

Leader guide

In this lesson:

SCRIPTURE

2 Kings 6-7

CORE BELIEF: THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:14): We believe the God of the Bible is the only true God and is eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

TAKE HOME TRUTH

It's what we don't see that enables us to understand what we do see.

MEMORY VERSE

Ephesians 2:4-5a "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—"

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Do You See What I See?



OVERVIEW

In this week's lesson we look at a difficult question: when is it time to draw a line on personal conviction and say this far and no more?

Each one of us find ourselves in situations where we find our personal convictions are being challenged. Throughout our study, we have stressed the importance of Christians staying engaged in the cultural dialog in order to share the gospel, which is the only hope for a nation riding the rails towards destruction. Yet, there comes a time when we are no longer associated with evil, but become complicit in the act of evil. Where is that line?

In some cases, this distinction is clear black and white, but in many others, it is grey. Moreover, given this is a matter of conviction, we must consider personal ethics and morals. If these morals and ethics are rooted in the truth of a biblical worldview, we are building on a firm foundation. If these morals and ethics are rooted in the shifting sands of cultural acceptance, we are in dangerous territory.

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not clear. As Russell Moore put it, 'A Christianity that is without friction in the culture is a Christianity that dies.'"1

As we noted a couple of weeks ago, there are three ways we can respond: in anger and isolation, through assimilation, or through infiltration without contamination. It is this third option that describes the biblical response of a Christian in a pagan culture.

In many ways, we see this option personified by Elisha the prophet. He was clearly a part of Israel's culture at that time, but he was a strong voice for God's laws and God's ways in the midst of a culture that was violently opposed to the ways of God. Yet, in spite of all the attempts to silence him, Elisha was protected by God and strengthened through His Word.

How do we distinguish personal convictions from biblical convictions that apply across all boundaries?

This is a tough question that I cannot answer for you. But God's Word does, and each one of us need to know where God's Word draws a line concerning the issues we are confronted with on a regular basis. In some cases, our personal conviction may be in a different place than it is for others, but in other cases, the Bible is clear about where the line should be drawn for all people across all cultures and throughout time.

Let me illustrate: I personally believe it is wrong to mow your yard on Sunday. I would never do it. I would feel like I was sinning if I mowed my lawn on Sunday. I believe Sunday is a day set aside for the Lord, and while I don't hold to a Christian Sabbath, I do believe that observing Sunday as the Lord's day is an important distinction and one that clearly demonstrates my conviction to the Lord.

Still, I would not consider my neighbor's decision to mow his lawn on Sunday a sin. I would not even question his faithfulness to the Lord based on his decision to mow his lawn on Sunday. This is my personal conviction, and it would be legalistic of me to project my conviction upon my neighbor.

I also consider it a violation of my conscious to kill. I believe the Bible is clear that human life is made in the image of God and that it is a violation of Scripture to take the life of another human being. This "commandment" is one of the foundations of Western Civilization. Governments and nations throughout history of recognized that human life is valuable and that the taking of another person's life without just cause is considered murder.

Where this gets tricky is when governments and nations begin to see shades of grey in a cardinal law like homicide. Is it murder to abort a baby? Our government says no. But as a Christian, what does God's Word say? Yes, human life begins at conception (Psalm 100:3, Psalm 139:13-16, Jeremiah 1:5, Isaiah 44:24, Isaiah 64:8, Luke 1:41, 44, Galatians 1:15), and is created in the image of God. It is morally wrong (sinful) for a Christian to contribute to any means that would support abortion.

We see this mostly clearly tested in the "Hobby Lobby Case" (Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.) argued before the Supreme Court. The Green Family, owners of the Hobby Lobby stores refused to pay for life-terminating drugs (abortifacients) and devices through their employee health insurance. Under Obamacare, the Federal Government mandated that employers were required to pay for such drugs. The Green family filed a lawsuit stating that the mandate violated their deeply held religious beliefs, and the case reached the Supreme Court.

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Many of them became martyrs. There is a time to say “No, not any further,” and we all must know where that line is in our own heart. Sometimes, we may not know where the line is until we are directly challenged, but at all times, we must listen to our conscious.

I find myself being challenged by media today. Without anyone telling us they were moving the line, the line of decency has moved. Not long ago we had a ratings system that helped govern our media consumption. We knew, going in, that an R-rated movie had aspects to it that would be offensive to our Christian sense of morality. Not so today. Much of our “television” consumption comes from streaming services (Netflix, Hulu, etc.) that are not governed by any kind of ratings system. Many of the series that are shown on the streaming services use profane language and contain a lot of nudity and sexuality. There is no R-rating or warning about “inappropriate content for younger audiences.” Recently, I found myself watching a series that many recommended, and I felt great conviction as I watched it. In fact, I felt guilty! I stopped. I didn’t continue with the series. Five years ago, this was not a problem. Today it is. I needed to draw a line.

