



Discernment-Part 2

Wants & Genuine Needs

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I'm sure you, like me, when you were growing up, asked the question, "Can I go outside and play?" To which occasionally your snarky parent might have said, "I don't know, can you?" Remember that? "I'm sorry, Mom—*may* I go outside and play."

Now I appreciate that, and it was good to learn from your parents the proper grammatical usage of words like "can" and "may," which is frustrating because it all seems to have changed in the last 30 years or so. But I found there were other little child-parent, you know, banter that went on like that that was much more helpful, and really provided a great life lesson. Like when you're walking through the shopping center with your family, and you come to the sporting goods store, and you see that glass window and there's that NFL jersey or whatever it might be, and you look and you go, "Man, I need that." To which your dad would respond, "Oh, you *need* that? Do you need that? You need—I suppose you need me to buy it for you because you *need* to have it?" "No, I'm sorry, you're right. I want it. But Dad, I really want it. Can I have it? I'm sorry—*may* I have it?" Have you run through all that with your parents?

I thought to myself, "Well, how helpful is that for life?" Because that's not just trying to adjust the way you speak or the grammar that you use; that's really trying to adjust an immature heart that doesn't clearly distinguish in their thinking between needs and wants. And that's so important. If you don't really understand the difference between needs and wants, you're in trouble. If you don't take an immature heart and begin to distinguish those things, then you've got problems. Not only will you create a bratty person, but someone who goes through life with expectations about things they presumably need that, in reality, they don't—they're just desires and wants—and they become highly disappointed and frustrated in life.

And that's no more true in life than it is in the Christian life. I mean, the Christian life—if we have certain expectations about God and what it means to be a Christian, and we don't see the distinction in our Christian life between needs and wants—we're in big, big trouble.

We get to Luke chapter five. We're studying here through Luke verse by verse; we've come to chapter five, verses 12 through 16 today, a short little scene in the life of Christ, where he encounters a leper, someone with this terrible skin disease of leprosy. And if you're there with your iPad, or whatever, you know what—I dare you to look up the, you know, image search of leprosy. It is a gross, terrible, debilitating disease. And it's various—you know, that word I know is broad semantically in the New Testament and the Old to encompass a lot of skin disease—but the kind that disfigures hands, digits, feet—I mean, it's awful. It's gross, it's debilitating, and it ostracizes people from society.

This leper encounters Christ, and he makes a request of Christ. Now, it's going to be hard—even just with that picture in mind—to begin to say, “Well, this is a want and not a need.” But there is something about the way this leper asks Christ for a healing that makes it clear he's got a kind of maturity and a discernment that most of us don't have. And Christ, in turn, asks him for some things. This text is helpful because if we don't get this in the Christian life, not only can we be bratty Christians, but we can really find a great level of profound disappointment when we expect that God needs to give us some things that he, in fact, is not indentured or obligated or in any way—you know, it's not necessary for him to do it. He has no obligation to do it.

Take a look at this. If you haven't turned there yet—Luke chapter five—we're going to look at verses 12 through 16, five verses that spell out and encapsulate the scene of Christ and the leper. Start with me in verse number 12, where it says, “While he”—that is Christ, of course—“was in one of the cities”—now we're in the region of Galilee, of course, far from Capernaum, we assume—“there came a man full of leprosy.” Now Luke is the only one out of the three that deal with it (Matthew and Mark also record this scene) who uses that word “full.” I mean, he's the doctor—remember, the physician—and he sees this as “Wow, this is an advanced case; it's all over. His body is full, completely, you know, loaded with a case of leprosy.”

“And when he saw Jesus,” the leper—“he fell on his face and he begged him,” as you can imagine (he's got a reputation for healing people's infirmities), “and he said, ‘Lord—now look at this—if you will, you can make me clean.’” The statement of confidence that Christ has the power to do it—“if you will.” What deference.

Verse 13: “Jesus, without delay, stretches out his hand and touched him, saying, ‘I will, I am willing. Be clean.’ And immediately the leprosy left him.”

Now, interestingly enough, in verse 14, now Christ has got a request for him. “He charged him to tell no one, but to go and show yourself,” he says, “to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them.”

“But now even more the report went out about him—it went abroad—and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.”

Start this morning in looking at the distinction of needs and wants by looking at the way the leper comes to Christ and asks him for this healing in a way that, though it rarely plays out in people's

thinking as an example of piety or godliness, it is quite like the prayer request we see that is often the template for praying, what—17 chapters later, in Luke 22—when Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane before his crucifixion, and he prays, and he starts the same way: “Lord, if you will,” he says to the Father—“if you will, if you’re willing”—“let this cup pass from me.” Now, he makes it even more clear when Jesus says, “But not what I will, but your will be done.”

The same heart of Christ—I don’t want to overplay the leper’s request—but clearly, the emphasis in all three Gospels is the way that he says, “If you will. If you’re willing,” which really implies the fact that he understands that your will trumps my will. And if you don’t choose to do it, you won’t do it. “I’m not demanding this of you. I’m not being bratty about this request. I have a need here, and if you don’t fix me, there’s something seriously wrong with the world.” He says, “If you’re willing, you’ve got the power to fix the problem.”

Number one, let’s just start by jotting that principle down; it’s a good place to start. We’ll encounter that principle again in Luke 22. But when it comes to wants—things we desire in our lives—we need to pray with deference. Pray for wants with deference—that sense of “I’m not demanding; this is not an obligation; I don’t think you have to; I’m recognizing that you have the sovereign, free decision to do what you want as it relates to my prayer request—if you will.” And then, if we want to take it even further, to really underscore that humble heart of Christ, we need to have that sense of, “And you know what? I know my will—it doesn’t rule the universe. Not what I will, but your will be done.” That idea of a humble deference.

Why is that? Because maybe this leper knew more than we might imagine in the reality that when it comes to God’s goodness, it is not something that is an obligation for God to dispense to everyone. God is free—as Jesus often illustrated—to use his generosity and his mercy and his grace however he’d like. He’s not bound to do anything. When it comes to our problems, our foibles, our pains, our trials, our sicknesses, our loss, he is not bound to fix any of that. That’s just the reality of it all.

