thousand years. I just have trouble believing that one." I said, "Well, the guy's name was Jonah and it may have felt like a thousand years, but he was only in there, according to Bible, for three days, which is remarkable, but not a thousand years."

And I thought to myself, as we had this conversation, how important it is to kind of straighten out thinking and lay a foundation and do what might rightly be called discipleship, pre-conversion discipleship. We have to teach, they need to become, as disciple means, to be a learner, to learn, to kind of think rightly about things. We had a lot of conversation about the Old Testament versus the New Testament, and that was foundational before I could ever get to Christ on a cross and sin and the call for repentance and faith and all that needs to be explained too. But there's a lot that goes into the discipleship and that's a word that can rightly be used in that category of evangelism as preparing them to come to repentance and faith.

And as I'm praying and speaking with him, I am wanting him to come to repentance. That's the goal. But it would be a mistake for me to think that I can rush to that. I can't rush to that. There has to be a foundation laid. And then let's just say we had a success in the sense that he makes this profession of faith. He says, you know, Danny goes, "I'm just ready. You've straightened out my thinking on these things. I feel like I need to be right with God and I want to repent of my sins, put my trust in Christ right now." That would be great. But for me to think that the job is over at that point would be ridiculous. Right? Absurd. I mean, that is just now entering into another phase of discipleship where I'm trying to teach and train and continue to disciple this man. And part of that discipleship is making sure that what you just think you did is really what you actually did, according to the Bible.

Now, that, I think is something we have seen throughout the book of Acts so far, people coming to a profession of faith in Christ. And then we watch to see where they go. Acts Chapter 8 is a perfect example of this with a celebrity conversion. And he was a celebrity. His name was Simon. He was known as Simon the Magician in Samaria. Everyone paid attention to him. And as Luke puts it in describing this in Acts 8 from the least of them to the greatest, everyone thought he was amazing. They paid attention to this guy. So that spells celebrity,



important person. And we'll see here he's got a lot of money and he's someone who is used to power and privilege and the spotlight and the platforms and all that. That is how this guy lives.

He comes to faith in Christ so convincing is that conversion experience that Philip, who knows the gospel well, he's watched a lot of people get saved, he sat under the preaching of his own pastor, Peter, and he's convinced enough to take him out of the crowd, put him in a body of water and have him baptized to declare his faith in Christ. And not only that, it says that he followed along with Phillip, as Phillip had brought this message to him along with other converts. But Simon in particular seemed to be a real close adherence to this thing called Christianity now. So Phillip was convinced that this was at least real enough to put him before the congregation of disciples and baptizing him.

We saw in the passage last week that the news of the Samaritans coming to faith in Christ was a big deal. You have to listen to that message to just remind ourselves of what a big deal it was for Samaritans to come to faith in Christ. And so they dispatched the news to Jerusalem. The apostles are still in Jerusalem. So then they send Peter and John to go to Samaria, which takes time for the message to get there. They can't just pick up a phone and then it takes time for them to travel back at a minimum two of days. I don't know how long it was before the message got there. I don't know how long it was that Peter was packing. I don't know how urgent that was for him to go immediately. But nevertheless, it took some time, took a week, let's say, at a minimum and maybe a month. Who knows how long it took?

And all that time Phillip here, leading as the teacher and the missionary in this area of the city, this important city of Samaria, everything seems to, at least as far as we know, seems to be going well. Peter comes and John comes, and in this scenario that we're going to study this morning, it becomes very clear, and we kind of previewed this two weeks ago, that his faith wasn't genuine, something was wrong. So wrong that Peter could say, "Your heart is not right before God." So we know that sometimes it's the post-profession discipleship that reveals the distinction between saving faith, real faith, real conversion and a counterfeit faith, a faith that, as James puts it, is the kind of faith that demons might have. They believe the facts, but it hasn't transformed the heart. It's not a work of God's Spirit. It's phony.

In this whole series I'm trying to put you in the sandals of the evangelists. I want you to have the experience like I had on Friday sharing the gospel. I want that to be a regular part of your life where you're talking about biblical Christianity and leading people to recognize sin and to consider Christ and to repent of their sins and put their trust in Christ. I just want you to know when you have that happen and you cheer because you're thinking Luke 15, "there's rejoicing in heaven," I just want you to have an asterisk, at least in your mind, to know this, that sometimes that profession of faith is going to be proved to be not genuine. It's going to be proved to be phony.

And while I don't want to make you in this sermon a skeptic, I want you to know that the reality of what we're going to study here this morning does happen and it's real. This is the kind of thing that all of us, if we've done enough evangelism, we know this is a reality. Those that just



keep boasting of their numbers of people who have made a profession of faith but never really look at those numbers in light of where they go six months down the road, 12 months down the road, two years down the road, well, I start to wonder, are you even understanding the distinction between saving faith and the kind of counterfeit faith that we see here in the heart of Simon the Magician.

So let's study this morning with some practical realities in our minds about where you need to go once you have that victory of seeing someone come to a profession of faith in Christ. And a lot of this I know you can apply to yourself, but let's, as best we can, keep our feet in the sandals of the evangelist. OK? Let's look at this text. We're going to read and study verses 18 through 24 of Acts Chapter 18 and I trust this will be helpful for you. Let's get this in our minds afresh. "Now, when Simon," remember this is Simon, not Simon Peter, this is Simon the Magician, Simon of Samaria. He was a celebrity, he had money, he had fame. "When he saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostle's hands," which, by the way, if you weren't here last week, we dealt with all of this, we need to understand why. We ask the question, "Why is the Spirit late to Samaria?" Because this is not the normal function of how we see right gospel, right response. Right? Then the Spirit invades that person's life and then they get baptized. We see those last two elements reversed. Why did that take place here? All of that was addressed last time. We looked at Acts 19 as a pattern, all that.

So he sees what goes on here when the delayed reality of the invasion of the Spirit in these people's lives with some kind of external confirming, ratifying like authenticating signs which are not spelled out here, but clearly was something that was evident to everyone and Simon wants this power. We looked at Acts 19 as an example of some of the things that might have looked a little bit like the day of Pentecost, where everyone looking on could see something miraculous taking place. Luke doesn't go to the bother of telling us what that is here.