Fifth, we must commit to radical obedience to the Word of God. If there is a fault within the church today, it is the reality that we have become too comfortable with sin. We live in the “age of cheap grace” when all things are covered by the blood of the cross, so live life to the fullest. This is a disgrace to those who went before us and gave their lives to be obedient in areas where we scoff at their testimony and charge ahead confident in the grace and mercy of God. Too often, we point our accusing finger at the evil in the unbelieving world without looking at the evil in our own house!

Tim Keller says this well:

Christians should be humbled before the new pagan pluralistic situation. Just as with the exiles, the situation is due in large part to our own failings. The Church did not lose its position of privilege simply because of evil enemies of the faith. We lost our position as part of God’s judgment on our pride, our hypocrisy, our love of power, our prejudice, our bigotry and failure to hold onto the truth. This is the way in which God gets people’s attention.

We must be far harder on ourselves in gracious, humble repentance, than we are on the unbelieving culture around us. That was a major lesson for the exiles and for us. Our first response should be repentance. We should be very understanding toward people who have failed to believe in Christ because of the weakness of the Church’s testimony. A lot of what is happening in our culture today may be more our fault than we are willing to admit.³

BECOMING A HOUSE OF PRAYER

“Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices; Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.” – Isaiah 56:7.

Prayer Focus for the Week of October 14 ...

Pray for the strength to stand, knowing that the enemy seeks to seduce us, silence us, and make us afraid: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil” (Eph. 6:10–11).

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6] So the man of God said, "Where did it fall?" And he showed him the place. So he cut off a stick, and threw it in there; and he made the iron float.

Ascertaining where the axhead had fallen into the water Elisha threw a stick into the river. Miraculously the iron implement floated to the surface. The workman was able to retrieve it easily.

7] Therefore he said, "Pick it up for yourself." So he reached out his hand and took it.

Certainly this miracle encouraged the group of faithful followers of the Lord that their God really is alive and that He would supernaturally provide for their needs even though many Israelites in that day had turned from the true God to Baal.

Military Secrets At Dothan

8] Now the king of Syria was making war against Israel; and he consulted with his servants, saying, "My camp will be in such and such a place."

The Arameans were sometimes at war and sometimes at peace with Israel during the years of Elisha's ministry. At the time of this particular incident the Arameans were making profitable surprise raids into Israel. The king of Aram (cf. 5:1) was probably Ben-Hadad II. (Of the major persons in this narrative only Elisha is mentioned by name. This may suggest that readers should focus on the Lord and His prophet.) In preparation for another raid Ben-Hadad planned to pitch his camp on the border of Israel from which he could strike unexpectedly.

9] And the man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are coming down there."

However, God informed Elisha of the place and the prophet passed his information on to the king of Israel (Jehoram) with a warning to beware.

10] Then the king of Israel sent someone to the place of which the man of God had told him. Thus he warned him, and he was watchful there, not just once or twice.

Jehoram checked Elisha's information, found it to be correct, prepared for the encounter, and frustrated Ben-Hadad's secret attack. This happened several times.

11] Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled by this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?"

Enraged by his continual failure to surprise the Israelites Ben-Hadad concluded that one of his men was tipping off the enemy.

12] And one of his servants said, "None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom."

The first recorded phone tap! An officer assured the king that there were no traitors in his camp but that it was Elisha who had supernatural knowledge of all his plans. The very words you speak in your bedroom mean even his most private conversations

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18] So when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, and said, "Strike this people, I pray, with blindness." And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

19] Now Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, nor is this the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." But he led them to Samaria.

Elisha said, This is not the road and this is not the city for that road and city were not where God intended them to go. They unknowingly followed Elisha inside the walls of Samaria, the capital of Israel.

20] So it was, when they had come to Samaria, that Elisha said, "Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw; and there they were, inside Samaria!

What the Israelite army might not have been able to do except with much fighting and loss of life, God did peacefully through one man. In response to Elisha's prayer God opened the eyes of the Arameans and they discovered that they were surrounded and helpless captives at the mercy of the king of Israel.

21] Now when the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, "My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?"

22] But he answered, "You shall not kill them. Would you kill those whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow? Set food and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master."

Elisha said no. Jehoram probably would not have killed soldiers captured in battle and furthermore God's purpose was not to destroy the Arameans' lives but to save the Israelites' lives. The king then assured them of this in an unusual way. By setting a great feast before the soldiers he was expressing confidence in God's ability to control the enemy; Israel had absolutely nothing to fear and could even treat these soldiers as friends because God had them in His sovereign power.

23] Then he prepared a great feast for them; and after they ate and drank, he sent them away and they went to their master. So the bands of Syrian raiders came no more into the land of Israel.