Matter of fact, look across the page at chapter four, verse 27. This passage is still fresh in our mind when it says there in Luke chapter four that there were many lepers in Israel at the time of the prophet Elisha, but none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian. And in Christ’s ministry we’ll find this—even in this passage, if you look for it carefully—you’ll recognize there are many people with infirmities and problems that Christ doesn’t heal. He goes off and prays in a desolate place instead of being in the cities. And I’ll drive that point home later. But we’ll see that Christ passed by many sick people and chose to be merciful and show his healing grace to certain people and not others. And to know that he’s free to do that should change the way that we pray. We ought to come to Christ with our requests with deference.



Because oftentimes we find that those that God loves—his children, we can see this elsewhere in the Bible—that are favored by God are not exempt from the kinds of suffering, and many times when they do suffer, they ask for relief and they don't get it. There's nothing wrong with them. There's nothing wrong with their faith. There's nothing wrong with their walk with God, if you will. They're just suffering.

You've been reading the fun book we've been going through in the Old Testament daily Bible reading, have you? The book of Job? If not, what a great time to get started—right there in the book of Job. As he's suffering and hating life, and he's going through this terrible thing—physically, his family—he's buried his children. It's an awful situation. But if you know the book, you understand this: when it started, we recognize he's got no problem with God; God's not mad at him. And yet, because of some backroom discussion he has with this angelic court, he ends up suffering and prays for relief, and God doesn't bring it—at least not right away. He doesn't answer his prayer. God has the right to do what he wants with everything in the universe. He is not obligated to fix every hurt, every problem, every issue of our lives that causes us pain.

Now, that's not what you'll hear on most religious broadcasting these days, because people want to hear that they are so loved by God that that in some way obligates God to give them health and wealth and everything else that they want. And you may think, "Oh, he hammers on this all the time; we're going to hear that little soapbox speech again." The reason that becomes a common theme from my pulpit is because we encounter it in Scripture so often where God does not—and the pendulum of our theological culture in the 21st century, particularly in prosperous areas like America—people start to see God as their servant who's supposed to grant them everything because of some promise to save them, that it should extend to everything like health and wealth and whatever problems I have—God ought to be quick to fix them. And we become pretty bratty in our praying, demanding God to do things that God never promised to do.

As a matter of fact, you want to go back as far as you possibly can in your thinking, you can go back to Genesis three. And I know we mentioned this not long ago, but when it comes to sickness, illness, and eventual death, those were the things that God promised would happen to everybody on the planet. Adam was made from the dust of the ground. When he sins, God cursed the ground, which included the stuff that his body was made of—rebellion built into the fabric of the universe. And then he said, "You were made from the dust, and to the dust you'll return."

Now I know that's not what we do when someone we love dies, or when we get deathly ill, or when we're vomiting and the flu. We don't stop and say, "Thanks, God, for being faithful to your promise in Genesis three." You don't think that way. You don't pray that way. And I don't expect you to. But you shouldn't sit back and ask, "Why is this happening?" The Bible's been so clear about why this happens—because we live in a sinful world that has been sentenced by a just God; that we will not be in any way, even as Christians, somehow exempt from suffering, sickness, pain, and death.



This man who got his healing in this passage would eventually get sick and die. We've made that point—I get that. But it is so important for us to catch this when it affects our prayer life. And just like the leper, let's at least be clear: when we come to God with our requests, we're saying, "If you will; if that's your will." I know you're able. I'm not demanding it like a bratty Christian. I'm just saying, "If it's your will, I know you can fix this problem." And I'm asking you—I'm begging you; this man begs Christ to fix it. Nothing wrong with that.

One passage on this at least—how about 2 Corinthians chapter 12, just to give you a classic reference to a situation where a very godly man—we know him as the Apostle Paul, who's writing much of the New Testament—has prayed a prayer for physical healing, and God—unlike Luke five—God says, "No. You're going to have a chronic physical illness for the remainder of your life." You know this passage, right? The thorn in the flesh passage.

Now, I know he starts here in verse seven—2 Corinthians chapter 12, verse seven—he starts by giving the reason. But remember this: this is all in retrospect. When he got sick, whatever the illness was, whatever this thorn in the flesh was, he didn't know why. He didn't see it as part of God's good plan for his life. He saw it as a hassle and harassment, and he wanted freedom from it—just as you would. Just like if you had leprosy you'd say, "God, please fix this."

But in verse seven he reveals, looking back, that he understands why: "It was to keep me," he says, "from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations." Now think about that. He was one who was going to write much of the New Testament, was given—as a prophetic figure in the Bible, an apostle—information from God, and that kind of privilege—God wanted to make sure it didn't go to his head; that he was always humbly dependent on him. So he has some chronic physical illness to keep him humbly dependent on God so that he wouldn't disqualify himself as an apostle. And he says it was because of that concern from God—next phrase—"that a thorn was given me in the flesh," some kind of physical pain. It obviously wasn't a thorn—all you need is a friend with sharp fingernails to get it out. This is, you know, a euphemism, an idiom for some physical ailment.

And much like you would imagine—either in Job or picturing the leper—this is a messenger of Satan. You don't look at someone who's filled with leprosy with his digits being knobbed off, you don't say, "Well, there's the handiwork of God there." Of course not. You say, "That's the work of the enemy," even though God may be using that for good, as he does in Paul's life. I mean, Paul sees it as a messenger of Satan to harass me, but it's under the umbrella of God's sovereignty to be used, as he wrote later over there in Romans chapter eight, "All things are going to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose." He recognizes this is for a good purpose in his life—to keep him from becoming conceited.