Nevertheless, it's assumed in the passage and when he sees it, bottom of verse 18, "He offered them money saying, 'Give me this power also.'" So Simon the Magician from Samaria wants to give money so that he can be like the apostle putting his hands on people and whatever evidence of that Spirit invasion was, he wants to have that power. That, by the way, if you look up in a dictionary, the word "Simony," simony, that's a word you probably didn't use in a sentence this week. Simony is the English word that historically describes when church officers, church leaders, pastors, they sell authority within the church or when someone tries to buy with money, authority or power or office within the church, that's called simony, for what it's worth. It's just interesting because whenever you run across that word, which you didn't probably not this week, but before you die, if you come across that word, it comes from this passage, simony. Look it up on your phone just to make sure that I'm telling you the truth.

But Peter said, "Well, that's very good that you're aspiring to church leadership, and I'm really glad, it's probably not something that's for sale right now. So I don't know. I mean, not that I want to be the Holy Spirit in your life or anything, but I, you know, I just... at least I can commend you for your ambition in the church." Underline all that in verse 20. No. "Peter said to him, 'May your silver perish with you.'" What a... I mean, I don't know if you can catch the full impact, but may your money that you're wanting to give us, Mr. Rich celebrity man, may it



be damned, perish, may it go to destruction, may it be the object of the wrath of God, along with you, may you go to destruction, may you have the wrath of God come upon you.

No one can preach this passage without quoting J.B. Phillips. Have you ever heard of the Phillips translation? It's kind of a more thoughtful, scholarly paraphrase. It's still a paraphrase, it's not a translation. But he takes this phrase and he translates it this way, "To hell with you and your money." (audience laughs) Which he's taken a little heat for, but that's exactly what's being said here, destruction. May your money go to destruction, may you go to destruction. So that's a hard no. Can I buy this power, this office? No, you cannot.

Matter of fact, that's a bad thing. Why? Because you thought you could obtain the gift of God, the apostleship, the place that we have in the Church, which God has entrusted us with a very special group of skills here, if you want to call them that, endowments from God, Hebrews Chapter 2 verses 1 through 4, where we can suspend natural law, do signs and wonders. That's something you cannot buy. We're in a whole different economy now. You cannot buy this with money. This is something God endows upon you. We were fishermen from Galilee and this is something God grants. You can't buy. You can't obtain it, the gift of God, with money. Simony.

Here is a celebrity coming to faith in Christ, not wanting to be like every other new Christian who says, "OK, I need to learn more about this, go to a small group, maybe you should go through a discipleship program of some kind. I should start a Bible reading program. Someone should keep me accountable for learning verses of the Bible. I admit my temptation." I don't know, do you really think simony is going on at all in our modern age, when celebrities make professions of faith, they want to rush right to the stage and be on the platforms and be the leaders and run church services? I don't know. Am I being too specific here? I'm just saying to you this concept is not dead. I think it's part of the problems, particularly the temptations that come with being a celebrity who comes to a profession of faith.

And here, a fisherman from Galilee looks at a big celebrity in the middle of Israel and says, in Samaria, which is in the middle of Israel, "to hell with you and your money. You're not going to buy this position of leadership." And what do you think most celebrities would say in response to that? "Well, I'll go do my own thing then." Which, by the way, though he has a seemingly penitent response to this, it's just one line is all we have, the post-biblical historical writings, which are a little confused and somewhat conflicting in certain areas, show us that he did go off and say, "I'll start my own thing then. I'm not going to sit there and go through your little penitent, you know, learning discipleship program to see where God places me in the body of Christ." I mean, he went out and started a movement that was counter-Christian, although it had a Christian label to it.

Which again, I can't say much specifically with any certainty, but we know at least Simon was known outside of the biblical writings, even by the second century, as a leader of a cult group, I think is not a wrong way to put it, although that may be an oversimplification. "May your silver perish with you because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money." So



here's the diagnosis. "You have neither part nor lot in this matter." What matter? Well, specifically, I guess in view, in the near view at least, the apostleship. You're not going to be an apostolic man. I'm sorry, you can't buy this. OK? But it's more than that. I don't think you have a lot even in this matter called Christianity. "Your heart is not right before God," which I do think is a categorical statement about the fact your faith is not right.

Because here's what real Christianity is like. Second Corinthians 5:15. I quote it all the time, but a good demonstration of what repentance looks like. "Christ died for us that those who live should no longer live for themselves." It's hard for celebrities, by the way, to have that happen and the humility of being a penitent new Christian, to say, "Oh, my life's not about myself anymore. I'm submitting myself not only to pastors and church leaders, but to disciplers, small group leaders, learning about the Bible. That kind of I'm now going to say, what does God want of me? What does he want for all the things that I direct in my life? I'm putting that asset, that resource of my life completely in God's hands." Think about that. I'm going to now say, Luke Chapter 14 verse 33, here are all my possessions. Here's all of my life. I'm going to take up my cross. I'm going to follow you. What do you want from me? Anything? I'll do anything.

Which I can assure you is not, even if you're a celebrity, to rush on a platform and try and lead big segments and swaths of the Christian movement. It's just... that's not how it works. Not that I'm trying to be specific in saying this is, you know, the only application of this, but certainly that shows that you're trying to merge Christianity as just another commodity in your life to continue the self-advancement, self-aggrandizement or the leadership that you think you deserve. Christ has become a tool or a commodity. It's not Christ is now the Lord. I'll do whatever he wants.

Easy to say that. And I'm sure that Simon the Magician said that. But in this case, when the temptation came to say, well, I'm going to buy my way into leadership, he tried to do that. Peter calls him out, diagnosis it, "your heart's not right before God." So he gives him the remedy, verse 22, "Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible," that's an interesting phrase, "the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you're in the gall of bitterness." You probably haven't used the word simony and you probably haven't used that phrase this week. We don't usually say, "You seem a little testy after work today. Are you in the gall of bitterness, honey?" Gall of bitterness. That's just strange, I mean, I don't know, if I on the translation team probably go for something different here to try and explain this little idiom of the ancient language. But the idea of you have something inside within you that is absolutely contrary to biblical Christianity, to the heart of a humble penitent disciple of Christ.

And it's like you're in a straitjacket, you're "in the bond of iniquity." It's like you have handcuffs on here in your sin. It's like you're a slave to sin. "And Simon answers," this is all we have in the biblical text, "pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you said may come upon me." I don't want my money going to hell and I want me going to hell. I don't want that.