In the ancient Near East eating together under one's roof constituted making a covenant of peace.¹ The Arameans were now bound by social custom not to attack the friend who had extended his gift of hospitality and protection. For these reasons the Arameans stopped raiding Israel's territory for a time. This incident demonstrates Yahweh is His people's defense. So to depart from Him was the height of folly. Israel's victory by means of God's prophet rather than by warriors undoubtedly should have encouraged many in Israel and Aram to fear the Almighty God. However, Jehoram and the nation of Israel failed to turn back to the Lord as a result of the previous incident. Consequently God sent a more severe situation to draw them back to Himself:

24] And it happened after this that Ben-Hadad king of Syria gathered all his army, and went up and besieged Samaria.

25] And there was a great famine in Samaria; and indeed they besieged it until a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and one-fourth of a kab of dove droppings for five shekels of silver.

Since no one could leave or enter the capital, a great famine resulted. It was so severe that one donkey's head, one of the least nourishing and most repulsive parts of this animal, unclean to the Israelites, became a highly valued commodity selling for 80 shekels (ca. two pounds) of silver. Approximately a half pint of (NIV, seed pods; KJV & LXX, dove's dung), normally considered animal fodder, cost 5 shekels (ca. two ounces) of silver.

26] Then, as the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried out to him, saying, "Help, my lord, O king!"

27] And he said, "If the Lord does not help you, where can I find help for you? From the threshing floor or from the winepress?"

Jehoram's reply (Where can I get help for you?) to a woman who called to him revealed his frustration. He was angry with the LORD for permitting this situation (cf. v. 33). God had promised that such conditions would discipline His people if they turned from Him (Lev 26:29; Deut 28:53, 57). Jehoram sarcastically told the woman that he could not provide bread from the grain on the threshing floor or wine from the grapes in the winepress; he was not greater than God was supposed to be.

28] Then the king said to her, "What is troubling you?" And she answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.'

Having vented his frustration with these words the king then invited the woman to explain her problem. She said that a friend had persuaded her to cook her son but the next day, when the friend was to cook her son she had hidden him.

29] So we boiled my son, and ate him. And I said to her on the next day, 'Give your son, that we may eat him'; but she has hidden her son."

30] Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he tore his clothes; and as he passed by on the wall, the people looked, and there underneath he had sackcloth on his body.

Learning the desperate extent to which the siege had driven his people, the king angrily tore his robes, an expression of deep distress and sorrow (cf. 2:12; 5:7; 11:14). Sackcloth, coarse material made from black goat's hair, was worn as a symbol of repentance and self-affliction.

Horizontal lines for taking notes.

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31] Then he said, “God do so to me and more also, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remains on him today!”

But Jehoram’s repentance seems to have been rather shallow in view of his attitude toward God’s servant Elisha. Rather than dealing with the real cause of God’s discipline, his own apostasy, Jehoram blamed Elisha who had perhaps only explained the reason for Israel’s condition.

32] But Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. And the king sent a man ahead of him, but before the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, “Do you see how this son of a murderer has sent someone to take away my head? Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door. Is not the sound of his master’s feet behind him?”

The elders who were sitting with Elisha in his house (cf. 5:9) were the officials of the land. Perhaps they were meeting with the prophet to discuss what should be done. Warned by God, Elisha announced that the king was sending someone to have him beheaded. The prophet’s instruction to the elders to bar the door against the executioner was evidently intended to postpone any violence until Jehoram himself would arrive. (Is not the sound of his master’s footsteps behind him?) The instruction would also give Elisha opportunity to announce God’s message of imminent deliverance.

33] And while he was still talking with them, there was the messenger, coming down to him; and then the king said, “Surely this calamity is from the Lord; why should I wait for the Lord any longer?”

When Jehoram did arrive he asked Elisha why he should wait any longer for God to act. Apparently Elisha had told Jehoram that God had said he should not surrender to Ben-Hadad but should wait for divine deliverance. Since that help was not forthcoming Jehoram had decided to take matters into his own hands. As he had done many times before he was disobeying the orders of his Lord through Elisha, acting as an unfaithful administrator (cf. 1 Sam 15:11). Since, as Jehoram stated, the disaster (the siege and the famine) was from the LORD, the king should have obeyed Him.

Footnotes:

[1]: Erwin W. Lutzer and Ed Stetzer, *The Church in Babylon: Heeding the Call to Be a Light in the Darkness* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2018).

[2]: ACLU Website, *Prayer and Proselytizing in School*, <https://www.aclu.org/issues/religious-liberty/religion-and-public-schools/prayer-and-proselytizing-school>

[3]: Tim Keller, “Exiles in a Foreign Land,” from *Living in a Pluralistic Society* (Bible study), (New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2006) http://s3.amazonaws.com/churchplantmedia-cms/chatham_community_church_pittsboro_nc/engage-series-discussion-guide.pdf.