Now going back in time—verse number eight—he says, “When this happened, I pleaded three times with the Lord—‘God, please.’” Now that’s much like what we see over there in Luke five—begging and pleading. “God, please take this away.” “I prayed about it that the Lord would take it, and it would leave me.” But even that conjunction right there shows me he said, “No.” Instead he says this: “My grace is sufficient for you. You’ll endure it; you’ll get through it; you’ll continue to manage and live; you’re not going to die from this; I’ve got work for you to do, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Now get that in the context here—“My power of your work as an apostle to get this revelation to the masses and even on down to America 2000 years later is going to be perfected—it’s going to hit the mark of what I plan for it to do—through your physical weakness, because it’s going to keep you from becoming disqualified—prideful and conceited. So in that weakness, it’s a good thing, because now you’re going to hit the mark in your life.”

“Therefore,” he says, “I understand that—I’m going to boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses.” Now that’s not a prosperity verse that you’ll hear on, you know, channel 13 this morning—think about that. “Now I’m going to be glad—then I’ll boast all the more gladly about it—so that God can do his good work through this bad thing; that Christ’s power may rest upon me.”

Verse 10: “For the sake of Christ, then,” he says, “I’m content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” When God uses these things for his purposes, then the power of God and the good thing and the strength of his purpose in my life is accomplished.

Now, look at all those things—weakness, insults, hardship, persecutions, calamities—when they all hit his life, including the thorn in the flesh, I’m sure he’s going to pray, like you and I would: “God, I don’t like this; this is bad; take it away.” He’s going to pray for those things. But he’s going to understand God doesn’t always say, “Okay.” He doesn’t say all the time, “I will; I’ll relieve the problem.” And in your life it’s the same way. And we need to get to the place where we recognize when we start praying for the problem, the calamity, the series of insults, the weaknesses in your body, the sicknesses—you need to start by saying, “God, I’m going to pray if you will. I recognize with deference and humility that you are not obligated to take away any of my pains. As a matter of fact, you promised I’m going to have pains. And, as a matter of fact, as a Christian, I understand they’re going to be used for good things in my life from time to time.” No, I don’t want them. I mean, initially I want to say, “Get them away.” But at some point my prayers need to be moving from “I beg you to take this away” to some kind of acceptance, contentment—that it’s okay. “God, I just ask you to allow me to endure this, and to see your purpose accomplished through it.”

How often do we see those prayer shifts in our life? We’re not praying three times; we’re praying 33—303 times—and we’re saying, “Take it away, take it away.” At some point the prayer for that



to be removed needs to stop. Now I know some prayers we're going to endure and persist in forever—the eternally important, you know, things that we know that God wants to accomplish in the world. But when it comes to our sicknesses, our weaknesses, the illnesses in our family, the financial problems or relational issues—whatever they might be—some of those will never go away. And we need to be willing to see our prayers—with the deference—move from “God, I beg you to take it away” to “Okay, I see you're not going to take that away. Give me the ability to endure this in a godly manner.”

I said one passage or two—let me give you one more. One more—I Peter chapter four—before we leave this first point. “If you will,” the leper said—“I know you can make me clean. I know you're able; I'm just begging you. But I'm doing it with an understanding that this is your decision; you have the option to do it or not do it.”

1 Peter chapter four—I guess as you're turning there, I should take a quick sidebar and say this: I'm not saying when these things hit your life—I hope I've made this clear enough already—that you should just gladly accept them without praying first. Pray. The Bible says—here's another passage for you to think through—Philippians chapter four, verse six. I know you know this one: “Be anxious for nothing.” There's a lot of things that are going to weigh our hearts down. The anxiety can be sickness, relational problem, financial problem—whatever it is. “But in everything with prayer, with thanksgiving, supplication, let your requests be made known to God.” So pray, pray, pray, pray, pray. God wants you to pray. You get sick—pray. You have a problem—pray. But at some point, if you recognize that he's not going to change that situation, then you pray that you would endure it. You pray that God's purpose would be accomplished through it. And then you get to experience verse seven of Philippians four, which says, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” Isn't that remarkable? “I'm content; I'm fine; I'm content with this.” That's a godly perspective. It's the godliness of Christ in the garden in Luke 22, and it is apparently the godliness of the leper in Luke chapter five.

But what I'm saying is: if he doesn't take them away, do not be surprised. I want to use the words here to drive this point home from 1 Peter 4:12. It says it—and I find so many questions about “Why? Why is this happening?” “Do not be surprised, beloved”—are you with me? 1 Peter 4:12—“Don't be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you.” God's doing something. In this case he underscores one of the themes in the book—and that is testing; testing you. “Don't be surprised as though some strange thing were happening to you.” What, did you think you had a promise that God would heal every hurt you ever had? He never promised that. He promised to save you from your sins if you confess him and repent. Great—he's going to come through on that. He didn't promise to solve every hurt and pain in your life.

“But instead of sitting there and moaning about it as though some strange thing were happening,” look at this—verse 13—“but rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings.” Now, that's a broad statement, but there isn't a kind of suffering Christ didn't endure. Did he endure physical hurt?



You've read the cross passages, right? The narratives of his crucifixion—beat in the face by Roman soldiers, crown of thorns, spear in the side, nails through his hands and his feet—you remember all that? He knows what it is to suffer. He knows what it is to suffer betrayal, relational problems, money problems. Remember that—we read it last week in Matthew *nine*, verse 58—no home; he had no place to lay his head. He had no place to live. I mean, he knew the pains that we are praying God to fix in our lives. And if he says no, and you share in Christ's sufferings—great. Rejoice and be glad. When his glory is revealed, you are going to rejoice; you're going to see that from the other side of the tapestry. You'll see what God was doing, I trust. We'll rejoice then when his glory is revealed.

But verse 14: "If you get insulted for the name of Christ," it's okay—"you're blessed; the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." Now, I'm not talking about you being glad that your house is being foreclosed on because you were out there racking up debt on your credit card and trying to play the lottery every night. I'm not talking about you being a bad manager of your job and getting fired. You know, I'm not talking about consequences of sowing and reaping, which he says next: "Let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler." Don't sit there and go, "I'm suffering for Christ." No, you're suffering because you're being stupid or sinful. That is different. We're not talking about that.