Thus the story of Simon encountering the other Simon, Simon Peter. It's very instructive for us in our day, and I do hope that you are actively involved in sharing your faith, and when you



get to the place of a positive response, we call it a profession of faith, I'm saying I have faith now in Christ, I want you to warn them of exactly what takes place here, and that is your faith will be tested. OK? Another word for that in Scripture, and I shouldn't even say that, it's the same word in the Greek New Testament, there is one word that has translated both "testing" and "temptation" and "trial," all the same Greek word. Now, depending on the semantic need in that particular passage, it may lean more toward the pain of the trial. It may lean toward the struggle of the fork in the road of temptation or it may just be a blanket kind of cold, like it's a test. Nevertheless, it's the same word.

So I want to tell new converts to Christ, people who profess faith, I want to say this, "You should expect ongoing temptations after you become a Christian. They are going to be trials and temptations and in particular tests of your faith." Number one, "Fully Expect Ongoing Temptations." And this you can put in quotes as coming out of your mouth to people who have come to faith in Christ. It was great. I had a great conversation after the last service and I, I mean, just people saying they're exactly where this passage is. And they've got people who have made professions of faith in their life and they know that their lives right now have put them in a place to test whether or not their faith is genuine. And they're standing there, they care about them, they brought them to a place of a profession of faith and now they have to comment on how they're dealing with the test. That's critically important.

But the first step is you should tell them that when you're sharing the gospel with them, that if you profess faith in Christ, if you repent of your sins and you say I want to be in this thing called Christianity, there are going to be trials that are going to, to put it in the words of First Peter Chapter 1, "test the genuineness of your faith." We're going to find out if it's real or not. We need to anticipate that. We need to tell people that.

I made a profession of faith as a kid. I came down the front of the church, pastor put his arm around me, I went back to the counseling room, I got a new Bible, I got a tract. I got a thing to sign, all that. And guess what? Not a single person at the front of that auditorium or in the counseling room told me, not a single person said, "OK, now we're going to see if this profession, this faith that you're confessing, is genuine or not. It will be tested." I didn't get any of that. Do you know what I got? I got people patting me on the back saying, "Welcome to the club." "Let's get you baptized soon as possible." "Let me give you all these verses," matter of fact, that was the playbook, "all the verses of assurance."

"Now that you've just made a profession of faith, I don't know what went on in laying the foundation in pre-conversion evangelism." But here's the thing, before I even talk about post-conversion evangelism, before I look at what I'm going to say to build a foundation of what it means to be a Christian, because who knows what you're thinking? "But I'm just going to tell you, you're part of the family. Let me have you look at all these verses of knowing that now you're in the family forever. Welcome to the Club Assurance of Faith." I'm just saying, just hold your horses on that just a little bit and lets at least stand back and say, "OK, let me just warn you, I'll give you a little bit of reality here that you need to have a bit of skepticism even about your own profession of faith."



Now, here's the danger in this sermon and I know you're looking at Luke 15 saying "there's rejoicing in heaven over a sinner who repents." And all I'm saying is what you just did, I want to make sure it is repentance. Not that I'm the judge or jury, but I am someone who is trying to disciple you through this thing. You went from saying, "I'm not a Christian" to now saying you are a Christian. I mean, I just want to warn you, I want to tell you there's going to be a testing to see if this is real. And the danger in preaching this sermon is some of you are going to have someone profess faith and go, "Oh, well, we'll just see about that, you know, we'll see." I don't want you to go that far. I want you to be excited about everyone's move toward faith in Christ. I want you to say, "Yeah, I have no problem patting you on the back for this." Right?

I had a very good conversation with Danny on Friday and we made progress and there was some receptivity and the doors were open but I needed to be very clear. Listen, this profession of faith that we're talking about in the Bible, this turning from sin to God, we need to know who God is, we need to know what sin is, we need to know what turning to him means, we need to understand the nature of saving faith. All of that you need to understand. Because if it's real, it's going to last.

Matter of fact, turn with me, if you would, to the gospel of Luke. This is an important place to go. These are the words of Christ about this very, very matter we're talking about. It's something that Peter is coming in the middle of. There has been a temptation. He seized power, Simon does, and he wants to buy that power and that is the test. And just like his old life, he can reach into his wallet and pull out money and buy his way into whatever he wants. He wants to buy his way into the apostleship. And that's the test. He's failing the test and Peter's about to point it out.

But I just want to show you that's what Jesus helps people see. As Peter sat there listening to these words of Christ, I'm quite confident he could tie this passage together and this teaching of Christ with what he was experiencing in Samaria when he looked at Simon the Magician. Matter of fact, just jump in the middle of it and then we'll look at the context. Bottom of verse 13. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, the last seven words. "And in time of testing..." This is Luke Chapter 8 verse 13.

It's helpful when I tell you where it is. Right? I just love that you needed that information. Because, yeah, it's important we get our eyeballs on this. And if you're new to the church, what we do on Sundays is we try to study the Bible. So I know a lot of people come, put their arm around the back of the chair and chill. This isn't TV. This is like a Bible study we're doing. We're studying God's word. That's the goal. So it's good to look at these things. If you don't have a Bible, go on your phone, go to ESV.org. You can have the entire Bible right there. Get your way to, in this case, Luke Chapter 8, the last seven words of verse 13. Now you're with me, right? That was a short commercial to give you time.

"And in time of..." Here's our word, by the way. Guess what it's translated elsewhere in Scripture. About half the time this Greek word appears, it's translated "temptation." "In a time of temptation..." Sometimes it's translated "trial" like it is in First Peter Chapter 1, "trial." So that, as Peter said, "the testing of your faith." Right? The "genuineness of your faith" is going



to be revealed. Well, in this case, it says, "In a time of testing they fall away." There are some people who failed the test.

Now, let's get the context. This is about the four soils. You throw the gospel out and you've got four different soils. Throwing the gospel out is the word of God. That's what I shared with Danny on Friday. "Now, the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved." It's like I've had many conversations like that with non-Christians. Right? They don't want to hear it. As soon as you start talking about God, the afterlife, the Bible, Christianity, right? Then it's like, "Well, what about them Cubs this year?" Right? I mean, we just change, we don't want to, it's like bullets off of Superman. They are not interested in talking about that. OK. That's soil number one.

Verse 13. "The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root," they don't have a foundation, they don't rightly understand even what they're talking about. They believe, they have that belief, just like Simon the Magician had walking around following Philip, listening to his evangelism and who knows, maybe he participated in evangelism, "they believe, for a while," but here it comes, "in a time of testing they fall away," they show they're not interested. Which if the historical post canonical records are right, that's exactly what Simon did. He went and developed his own version of Christianity. That's soil number two.

Soil number three, "As for those that fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasure of life and their fruit does not mature." It's not bearing fruit. Right? All these other things that they want, like the rich young ruler. "I want my stuff. I want my life. I have all these things. I'm not interested in really genuinely repenting, even though I said it. I don't have real faith that produces lifelong works that show the proof of my repentance." They're just... they're done. It's the same concept of the time of testing only this one is a slower thing. The parallel texts say as this is kind of expanded in longer descriptions, like in the book of Matthew, it says "when persecutions arise because of the word, they fall away." The idea is it's either immediate, like it was in Simon's case, or maybe it's just slowly they're done.

"But as for the good soil," soil number four, "they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart," they're all sincere, they don't have mixed motives here, "and they bear fruit with patience." See that word, right? They keep going. They continue on. They don't stop. That idea is so important for us to catch, because when you have a positive response to the gospel, most of you think, a lot of us think, I don't want to condemn you in this because perhaps it's not the way you think, is either I have the people who reject the message or people who accept the message. And if they accept the message and respond, hey, great.

I got non-Christians, I got Christians. Within that batch of people that you might be quick to give verses of assurance about their salvation, in that Jesus makes it clear, and he could have done this with three soils, he did with four soils, I think just to remind us, a lot of people



profess faith. And in time the testing comes, they prove that their faith was not real. James making that point about the faith that the demons have. They believe, but they believe in a way that is not the kind of belief that as those last words here in verse 15, "not bearing fruit with patience," not continuing on with that lifestyle of producing in the long haul as the expanded version of this record goes, "they bear fruit some 30, 60, 100-fold." They continue to increase in their fruitfulness.

Without crossing your arms and saying, "Well, I don't believe it, we'll see," I want you at least to say, I want to tell you there's going to be testing that's going to come to test with it. I don't think, at least in the modern era of my Christian life, I don't think there's a time I shared the gospel where I haven't added something almost to that verbiage, that's how I say it, you know, your positive response is going to be tested. And in that testing, as Jesus warned, we will see whether it's genuine or whether it's not. That's hard when we're working and rushing toward just make a commitment of faith, just profess your faith in Christ.

Back to our text here. Acts Chapter 8. Peter sees what's going on and he says, we've got a problem. Take a look at what he says. I mean, I kind of made fun of it earlier, but here he says, "May your silver perish with you." I mean, no, hard no. Because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money. "You've neither part nor a lot in this matter, your heart is not right before God."

That may take courage, but it doesn't take a ton of insight. That may take courage, but it doesn't take a lot of insight and some of us lack courage, but we have the insight because you see things that are completely incongruent with a profession of faith. I mean, I had a great conversation just a little while ago with... here's someone who is trying to lead someone to faith in Christ. There are professions of faith. And now it's like they say, "Nah, I'm not even interested in going to church." And the responses are even good at having their defense. "Well, you know, I don't have to be going to church to be a Christian." I mean, that was one of the many things in the menu of descriptives of a person who is claiming faith in Christ and they'll be, "Yeah, I'm a follower of Christ. I just don't want to follow those things that Christ said."

That doesn't take a lot of insight to say something's wrong with your profession of faith. Perhaps if you're a real Christian here today, you know that because you look back at your life and maybe you've had, like I have, those professions of faith early on and the time of testing comes and while it's not, you know, I wasn't growing pot or, you know, a drug addict or in a gang killing people in Santa Ana, but I know that in the time of testing I failed. Because what I did was continued on my path doing what I want, hoping to have Christ come alongside and just affirm everything I want. Just like Simon, I want God here to come alongside and give me the continued celebrity that I had before. And that was the kind of thing that made perfect sense to him as a non-Christian claiming to be a Christian. It's so important that we have that time of reflection. And if we see something incongruent and we say no, that's completely opposite, then we're willing to call that out.



Do you know what calling that out is, the word for that, in the Bible? It's called rebuking them. Would you say this is a rebuke from Peter? Yeah. Oh, yeah! "To hell with you and your money" is a rebuke. That's a rebuke. And he rebukes him hard in this passage. OK, I just want you to be bold enough to give a clear rebuke when you see things that are incongruent with the profession of faith.

Number two, put it this way, you need to "Clearly Rebuked Sinful Actions." You see sinful actions in professing Christian's lives, you need to say that's wrong. A rebuke is a clear statement of you are doing something that is not in keeping with what you are saying you are. You are doing something that is opposite of your profession.

Matter of fact, go with me to Titus. Titus is a good example of a guy trying to build a church in a tough environment. And again, I'll get some context here in a minute, but can you drop down to a great line here in verse 16 then we'll get the context? Talking about people who say, this is Titus 1... I didn't give you the chapter again, did I? Man! I'm just failing. This is not my first sermon, but it feels a little bit like it right now. Verse 16 Chapter 1 Titus, New Testament, Bible. OK? Just to be clear that's where we're at, right? You got it.

It says, "They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works." OK? When you see that, you need to point it out, you need to point it out. You say, "Well, I'm not a preacher." You don't have to be a preacher. "Well, I'm not an apostle." You don't have to be an apostle. "I have no positions of leadership in the church at all, Pastor Mike." It doesn't matter. Here's an old line, it sounds so good when we think about it in a wholesome context that I think is palatable, "Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." That feels good, a men's ministry verse, right? Until it means... OK, sharpening means there's stuff that needs to be filed off of your life right here. And when you claim to know God but your deeds are absolutely incongruent with that, you deny him by the things that you're doing, then don't tell me you're Christian and you're not doing what Christ said, something as simple as, that we should be a part of a band, a community of brothers, in a church that we're under the leadership of the people that you've gifted to lead in the church, that you have a church family, that you have a pastor, that you are in a functioning church, being a good steward of the grace of God within you, functioning in a ministry post that you're going to church and not forsaking the assembling of yourself. Don't tell me you're a follower of Christ, but you don't follow Christ. That's a problem.