Verse 16: "Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian"—because you're a Christian—"let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name." Of course, specifically he's thinking of the persecution. But there's a lot of things that are happening in our lives—as Job plays out—where we're suffering and being persecuted because of some larger spiritual battle that's going on. The point is that we ask with the kind of deference that the leper is demonstrating for us in the way that he asks.

And by the way, speaking of lepers, I should underscore this: there's not too many chapters later we're going to hit a story about Christ healing ten lepers. Now picture that—they lived in colonies often because they were ostracized from cities and society (although this one was in a city). The point is, there's a bunch of these. Now, if you picture them as the grotesque disease that this is, there are ten of them made instantly well. And in that story, the point of it is much different, because Christ is trying to underscore that when ten of them were healed, only one came back to thank him. Do you remember that? And you know what Jesus said? He didn't say, "Oh, thank you so much, that's so kind of you—appreciate you doing that superfluous act of thanksgiving and worship—oh, bless you." He says, "Where are the other nine?" Remember that—"Where are the other nine?" What's the implication? "I expect you to be thankful when I do answer your prayers."

Now again, there are times when you beg God to fix a problem and he swoops in and does it. When he does—as Psalm 103 says—you better be telling your soul to bless his holy name for whatever goodness and benefits he's provided. Don't forget—that's what the psalmist says—"forget none of his benefits," and "Bless the LORD, O my soul; let all that is within me, bless his holy name." Be



careful to thank him if, indeed, he has answered your prayer—because you were diagnosed with something and now you’re not sick; if you had a financial problem and it’s been fixed; you’ve had some relational issue and God has repaired it—be thankful. You certainly owe him that.

Speaking of what we owe him, the next verse in Luke chapter five gets to Christ asking him some things. Now this is where we build the contrast in sharp focus. We’re going to make the distinction between wants and needs. You can’t see it any clearer than you see it in the juxtaposition of verse 13 and verse 14. This section of asking with deference—and Christ responding with “I am willing; I’ll do it”—then in verse 14—Luke chapter five, verse 14—Christ now asks the leper, the healed leper, something.

Now, he doesn’t say this—let me read it this way. He doesn’t say, “If you’re willing, tell no one. If you would—I know you could, I know you’ve got the ability to say something or not say something—and I’m just asking if you’re willing.” It’s not what he says. He uses a very strong word that’s translated well here: “He charged him.” He commanded him—strongly—“to tell no one, but to go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them.”

Leper asks of Christ, “If you will.” What does that mean? It’s optional. “I know it’s your decision. I know it’s up to you.” Christ says, “Great—I’ll do it. I’ve got something for you.” It isn’t optional: “I’m charging you to do it. I’m charging you to go back to what the Bible says about what healed lepers should do in response to their healing, and I want you to do what Moses *commanded* you to do.”

Do you see the difference there? It’s strong. One—his sense of deference regarding options, making clear that my requests to God—most of the time, 99% of our desires and wants—and when Christ asks us to do something, they’re not suggestions; they’re not desires; they’re not wants—they’re commands. They’re needs.

Number two—let’s put it down this way: you need to see the need to obey the Bible, which—both Old and New Testament—are in view here. Old Testament—“you need to keep the command of Moses,” we’ll talk about that in a second; New Testament—in that Christ is giving him another command: don’t say anything about this. At least they represent both covenants here. What’s the point? Here is someone who had a lot of reasons not to obey. I mean, think this through with me.

Maybe in your study Bible or even your reference Bible, in the margin you’ll see Leviticus 14. Don’t need to turn there because it would take a long time to read it all out; let me give you the



executive summary real quick. In Leviticus 14 we have the things that you're supposed to do if ever you had leprosy and you think you don't have it anymore—if you got cured of it somehow. Chapter 13 talked about all the different varieties of skin diseases under the rubric or the heading of leprosy. So you had leprosy described in Leviticus 13; what you're supposed to do if you get cleansed of leprosy is in Leviticus 14.

Now, there's a lot of reasons if you're this guy you're not going to want to do this. Number one—let's think about this. Where are they? They're in Galilee. Galilee's way up north. Remember the geography of all this. The priests and the offerings took place way down south in Jerusalem. When we looked at some of the travel that went back and forth, I told you this before—this is about a 27-hour trek on foot, okay? And since there were no buses, planes, or trains, that's what you took—you took your feet (or your donkey), but you're still going to take 25 to 30 hours to get there. That's like driving to Chicago in your minivan. That's going to take a few days; that's a long way to go. If I'm going to give this offering, it's going to take at least two or three days to get there—probably more like three or four—and three or four days to get back.

And Leviticus 14 describes what you're supposed to do if you once had leprosy and you're going to show proof to the priests that you don't have it. It takes a week and a day, at least, for you to prove that through all the rigmarole that's involved—if you will—in Leviticus 14, which starts with an offering. You've got to take two birds; you've got to take two ewe lambs—one-year-old lambs without defects; you got two birds, two lambs. You got to take about six gallons—if you will, to put it in some kind of measure that we can identify with—of flour that's mixed with fine oil; then you got to take half a pint of pure oil with you. So already I'm starting to think about what this is going to cost me. I'm going to have to travel there, I'm going to have to spend, you know, a week at least with going there and coming back. I'm going to have to have a week of the rigmarole of all the prescriptions of Leviticus 14. It's going to cost me the two birds, the two lambs, the fine oil, and the flour—my backpack full of flour.

Then, if you've ever read the passage—maybe this will be a homework assignment—you've got to shave your body completely. And most guys with beards don't like to shave them off. You've got to shave your beard. You've got to shave your eyebrows. You've got to shave your hair. The Bible says twice—you've got to shave your whole body of all your hair. And then you've got to let seminary grads inspect your whole body. No thanks. I don't want some seminary grads checking me out to see if I've got skin problems. And you've got to go through all this. It's going to take a week plus to do the ceremonial ritual. It's going to take you a week to get there and back, and it's going to cost you all these things.