And Peter was willing to say it in some dramatic terms, and I'm thinking maybe the words are not the ones you want to echo here. Right? I don't know that for sure, we can't say, oh, there is a layer of, you know, kind of the John the Baptist prophetic and the Peter Apostle kind of being very strong. But again, I don't think most of us even want to point it out. "Who am I to judge them? Judge not." I mean, all this stuff that we say in our hearts, "I don't want to be the Holy Spirit in their life." All these things that keep us from doing the very thing that we should be called to do when we see something that is incompatible with your profession of faith.

So I want to warn them, your faith is going to be tested. When I see someone failing the test, I got to be gutsy enough to say something. Maybe it'll help at least the power differential



between an apostle and some new convert in Samaria, even though he's a celebrity, which I tried to say as I read it, sure is a turnaround of a Galilean fisherman and the big celebrity in Samaria. Like we saw Peter, the fisherman before the Supreme Court, the Sanhedrin, I mean, it's amazing the power and boldness and courage of Peter.

Nevertheless, that differential of in the body of Christ, Peter, you're the senior preaching pastor of a megachurch in Jerusalem and you had a brand-new convert, of course you should call him out when you see that he's professing God, but he's denying God by his actions. Maybe that power differential would help you, at least to see that this stuff can happen in our lives, even outside of our families. Which I guess the first thing I would say is in your families you ought to have this going on.

But let's say you were called into ministry here in the church and the youth pastor says to you, "I'd like you to be a small group leader in our high school ministry." So you go and you become a part of the high school ministry and you've got in your group here, your job is to help them apply the messages that the high school pastor is preaching. And so you got these high school students and you are there and you now see something completely incongruent with someone who says, "I'm a Christian, I profess faith in Christ.

Let's just say he's a big middle linebacker on the local football team. And before he was a Christian man, that's just his identity. And he just, you know, would throw little nerds into their lockers and he was the bully on campus and he's huge and big and muscles, always in the weight room. And that's the guy who now says, "I'm a follower of Christ."

And you say, great, it's all about now Christ being your Lord. It's about you living out this faith in your campus. It's about you showing the repentance by your deeds. And he says, "You know what, you called for that Bible study on our campus. I'm so for it, I want everyone there. So what I'm doing is I'm telling people, you'd better be there or I'm going to beat your face in. I've even beat up three people this week who told me they weren't going to come to the Bible study." You're the small group leader. You sit there and go, "Well, that's not the way I would get someone to this Bible study. I just think maybe the campus lunch, you can just maybe invite them... I don't know. I don't want to be the Holy Spirit in your life."

I think you're going to say, "wait a minute, your old life and the way you functioned, you now live under a different set of rules. You're not going to be a bully now for Christ, right?" Just like you're not going to be a celebrity here using your money to try and buy your way into the spotlight so you can be the megachurch pastor. That's not how this works. You would rebuke that guy, that 17-year-old middle linebacker who thinks he's a big shot on campus. You would rebuke him for using those same things, that same value system and trying to use it for God. You'd say, "No, it's wrong," and you'd call him out. I mean, that would be your role. You would see that as a 30-year-old guy dealing with 17-year-old boys, you'd be like, you need to follow Christ.

If the pastor preached in the high school ministry about obeying your parents even as a post, you know, adolescent football player, and you had him say, "Well, I don't want to obey my



parents. I don't want to obey them. My parents are idiots." Right? You'd say, "OK, you are now professing faith in Christ, but your actions and your words and your influence, it's denying it. You'd call them out. And I'm just saying, you got to get to that place, even with your brothers and sisters in Christ who you sit across from in a small group. And it may be that it's done privately and carefully. It's done with words that are diplomatic, but it's done.

Do you think the power differential between Nathan and David was, "Nathan was a big shot, David was this little guy?" David was the king. He was known as a warrior. But when there was an incongruity between his profession of faith and his life and Nathan finds out about it and he says, "Man, this is a problem." Nathan is willing to go in and say, "David, you're the man, you're the guy, you're the sinner. You are now in big trouble with God. You're living a life that is inconsistent with your profession."

Nathan was willing to do that in the Old Testament. We got to be willing to do that, regardless of where you are in the power structure as you see yourself in the church. You've got to do it. Because God says to people like the Corinthian church who said, "I don't want to do that." I'm sure was a lot like the modern church. "I don't want to be a Holy Spirit with them. I don't want to be the guy narking on people. I don't want to judge anybody." That was such the pervasive perspective that there were people involved in an incestuous sexual relationship in the church that no one wanted to confront. And Paul is livid with this. He says you guys should have put that person out of the church, but you don't want to confront him.

And then later in the book, he says this, it's like you guys are willing to have a little bit of leaven in this lump, like it's not a big deal. You know, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." Why does God want a pure church? Why does God want you to make sure that your brothers and sisters in Christ are being faithful to their profession of faith? Because he knows that, all you have to do is read Revelation Chapters 2 and 3 about how he views the church, a little bit of compromise in the corner of the church that goes unchallenged and undealt with, it just becomes this massive thing that affects the entirety of the church that God then says, well, we can't go any further.

Just like in the Old Testament, the narratives of the Old Testament play this out in Achan, one guy who put all this stuff under the carpet in his tent because he went into Jericho and took stuff God said not to take. God says, "Well, I'm not going to move forward with this congregation until we deal with this problem."

You need to clearly rebuke sinful actions. I know you don't think that is your job. But every time you read the Bible, I hope you realize as it says in Second Timothy Chapter 3, that this God-breathed document that you're studying every day and memorizing verses out of, "it is useful for teaching, for correction and for training and righteousness." That has to happen, not just for yourself every morning as you stare into the word of God to see how your life ought to be altered. It's got to happen in other people's lives.

Look at the context of the passage, I still have you in here, right? Titus Chapter 1. I mean, that's why you study the Bible. Verse 9. I know this is about church leadership here, but we try



to "hold firm to the trustworthy word as it's taught," this is Titus 1:9. One of the reasons, at least part of your life, it has to be as a ministry to other people's lives, "so that you may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine," like that. Maybe I should partner someone, take them through discipleship, but "also to rebuke those who contradict it."

Some say, "Well, I don't want to start rebuking people. What if they are really Christians?" Well, in a context with a lot of external pressures of compromise in the culture, look at verse 12. He says, you know, "The Cretans prophets have said, 'Cretans are always liars and evil beasts and gluttons.'" That was the island he was on, the island of Crete. He says, "This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply," make it clear, make it make it firm, "that they may be sound in the faith." I want real Christians when they're tested with compromise, I want them to pass the test. So if they're doing the wrong thing, I want to rebuke them. I want them to be sound. I don't want them devoting themselves to Jewish myths that have actually crept into the church and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. No, I want to be pure. To the pure all things are pure.