Not to mention—you are living in modern times here. I mean, we are not talking about something that was just commanded by the recent prophets. This was the command from 1445 to 1440 BC. These were old commands—15 centuries ago, Moses commanded this. I'm thinking, "I don't live in Jerusalem. Why should I worry about ritual purity? That's all this is about. I don't go to the temple



and I don't want to do this; it doesn't seem necessary." And Christ now charges him to go and do what the Scriptures command him to do. A lot of reasons not to.

Let me think for a second, too, if you would think with me about what Christ might think about commanding this. I think of a couple things. Number one—these are the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. He's going to die just in a matter of months. In less than a couple of years he's going to be out there dying on a cross, and the temple veil is going to tear, which is going to be the symbolic destruction of the whole ceremonial law. That's why he said in John 4—you know, you talk about Mount Gerizim, we talk about Mount Moriah in Jerusalem; you know what—"the day is coming when all that won't matter." All these ceremonies are about to become obsolete—in less than three years. And he's commanding—why should he make the guy do that? I know how much it's going to put him out.

Not to mention—you do understand that when you bring offerings to the temple mount and you give them to the priests in the ceremonies, that's like putting money in the offering bag. These offerings are the way that the priests and the leaders of Israel were able to have their paycheck. That's how they made their money to survive. Think that through now. These were the priests that you knew were going to conspire to have you betrayed and killed and crucified. You know their hearts—envious. I mean, how often would he slander the leaders of Israel as being the wolves that they were? You really want Christ to command this guy to put money in the offering? But it doesn't matter. Why? Because the Bible commands me to have you do this. Every cleansed leper ought to do what Leviticus 14 says. With all those reasons not to, Christ tells him to do it—and doesn't say, "You know, it'd be a good idea if you did what the Bible says." "I *charge* you to keep quiet and keep the commandments of Moses."

Turn with me, if you would, in a timely way, I suppose because of what's going on in our country presently, to look at a passage of Scripture that will remind us of how important this is for us—2 Timothy chapter three. And as you're turning there, I guess I should get a quick sidebar in here, which—if you don't make this distinction, as I find even though I've said it many times people forget this—and when they do, they have people come to them and say, "You keep trying to talk about those moral dictates of the Bible. But you know what—there's a lot of things in there that are ridiculous, like, you know, two fabrics in your clothing and mixing seeds in your field. You've got all these bloody sacrifices; you Christians have gotten past all that—why are you harping us out with all your antiquated morality from the Bible?"

Okay, this would be worth taking a few notes if you haven't heard this, or you can't recite it in your sleep at two in the morning. If you read the commands of the Old Testament—which is what we're pointing to; Christ is pointing him to the Old Testament commands—there are three clear categories.



Let's start with this: there are *civil* commands—we call this the civil law of God. And that means that when Israel comes out of Egypt, God has to give them some rules to become a nation. When you back your camel into your neighbor's donkey and there's damage, how are we going to fix this? When you were in Egypt you could go to the magistrates of Egypt and you could get your problems adjudicated. You know, what happens when the punk teenage son living down the street in the next tent comes over and gets into your tent and steals the brie? What's restitution look like? What's the percentage? How do you do all that? So God gives Moses a series of civil laws so that they can function as a community—better yet, as a birthed nation. They're going to be a nation; they need civil laws.

Now, the church in the New Testament is not a nation; it is living among nations, which is how Israel was set up, and all the civil laws were for a nation to function among the nations of the world. You are part of the church if you're a Christian—if not, you're just a poser along for the ride. But if you're a real Christian, you are part of an international organization, the Bible says, that should function obediently under the laws—the civil laws—of whatever nation you live in, insofar as you can keep those without violating the moral dictates of the Bible. You're supposed to pay your taxes; you're supposed to abide by the civil laws of your country—whether you live in Rome, whether you live in Macedonia, whether you live in Israel, whatever it is—you abide by the rules of your civil society, insofar as it doesn't violate the morals of God. Civil laws. Therefore, as a Christian, I read the civil laws in the Old Testament—someone says, "Your Bible says this is the restitution when something goes..." You don't keep those laws. You're right—we don't keep those laws. Why? Because the Bible clearly says that as the church we're an international organization that's supposed to abide by the laws of the land in which we live. I don't abide by those. Therefore, I am meticulously keeping the Word of God by looking at those civil laws and saying they don't apply to me when I live in America.

Second category is the category we're dealing with here in Luke five. Christ is calling him to keep the *ceremonial* laws—the ceremonial laws of Leviticus and the other parts of the Pentateuch, where the law is given for clean and unclean; for what makes you worthy to worship with the community of the Jews, and those that don't. These are the laws that the Bible says look forward to the coming of Christ. That's why he said in John 4—you know, you talk about Mount Gerizim, we talk about Mount Moriah in Jerusalem—you know what? The day is coming when neither in this mountain nor that mountain will it matter, because the day is coming (and we're on the cusp of it now), as he says, when real worshipers are going to worship God in spirit and truth. And all the ceremonial laws will be gone because the reality is Christ. And how much of the Bible makes that super, super clear—that those were the shadows that are supposed to lead people ceremonially to understand when Christ appeared. And when Christ showed up, those ceremonial laws—what are they? Here's the biblical word for them: *obsolete*. That's the word in English that's translated in the book of Hebrews. They're obsolete—Sabbath day, dietary laws, Levitical priests, two kinds of material in your garments, the two kinds of seeds—none of that. It's all obsolete. Why? Because they were stupid? No—because those ceremonies were all ceremonies that were to point us to the reality of Christ. It's like you telling your kids to dress up in their nice tuxedos and their dress because we're going to the marriage ceremony, and you're going to celebrate the marriage of these people—and you tell them to do that. And then the next day you say, "You don't have to wear all that." "Oh, you've changed your mind all the time." No, no—this was for a purpose. But once the reality of



Christ came and Christ appeared, those things don't matter anymore. That's the ceremonial law. So I am meticulously keeping the biblical law—the law of God—by taking the Levitical priesthood and all the ceremonial laws and saying those are now obsolete. I am keeping the letter of the Bible by making those obsolete—I'm not picking and choosing. Not because I didn't like the fabric thing and my tag says it's good to mix that—I don't care. If the Bible says that it is current and not obsolete for us not to mix fabrics and seeds, then we don't do it. But the Bible says those are obsolete—the shadow of the things to come.