Well, a lot of times in rebuke, someone who's doing something that is incongruent with their Christian life, they are Christians and you're just helping them be sanctified and sometimes they're non-Christian, look at verse 10. "There are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers, deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party." There was a band within the church in Crete, just like it was all over the early church, that said you've got to adhere to the Old Testament ceremonial laws and therefore they were perverting the gospel as the book of Galatians says. It was a big doctrinal heresy. They weren't saved. And what do you do with them? Well, you rebuke them. "They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach."

Dropped down to verse 15, we stopped with the "all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing's pure." They keep perverting everything. They failed the test left and right. "But both their minds and their consciences are defiled." "You are not right with God," Simon Peter said to Simon the Magician. "They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are," in this case, "detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work."

I don't know sometimes when I'm saying to someone who I should care about, your life right now is inconsistent with your profession. I don't know if I'm talking to a Christian or non-Christian. I need them to figure that out for sure. And sometimes I have the insight to see. But I do it just whether I'm dealing with someone who needs to be sound in the faith because they need to get over this temptation or whether I'm dealing with someone who's failing the test because they're proving they're not Christians. Either way, they got to be silenced, they've got to be confronted, they have to be sharply rebuked.

Some people say, "Yeah, well, this is... I know the Bible and this is a pastoral epistle, so..." At least jot this down. Romans Chapter 15 verse 14. The word "noutheteo," which can be translated as confronting someone when they're doing the wrong thing with the right thing. Noutheteo, it's such a big word, "to confront them," "to address the wrong." Paul says to the rank and file, pew-sitters within the Church of Rome, you don't have to be an apostle, you



don't have to be a preacher, you don't even have a position of leadership, he says, I know, "I'm satisfied, brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness and filled with knowledge and able to," here's the word, "noutheteo one another." You can confront them.

Matter of fact, it's often translated "to warn them." And that's what we're doing. You're in the bond of iniquity, man. You are not right with God. You're able to instruct one another, to warn one another. And he says, "I know in some points I've written you very boldly by way of reminder." I continue to be bold. We need the boldness to clearly rebuke sinful actions. There's so much more that can be said on that. But we're running out of time.

So go back to our text in Acts Chapter 8 and notice he doesn't just diagnose the problem because that is a frustration when someone says, "Well, here's the problem with your car," but they have no way to fix it. The fix is simple, one word. Seems like the answer for everything in the New Testament. Well it is. It's the answer for everything in the Bible. Sinful people need to repent, verse 22, repent.

Matter of fact, let's just write it down. After that one word is enough to get our third point. "Sincerely Call for Repentance," number three. Call for repentance and say, "You need to turn around. This has to stop, Simon, you cannot do this. You cannot just continue with your selfish ambition and trying to use your bank account to get up in this church. You now want to be a big fish in the small pond of Christianity. That's not how this works. You're a neophyte in the faith, you need to learn, you need to sit back and with your heart of sensitivity to God you need to be ready to grow."

I want you to quickly underline or note the elements of this remedy, this call for repentance. "Repent," there's our word, "therefore" and here's the definition, "of this wickedness of yours." He could have used a lot of words here like "of this booboo," "of this mistake," "of you not doing it quite right." It's a big, strong word, "your wickedness," "and pray to the Lord," I like that. Clearly not Catholic theology here for the first Pope, according to the Romans, not "pray to me," "not father, I have sinned. Forgive me." This is you need to talk to God. I just love that redirect. Right? You got to deal with this before God.

And I said this was interesting, "if possible," if possible, "the intent of your heart may be forgiven you." That's an interesting way to put it, but it seems like I don't want any presumption on the grace of God here. You need to go with a kind of contrition that a real penitent person has saying, "God, if you would, forgive me." Because he's the violated party, verse 23. "For I see that you're in the gall of bitterness," you got something internal that is antithetical to a real heart of conversion, "and in the bond of iniquity" it's like you're a slave of sin. "And Simon answered, 'Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you've said may come upon me.'"

Go to Psalm 51, speaking of Nathan and David. Psalm 51 is one of the two psalms written in response to Nathan's confrontation that David receives and he repents. This is a good picture of repentance. Psalm 32 and Psalm 51. But I want us to look at Psalm 51 and see if you can't see every element of what I just read to you in this psalm. OK, the first thing is some really

strong words for sin. He doesn't say your mistake, he says you need to deal with this, repent of this wickedness of yours. Just look at some of these ways that David describes his own sin.

Look at verse 2. "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity." I know you don't use that word much either, but that word is a pretty strong word about the twisting and perversion of what I've done. "And cleanse me from my sin!" Now there's the common word for it, even though that's a bigger word than we give it credit for. And he gives us another word, verse 3, "I know my transgressions." I've gone way out of bounds here. That's what transgressions mean. I have gone way beyond what you've said to do. And he used the word sin again, "my sin is ever before me." Look at verse 4, "Against you, and you only, have I sinned and done what is," here's another word, another synonym for his sin, "I've done what is evil."

I mean, how many people in their repentance have called themselves evil? Right? Have said my iniquity, my transgression, my sin, the evil that I've done. Peter's treating it the way every penitent person should treat their sin. If you're going to build some sub-points real quickly, I would say one thing I want my discipleship to teach people in the midst of their failing of a test, it seems like at least that they're failing, I want to say you need to repent, and here's how I would put it, "You need to call sin, sin." And that's what confession is. You're admitting this is wickedness, this is transgression, this is iniquity, this is evil, this is wrong. And you know what most people do? They put a comma after that and they say, "but... here's why I did it and here are the reasons." And, you know, they start to rationalize and justify what they've done and excuse it. Real repentance just gives the wrong like David does, "I've done wrong. It's iniquity, it's transgression, it's evil, it's sin."

Peter says you need to pray to the Lord. This whole psalm, by the way, is a prayer. Look at verse 1, "Have mercy on me. O God," David is talking to God, "according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions." Look at verse 4 again, "Against you, and you only, have I sinned." He knows who he's really wronged. And I'm thinking there are a lot of people in Bathsheba's family that I think have got another opinion on that. You've sinned against a lot of us. And he really had. He sinned against the armies, the commanders, Bathsheba's husband, the family, everyone had been sinned against here, it seems like. And yet David is praying directly to God.