Third category of laws—easy to distinguish from the other two—*moral* laws. There are plenty of moral laws that are all reflecting the holiness of God—the way God functions with fidelity and honesty and being true and kind. Those are the laws that are reflected in all the other moral laws of the Bible—your sexual conduct, your conduct with one another as it relates to stealing or cheating or lying or all the rest of those. Those are things that the Bible from the beginning to the end have always underscored and affirmed as reflecting the nature and character of God that you're supposed to replicate in your life. That is never passé and never obsolete. I'm not picking and choosing to say, "Well, I don't do sacrifices anymore, but I'm going to keep to these rules as to what ethics and conduct look like in morality." I'm not picking and choosing—I'm following the Bible to a T, which tells me: civil law—not applicable when I live under another nation in the new covenant in the church; ceremonial law—all fulfilled in Christ; what's left—moral law. And when God says something in the Word about how you're supposed to live morally—I don't care who says different—you'd better do it.

And in this case, living under the old covenant, though it was soon to be obsolete, Jesus says to this man, "If Moses commanded it, you're to do it," because in this case the ceremonial law is still applicable. The moral law is as well—and would be—and still is.

2 Timothy chapter three, where I turned you—long sidebar. Verse 12: "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." How do we define what a godly life is? There's only one way—God has revealed himself in propositional truth; it's on paper, it's called the Bible—as he's about to discuss. That's how I know what it is to be godly. And if you want to adhere to that in your life, you're going to be persecuted.

Just like this guy—say you're this guy who just got healed of leprosy. How many of your friends are going to give you a double thumbs-up to spend two weeks of your life getting ceremonially, ritually clean, shave all your hair off of your body, have seminary grads inspect you, and blow two good sheep and two birds and all that flour and all that oil? They're all going to go, "That's a great idea, go do that." They're going to go, "No, you don't have to do that; that's stupid; that's antiquated; that's 1500-year-old stuff. Forget it, forget it." That's mild persecution.



The Bible is clear—verse 13—it’s going to get worse. That’s always been the natural reaction of those around us who see us adhering to the biblical truth. But in coming days evil people and impostors will go from bad to worse—both evil people and impostors. The evil people are easy to identify—they’re wearing the other jersey, right? They’re clear: “I’m not for God; I don’t like your God; I don’t like your Bible; I don’t like all your stuff.” The impostors are the ones that have the God T-shirt on—“I’m a Christian, and you know what, I just think you’re all wrong about—you’re just uptight; you’re legalistic; we’ve got a new way to see this; we look at it differently.” They’re the impostors, and they’re really going to be good, the Bible says, as time goes on at deceiving and being deceived.

“But as for you”—don’t go with the crowd; don’t be with them—“as for you, continue in what you’ve learned and have firmly believed.” Now, this is a great phrase to highlight—“knowing from whom you learned it.” And that’s not Paul—Paul’s not saying “me.” Why? Keep reading—“and how from childhood you’ve been acquainted with the holy, the sacred writings”—that’s whom you learned it from—from God, from heaven—“which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ.” Because “All Scripture,” verse 16, “is breathed out by God.” Even the civil that now does not apply to us, and even the ceremonial that now does not apply to us because it’s been fulfilled in Christ—and also the moral—it’s all been breathed out. It’s as though God were speaking—not Moses, not Paul, not Jeremiah and Isaiah. “And it’s profitable”—so get at it—“teach it, reprove people with it, correct people with it, train people to be righteous by those things.” It reflects the righteous character of God. “And if you do that the man of God will be complete, equipped for every good work.”

Keep reading—chapter four, verse one: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus”—by the way, did you see that word that showed up there? And just like Jesus said to the man, “I charge you, go do what the Bible says.” Paul says here to the new covenant church—not living under the civil or the ceremonial laws—but still under the moral laws of the Bible: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is the judge of the living and the dead”—that’s a euphemism for the Christians and the non-Christians. He is the judge of them all; everyone’s held accountable to God—“and by his appearing and his kingdom, I charge you to do what? Preach the word. Declare it. Don’t fudge on it. Don’t sit back—‘Well, you’re right, I don’t know...’” No—preach it. “Be ready in season”—I don’t know, when everybody applauded when you said those things, the 1950s—“and out of season”—like, I don’t know, this week. Keep to it. Hold to it. Stick to it. Don’t move from it. “As a matter of fact, you need to take those truths of the Bible—reprove, rebuke, exhort—with complete patience and teaching.”

“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound doctrine.” Does that sound as current as the headlines? “But having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.” There’s the impostors—the teachers that will tell people what they want to hear. You want someone with a God jersey on, with a Jesus jersey on, to tell you that you’re right to do what you want to do, even if the Bible says different? There will be plenty of them. “And they will accumulate a whole mass of them.” Great. You want to find those—you can find them. “They’re going to turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”

“But as for you”—does this sound a lot like chapter three of this book?—“don’t do it. Don’t go with them. You be sober-minded.” I know it’s going to cost you—here’s the reprise of the theme of suffering: “endure hardship; endure that suffering. Do the work of an evangelist; fulfill your ministry.” “Timothy, me—man, I’m ready to be poured out as a drink offering. I’m spent; I’ve been through this. The time of my departure has come—I’m old; I’ve been through this.” I have—now notice how he describes this whole thing—“I have enjoyed the idyllic life of walking through the garden with Jesus in life.” Is that what he says? That’s what most people want to pitch to you this morning. That it is not a battle. No—“I fought the good fight; I finished the race; I’ve kept the faith.” I didn’t fudge on the truth of the God-breathed Scriptures. “And henceforth is laid up for me the crown of righteousness—he’s going to reward me—which the Lord, the righteous judge”—just to reprise that theme—“is going to award me on that Day”—capital D—“and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.” And if you love the God who’s coming back, you’re going to love the book that he wrote and the truths that he’s inscribed. And though you will be tempted to go with the flow of our culture and say it’s time for you to not do what they say and to stick to the Word of God—I charge you, Jesus said to this leper, “Under the dispensation in which you live, you do exactly what the Bible says.” It’s not a suggestion; it’s a command.