How many people think that they need to apologize to their Christian friends or their small group leader or the shame they brought to their family? You need to talk first and foremost and primarily the prayer of repentance goes to God. Do we need to confess it to people? Of course we do. But I'm just saying that's a good counseling point, say that sin is sin, speak directly to God. You're praying directly to God. You praying to the Lord.

And then I pointed this out a couple of times, but "if possible," what a strange thing to say, "Pray to the Lord, if possible." If I ask you the question, is it possible for Simon to be forgiven? Of course you would say yes. You'd say, "Well, yeah, just claim the promise of God. Right? Confess your sins. He's faithful and just to forgive your sins, cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Just do it, man. Pray the prayer." And I'm just saying this, there's no



presumption upon the grace of God when the real repentant, penitent heart says, "I've sinned."

Is that in Psalm 51? How about this? It creates some issues in our minds, doesn't it? Verse 11, Psalm 51:11, "Cast me not away from your presence. Take not your Holy Spirit from me." All you got to do is look at all the other psalms David writes, and you think, "You don't believe that." You believe that when you confess your sins, God separates you from your sins as far as the east is from the west. Of course, you preach that to people, but when you're in the midst of your own repentance, you're like, "Man, I don't know. If you could, if you would. I don't know if you will." I mean, there's this sense of like, I don't earn this, deserve it. It's like some people, you've heard the old line, right? "My job to sin, God's job to forgive." God, that's what he does. There's a presumption upon the forgiveness and grace and mercy of God. We shouldn't presume upon that at all. Say that sin is sin, speak directly to God, don't presume upon grace.

He says, "You're in the bond of integrity, the gall of bitterness, the bond of iniquity," that picture of that enslavement. I put it this way you need to "Fear the Power of Sin." Do you think David has any of that here? When he is dealing with his lust and adultery and his covering up by killing Bathsheba's husband, look at what he says here in verse 5. After all this discussion about sin and iniquity, evil, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, in sin did my mother conceive me." If you're the counselor here you're like, "Oh, that's a little too far, right? I mean, you don't need to go that far." I mean, he's past the focus on this transgression. Now he looks at the way he's so out of sync with God even from his birth. And that's a great text to quote when you're teaching systematic theology and anthropology, saying, "Yeah, we're born in sin, separated from God."

It's a Romans 5 principle, it's clear, I get that. But it's a prayer of penitence saying this, "I am so messed up, messed up from the beginning. It's like my whole bent in life is to sin." He fears that bond of iniquity. He fears the fact that this is who he is. And I know that what you want is so different than that, verse 6, "You delight in truth in the inward being. You teach me wisdom in the secret of my heart," and it's constantly rebelling. I have so many problems. This is a prayer, a humble prayer of penitence. Calling sin, sin, speaking directly to God, not presuming upon grace, fearing the power of sin. Those are the four things you kind of see teased out in Peter's response to Simon's sin and the failure of this test. But then it is interesting how Simon responds, right? He says, "Pray to the Lord that none of this happens to me." Look at verse 4 of our psalm. That's not how the real penitent person responds.

"Against you, and you only, have I sinned, and I've done what's evil in your sight." Now look at this line, "So that you may be justified in your words." I sinned. I deserve to be punished. "And blameless." No one can say you didn't do the right thing here, God. If you kick me out of your family, if I don't have a place in Jerusalem, if I'm not the king anymore, you are completely justified. I mean, Nathan said the baby was going to die. I mean, I'm thinking you're not going to accept that. That seems like an overresponse. No, you're justified in your judgments. What you said about my sin, I totally get it. "You're justified in your words and blameless in your judgment."



Hey, if Simon was struck dead for doing something that is egregious in this passage compared to even the response of God to Ananias and Sapphira knocking them dead for lying, you recognize that that is what Simon deserves. He does deserve to lose all of his money and to die on the spot. That's the heart of a real penitent person. They fully own the transgression and they even see that if God were to punish them, they completely deserve it.

David had that even long after because one of the things Nathan said when David sinned, "The sword is not going to depart from your household." And when his son rises up, Absalom, to try to overtake the throne, and he does so for a while in the coup that takes place in Israel, David is being forced out of Jerusalem. He goes to the Kidron Valley, up the Mount of Olives, and there's a man named Shimei who hates David and he starts throwing rocks at him and cursing him.

David still got an entourage around him, even though he's the kind of the deposed king of Israel at that point. One of his commanders says, "Let me go over there and kill this guy." And David says, "No." He says, "What if the Lord had just called him to do this?" I mean, think about that. A guy is throwing rocks, some dirtbag in Israel, is throwing rocks at David and cursing him. He's the king. But he says, "Yeah, I'm the sinner who sinned. And all of this is happening because he's just in his judgments."

That's fully owning the transgression. And what happens? Well, in the rest of this psalm, the good things happen. Verse 10, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Verse 12, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation, uphold me with a willing spirit." Then I'll become the discipler. "I'll teach transgressors your ways and sinners will return to you." Verse 15, "O Lord, open my lips, my mouth will declare your praise. For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

I know people see all this talk of repentance and contrition and weeping over our sin. You don't get it if you're not a Christian. I get that. But I do want to say, at least to you skeptics, you do know where this ends for us with the feeling of complete release of our guilt. Joy. The kind of deliverance that we celebrate in our songs. Singing "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." You're focused on the fact "I can't believe they call themselves a wretch." Yeah, we do, because it's true and you are too, it's just you don't see the amazing grace of God, the amazing, costly grace of God. And it's all available to us. But it needs real repentance, not fake counterfeit repentance, not trying to merge Christ into your life. It's the precious, expensive redemption that ransom souls.

Price. Expensive. I thought of that because my lease is about to come up on my car and don't talk to me about what a bad financial arrangement leases are. I get it. But I don't want to mess with cars. I just want it to work and it doesn't work, send it back to the dealer. So I got these leases and they come up and I don't drive very long, so I can get the low mileage lease and it's pretty cheap. It's affordable. Whatever. My lease is coming up, that means I need a new



car. So I look at the car I really want, not the car I REALLY WANT, you know, you know the car I really want. Right? I won't get that. That blue Porsche Carrera doesn't look good next to the pastor's office, so that's not the one.