And I say the same to you, as Paul said here to Timothy. It’s getting harder and harder—have you noticed that? It’s going to get worse. It’s going to get worse. Are you ready to endure the suffering for just simply reiterating the eternal moral truth of God? Get ready for it. We’re there—but it’s going to get worse.

“Oh, doom and gloom—hate this guy.” Back to Luke five. There’s more.

Verse 15 begins with a contrasting conjunction—good word to circle here—because something’s going on here that is a contrast to what he commanded. Now, we have no indication of what happened in terms of him going to the priest and offering his offering. We don’t know; it doesn’t say. None of the Gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, or Luke—record whether he did that or not. But whatever is being contrasted now is something that relates to the command. And the first command—now that I do know—he was told to not tell anyone. You can see how this relates, and Mark makes it crystal clear. If Luke doesn’t—he kind of goes easy on the leper—but look at it, verse 15: “But now even more the report about him went abroad—everyone learned about it—and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities.” But what does that mean? “He went away; he withdrew to desolate places to pray.”

Now, I’ve got to take you to the parallel passage in Mark—Mark chapter one—to show you that I’m not stretching this point by simply saying what I’m about to say regarding the disobedience of the leper. And this is why—one of the reasons I posted that picture on my Facebook page (because I know you’re all my friends) of the leper; it’s an ancient picture, the relief of Jesus healing the leper.



I posted that hoping you'd look at it not only before I preached this sermon to you but after. I'd like you to go visit it again this afternoon. I want you to look at that because most people see that as just a compassionate scene of Jesus showing pity on this man—healing, and he got his healing. Isn't that great? This is going to change your view of this guy. That's the point—to give you more than a two-dimensional view of him; to give you that depth of what's really happening here.

Just to give you assurance that we're dealing with the same setting, go to verse 40—Mark 1:40—it's the last paragraph of the chapter: “And a leper came to him, imploring him, kneeling; he said, ‘If you will’”—that's the emphasis of all the three synoptic Gospel writers—“‘you can make me clean.’ Moved with pity,” Mark adds—he's compassionate; it's a grotesque disease—and Christ, sympathetic, “stretches out his hand and touched him and said to him, ‘I will; I am willing. Be clean.’ And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.”

Now look at how this is translated (a little stronger form of the word): “And Jesus sternly charged him”—he didn't just charge him and command him; he sternly charged him—“and sent him away at once, and said to him, ‘See that you say nothing to anyone, but go and show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.’” That's the sacrifice.

But notice this now—underline it: “But he went out”—and Mark wants to make it clear—“he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news.” And what was the problem with that? “So that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but had to go out”—look at this—“was out in desolate places.” Not just as prayer retreats—he had to do that. People were crushing in on him, and “people were coming to him from every quarter.”

Do you see that? I want you to look at this leper a little differently. I've held him up as an example as to how to ask God for things—and that's great; he is. Now I want to show you the side of him that I'm not so happy to show you, and that is that Christ gave him an express command. I don't know what he did with the whole Moses-and-the-cleansing-and-sacrifice part, but I know what he did about the command to shut up about this—he flapped his mouth, freely talking about it. “Gotta spread the news.” Now, Jesus told you not to.

Here's the thing—I know you wanted to share the news; I can see why; it made sense to you to share the news. I know that your desires were pressing you to share the news. But that's the thing about obedience—number three on your outline: we need to obey even when our desires say “compromise.” When our desires are pressing us—as they always eventually will—to disregard what Christ has said, we need to fight that and say, “I don't care.” It's called self-denial. “I don't care what I feel. If God has told me, I'm going to do it—despite my feelings—I'm going to do it.”



Think of the internal conflict in his heart. Think of all the things he probably thought to himself that you and I would think. Number one: "I don't know—why would Christ command me to do that? I don't understand the command." How often have we said that and disregarded a command of Christ, because "I don't really understand it"? What difference does that make? Think baptism—Bible's very clear: you're supposed to get baptized. Jesus said you gotta be baptized. "I don't get it, because he was clear it's about faith and repentance, and baptism doesn't... I don't—it doesn't make any sense to me." Some of you are in that camp right now. You've disregarded what Christ has said because, to you, it doesn't make any sense. I don't care if it makes sense to you or not. If it's clear, and it's what Jesus told you to do, you better be signed up to do it. It's exactly what Christ is saying—do it.

He might have said this—understand the motive. You know, I'm here to assume the motive. Let's say, "You know, Christ—I don't know—he's just like the humble Messiah; he just doesn't want to get credit for it. I don't know—he's like, 'Oh, don't tell anybody.' Maybe that's it. So I'll just—how do I share it? I'll be careful how I share it—I'll be okay because I know the motive." Think about that.

Think of things like this: "What God has joined together," Jesus said, "let no man separate." What was he talking about? Marriage. He said to you, "Do not get divorced." That's what he's told you—don't get divorced. Some of you have looked at that command and said, "Well, I know what he meant. What he's getting at is he wants us to be in happy, monogamous marriages. And so he just—he wants that; he's just giving us a formula for happiness. But here's the problem, Pastor Mike—you don't get it. I'm not happy. I married a loser. So I know this—God loves me; he wants me happy. There's—no, I know that's in the Bible, but I understand what Christ is trying to say." Really? So you're going to disregard what Christ has actually said, because you think you've got his motive figured out—and his motive is "You can get divorced if you're not happy"? Is that it? I hear that all the time. All the time. Ask the pastors—we probably hear it once a week: "I'm not happy." "I know, I know the Bible; I know what the Bible says." On that day when he judges us—when you stand before the judge of the living and the dead—he's not going to say, "So, did you figure out all my motives behind all those creepy commands I gave you?" He's going to say, "Did you do what I said?"

You know what this guy might have thought to himself: "Not hurting anybody. What damage could it do for me to share the good news of what Jesus did for me? I don't understand. Matter of fact, I think this is a good thing, and I don't think it's hurting anybody for me to disobey him." "Hurt anybody?" There are so many things, I think, that people look at in the Bible, and they see the moral commands of God, and they say, "If I just—if I violate that, I don't think it's going to hurt anybody. It's going to make me happy." And it made this guy happy, I'm sure, to say, "You remember me? I had all this leprosy; look at me now—I'm healed. I just got to share it. I know Christ told me not to, but I really wanted to share this news." So you think it's fine for you because you want to do something—even though God has expressly told you not to do something—you think it's okay because he wants you to be "authentic" and "true to yourself"? Really—good luck with that logic. Really—as you stand before God one day.



You understand so many things that Christ has said to us—"Seek first the kingdom"—and we could go on and on and on. And instead, you seek first the good of your family—that's more important than the kingdom of God—or your job or your hobbies. Those really are prioritized above the biblical priorities of God's kingdom and his righteousness in your life. "But, you know, he understands—I'm raising small kids; of course they're number one in my life." God is not going to handle that well for you to come and say, "I knew better than what you expressly and clearly said in your Word."

God knows what's best. This leper couldn't see that his disobedience, for whatever reason he had—and I don't know what the reasons were—that he disobeyed Christ, clearly involved his desires. But beyond that, I don't know what his rationale was. He had no idea that Christ's ministry was going to be seriously curtailed in the Galilee area. But that's exactly what happened. So when you look at my Facebook page and you see that leper being healed in that old, ancient, centuries-old relief of Jesus healing a leper, just remember that guy—ah, that guy cost Jesus ministry. Other people could not hear the good news of the gospel because that guy did what he wanted and disregarded the clear teaching of Christ—the clear command of Christ.

If you don't think God knows best, you might want to ask Adam and Eve one day, because their command didn't make any sense to them. Their command went in opposition to their desires. The command to not eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—they had every reason to take it; it made no sense for them why God would prohibit it. They said, "I'm going to do what I want," and it causes us all a lot of trouble—to put it mildly. I'm asking you not to compromise because I know your culture is going to always call you to compromise. The Bible says the pressure is going to be worse and worse as time goes on. Your desires are eventually going to side with the culture, and they're going to gang up against you to compromise. And I'm asking you not to compromise when the Word of God is clear.

I think about the word "compromise," and I, you know, study and think about, "Okay, we wrap this up—this guy compromised; we shouldn't compromise." I can't use the words "not compromise" or "no compromise" without thinking of Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah. Those names familiar to you? You may know them as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. In Daniel three, they had every reason to go along with the culture—talk about skin diseases—they were about to get their skin burned off in a fiery furnace if they did not bow down. Now why in the world would they not bow down? Because the Bible expressly said in Exodus chapter 20, "You will not do this." And because of an ancient command—which, by the way, was about a thousand years prior; it was written a thousand years before Daniel and his three friends were in Babylon—so Hananiah and Mishaël and Azariah were all sitting there looking at an ancient command not to bow down to idols. They were being asked to bow to the idols, and they said, "We're not going to do it."



Now there was a lot of internal motivation and conflict, I'm sure, for them—"Who's going to know? We're not even at home; we're not even near our homeland; and the God of the Bible—he's let us down." "I've got a million reasons to disobey." Let me read you the apex of that passage—very short, just a few verses. They responded to Nebuchadnezzar the king; they said, "We have no need to answer you regarding this. I know you're asking us what the deal is—we have no need to answer you. If you're going to throw us in the fiery furnace—fine—we know God whom we serve is able to deliver us." Does that sound like the leper? "If you're willing—I know you can." "We even have confidence—and we trust—that he will; we think he will deliver us." But verse 18 of Daniel three says, "If he does not"—love that—"but if he doesn't"—because we know it's optional for him; it is optional for him to fix our problems, to deliver—optional—"but even if he does not deliver us, we will not worship your gods; we will not serve your golden image. We won't do it." Why? Because God's Word in our lives is binding. It is a necessity; we have no choice but to obey. The requests we bring to God—bring them with deference; they're options—we're not brats demanding anything of God. When he tells us to do something, there is no option. It is binding. We recognize that we have no option but to do what he asks.

In a day when we need a lot more Hananiahs, Mishaels, and Azariahs—because Babylon is getting darker and darker by the day—it is time for Compass Bible Church and other churches like ours to resolve and redouble our resolve to stand firm on the revealed Word of God. Show the courage, would you, to stand up for what's true. I'm not asking you to be some kind of malicious or, you know, stick-a-finger-in-the-eye just to cause problems; I'm not asking you to be a pest. I'm just saying, let's not compromise. Our requests for deliverances are optional. The real need is for us to obey.

Let's pray. God, give us the courage in a day where we need more faith in you, to remember the day that's coming—to trust that your promises are true; that one day we will stand before you and give an account for our lives—the judge of the living and the dead, the Christians and the non-Christians. We want to be faithful to the God-breathed Word. And when the silly, ignorant critics come to us and say, "Well, look at your Bible—you don't do all that other stuff," let us be real clear about moral, civil, and ceremonial distinctions in the law. And let us be able to defend the fact that we cannot in any way fudge on the truth of your Word. If it says that this is how we're to live—this is what we're supposed to do—we've got to do it. And when our desires are siding with the culture and we've got every reason to compromise and disobey, bring us back to this simple text that reminds us of all the damage that this one leper's disobedience cost. And help us remember there's always negative ramifications for our compromise.

So make us faithful. God, keep us just on that cutting edge in our own hearts every single morning of walking out the door of our home, realizing that we're heading out into a world where today, perhaps more than ever, we're going to need to stand resolved—and with that absolute commitment to follow your Word no matter what. Strengthen us in this, God. And every request we have, we want to bring to you with that deference, praying, "If it's your will." Give us the right heart as we go about the things that we face every day. Encourage this church, God, and these people—bless them for being so attentive and hungry for your Word this morning. In Jesus' name, amen.