But the car I want, I mean it's like just the better version of the car I have, it's a different brand. I looked at what they cost. It's unreal what they cost. I see them, that's the car, I'd like that. I mean, I could get away with parking that in the pastor's slot. That's not going to get me thrown out. You guys can swallow it because you're all driving them. So I just want one of those. I was shocked. I can buy, like, two of my Hondas for that. I mean, like, I can't believe it. It's not even a luxury car. It's not a fancy brand. I mean, it's just a Chevy Tahoe. Do you know what Chevy Tahoe costs right now? Unreal.

I thought about my need to get my lease on a new car and thinking about sticker shock, and I was having it. And I was coming back from Chicago on a plane on Friday night and I was sitting there just thankful for the seats. It was one of those newer planes that had the nicer seats, all the gadgets, a place to plug in USB stuff. And I was like, "Oh, this is nice." I start looking around thinking this nice, it must be a new plane. And, you know, I'm not big on planes, but I'm looking around. And I thought, oh, how good it is to fly on a plane that's new like this. So I start thinking, I wonder what a plane costs. Right?

So the plane was so cool, it had Internet access, so I start looking around, what does a plane cost? Not that I'm a preacher that can either drive a Porsche or buy a plane. I get that. But do you know what a Boeing triple seven costs? I mean, nice plane. \$320,000,000 per plane. Now, maybe you can negotiate with the dealers, you go in to buy one, but that's the sticker price. I think I was flying in, what was it, I think I wrote it down. I was in a 737, I think, flying back from O'Hare. And I thought, well, this is much more affordable. Only about \$100,000,000 for that plane new. But still it's more than a Tahoe and it's out of my price range. But I thought, that's a lot of money. I'm flying in this plane, I'm always looking for good deals to fly.

Then I started looking up weird things, right? When you got time to kill. I was like, what's gas costs for this thing? How big is the gas tank? How big do you think the gas tank is? Let's just start a triple seven, 777. How many gallons, how long is it going to take to fill this thing up? How many gallons do you think are in that plane? Ready? Depending on the model, there are three big tanks, 46,000 gallons. 46,000 gallons. So then I looked up the jet fuel costs. What does it cost for jet fuel? And since I'm from California, I wasn't shocked with this. It's close to five bucks a gallon for Jet-A fuel. That's what it's called that America's jets use.

So at about five bucks a gallon, 46,000 gallons. Yeah, I'm not good at math, but I started doing some math on that. What does it cost to fill this thing up? I go to Costco just to save a few bucks on gas, right? But I'm thinking, what does it cost? You know, that's almost \$250,000 just to fill it up. I mean, I do want a good rate to fly from here to Chicago. I'd like to get a good deal. And I'm always, talking about sticker shock, I'm always, like, shocked at how much it cost, especially after COVID now, it's starting to go back up. It's like I got good deals for a while, but now it's like I don't like spending this much money on... even if someone else



is paying for it, people that have me out to do things, it's like you're paying for the ticket. I still want to find the best price.

But if I found an airline that was charging me like \$39.99 to get there, I would start to wonder, (audience laughs) like, what are you filling this up with? Does it have all the safety features? Did you not hire all the guys to kind of check the engines before we take off? I mean, I don't know that I should be flying on a plane that's getting me there for 39 bucks per seat. I mean, are you putting in, like, water in the gas tank? It can't be possible. It's not possible. And I realize this, that I don't want it to be cheap. I just like it to be inexpensive.

Forgiveness. Especially for those who recognize the genuineness of their faith when they get through the tests, they need to remember, as Peter is quick to point out, don't forget that "you were ransomed not by silver and gold, but by the spotless blemishless lamb of God," who through his blood, paid for your forgiveness. I mean, it's an old line, right? But Bonhoeffer was right. This grace thing that we have, it's not cheap. It's the most expensive thing in the world. Someone hands you a free ticket on a plane to go overseas, that's a gift, especially if it's a good plane with all the safety features and with all that gas that it's burning. It's amazing what it costs to do that right. And to have your sins pinned to the cross, I just think it deserves a kind of real penitence, a real repentance.

Not just in our lives, which we always start there, but when someone is there making less of the blood of Christ, as the writer of Hebrews puts it, by their sin, they are "trampling underfoot the blood of Christ." I think you need to call them out on it. You need to be willing to clear the rebuke of that and you need to call for repentance. For those of us who are constantly reminded of the great high cost of our redemption and grappling with our own repentance every week, I hope it's not a big stretch for you to help people see with sobriety the great need to make sure that their profession is in line with their needs.

Would you stand with me? I'll dismiss you here with a word of prayer today. God, we stand before you, it's another one of these sermons we don't like because it's, man, it's not only hard to think about doing, but it's so out of step with evangelical culture. We like to talk about our personal relationship with Christ. We like to atomize this down to no one else can tell me anything about my Christian life. It's about me and God and me and the Bible and God. I just pray that we get past that and think more about, speaking of Bonhoeffer, the community that we're a part of, life together, realizing that iron sharpening iron and people sharpening one another and spurring one another on to love and good deeds and confessing our sins to one another and restoring those who have fallen. When we see our brothers sinning that we're willing to go and confront them, all those principles of Scripture are just as valid and just as needed and maybe more urgent than ever for us than even the Scriptures we like to run back to every day. God help us to see our responsibility to do our best to keep this church, our small group, our sub-congregations, keeping their actions and behaviors in line with their profession.

God, we are so grateful for Peter and all of his flaws. That you're transparent enough in Scripture to show us that he had the boldness to look at someone who was doing something



clearly out of step, was clearly wrong, to be willing to call it what it is. And we're thankful that Simon had to leave the Church to continue his self-aggrandizing, self-promoting behavior, and at least it wasn't put under the banner of real Christianity. We're grateful for that. God, thanks so much for that, give us more Peters who are willing to just be honest, to be clear. To love their brothers and sisters enough to sit down with them and say, this doesn't work, it doesn't fit, this isn't right. And again, God, we don't want to create hypocrites here, we all want to live in keeping with our profession. So continue to work on our own hearts to be faithful to our calling, to our profession of faith as we continue to reach out and love others around us as well. So God, commend us to this difficult work, give us grace, go before us, pave the way for us as we try to do what you've asked us to do in this passage.

In Jesus name. Amen.