

Last week I preached on the ninth commandment. During the sermon you sent in six questions, which I've answered below.

Question 1: "How do you, as a Christian, reach out to someone who speaks a different language?"

Two things come to mind. Either learn the language they speak or invest in missionaries who speak in other languages and are reaching out to people you can't because of your language barrier. Both can be costly (one costs you your time as you learn the language; the other costs you your money as you support the missionary), but both can be very rewarding. Finally, some things work even with language barriers. Baked cookies, for example, left on their door step. Mowing their lawn or raking their leaves. My family once invited a family over for Thanksgiving and only the dad spoke English, but we were able to communicate well with them as we had checked out books about their country from the library, learned some basic vocabulary, and gotten out toys for the kids to play with. All in an effort to reach out to someone even though they spoke a different language than us.

Question 2: "Would this be considered the sin behind the sin for Moses when he didn't obey God and he suffered the consequences of it when he couldn't enter the "Promised Land? In other words, was Moses a false witness to God?"

Here's some context for those who are unfamiliar with the story mentioned in the question. In the book of Numbers the people of God grumble and complain quite often. One time they complain about not having any water to drink. And God told Moses, "You and Aaron must take the staff and assemble the entire community. As the people watch, *speak to the rock* over there, and it will pour out its water." (Numbers 20:8a NLT; italics mine)

God told Moses to speak to the rock, yet a few verses later we read, "Moses raised his hand and *struck the rock twice with the staff*, and water gushed out. So the entire community and their livestock drank their fill." (Numbers 20:11 NLT; italics mine)

Two things. First, Moses disobeyed God. That's why he wasn't allowed to enter the Promised Land. Second, even though he disobeyed God, the people still drank water. And that should frighten all of us.

In a way, I do think Moses falsely represented God when he struck the rock. Earlier, as they wandered in the desert, the people grumbled about not having anything to drink and God told Moses to strike a rock and water came out of it. But this time, Moses wasn't told to strike the rock. He was told to speak to it. But striking worked last time, so instead of trusting God's Word, Moses did what he knew worked. And it worked this time as well. Which, as I said, should frighten us.

Why? Because instead of trusting God's Word (speak to the rock), Moses decided to trust a technique (striking the rock). God still quenched His people's thirst, but distrusting God's Word was incredibly costly for Moses. And in churches today, pastors and congregations often distrust God's Word and instead trust ministry techniques that have "worked" in the past. They hold on to old worship techniques, discipleship programs, preaching styles, ways to dress, etc...even though sometimes these ministry techniques go against God's Word! And the question for all Christians—and congregations—is this: What will we trust more? Will we trust in techniques when God has asked us to trust His Word? Trusting in techniques may produce the results we desire, but they will cost us tremendously. However, trusting in God's Word always results in experiencing God's faithfulness and favor as we obey what He's commanded us to do.

Questions 3 and 4: "Lack of trust = In my mind that equals FEAR...How do you feel about that as the real root cause?! I think Satan uses fear as a constant weapon with people to fall into sin! Also, I can see PRIDE as a root cause to lie as well! How do you feel about PRIDE being a root cause for lying or bearing false witness?!"

It's always important to consider what the Bible has to say and let that drive what we believe. So what does the Bible have to say about fear and pride? Lots actually. For example, Jesus said this about fear. He said, "Dear friends, don't be *afraid* of those who want to kill your body; they cannot do any more to you after that. 5 But I'll tell you whom to *fear*. *Fear* God, who has the power to kill you and then throw you into hell. Yes, he's the one to *fear*." (Luke 12:4-5 NLT; italics mine)

The question, then, is do we trust what God's Word says about fear? If we do, we will fear God more than we fear man. So much so, that we won't fear man, even if it costs us our life. Now our problem, and this applies to pride as well, is that there are times when we don't trust God's Word, so we give in to fear. But I'm not sure our fear is what causes us to distrust God's Word. I think Jesus is showing us that it's the opposite. When we don't trust God's Word we give in to fear (and pride).

Question 5: "How do you avoid pitfalls of lying in answering the 'everyday' questions people [ask]? 'How are you today?' 'Good or fine' is the typical answer when you're far from that in truth. Or lying when you put on your 'plastic face' when you attend church? Or when you ask someone if they need anything when in all honesty you hope they say no?"

I touched on this in my sermon, but the key idea for your question is: You avoid all types of lies by trusting God's Word. So why do we say "fine" when asked how we're doing when life is far from "fine?" To keep up appearances, perhaps. The possibilities are endless really, but they all boil down to not trusting God's Word. Our Christian faith says we're all poor and needy sinners whose entire hope is built upon the undeserved grace of God, which means that we don't need to keep up appearances.

Now the crazy thing is that most often, as the questioner highlights, we play “keeping up appearances” while at church! And church is supposedly where we gather with people who’ve all acknowledged that they’re poor and needy sinners who, without the grace of God, would be utterly hopeless. And it’s precisely because we don’t trust God’s Word that we put on our “plastic faces.” You see, God’s Word tells us that not only are we saved by sheer grace, but we’re also continually being saved by God’s grace. The Christian life—from new birth to Heaven—is all about grace! But we don’t trust that, so we think grace saves us, but our hard work is what keeps us saved. Which is a terrible burden to carry and a cruel slavedriver that robs many Christians of the joy that is theirs in Jesus.

And even when we ask “someone if they need anything and hope they will say no,” we’re failing to trust God’s Word. How so? We’re failing to trust that God loves them and wants to use us as His instrument of love. We don’t believe that we will be blessed by loving our neighbor in the same way that we love ourselves. Or that when we serve others, we’re actually serving Christ and will be rewarded for our good deeds (see Matthew 25:31-46). The Christian faith really is about trusting God’s Word to be true and allowing God to prove Himself faithful again and again as we live our lives in the freedom we’ve been given.

Question 6: “What promises of the Bible are really for us? I mean shouldn’t context be taken into account. Isn’t God speaking to a specific church about being lukewarm? Isn’t God speaking to the Israelites when He says, “For I know the plans...” Isn’t God speaking to Abraham when He promises land, prosperity, a large family? Should we believe we will all have homes, a spouse, and possessions?”

Yes context matters. It matters tremendously. But let me answer your string of questions at the end with a question of my own that should disturb your line of thinking.

“Is any of the Bible written directly to us?” The answer is “no.”

Ephesians was written to a church in Ephesus. Titus was written to a guy named Titus. Luke and Acts were written to a specific guy. In fact, all of the New Testament was written to individuals or groups of Christians that were alive in the first century.

So then, is any of the New Testament “for us?” And if so, what parts? The answer is “all of the New Testament is for us” and the context we are to take it in is...itself. The best way to interpret the Bible is with the Bible. Meaning, the best way to know what a particular verse means is to look at the verse through the context of the entire Bible.

So although the “lukewarm” passage was written to a specific congregation, the truth of the verse applies to all Christians. For if it doesn’t, then we’re in trouble. Serious trouble. Because everything we believe as Christians was written to specific people. “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved,” was spoken to a specific group of people. So if

the “lukewarm” passage doesn’t apply to Christians today, neither do the passages that talk about salvation. So, like I said, we’d all be in trouble because salvation would be impossible. But thankfully it isn’t impossible for God, so He uses the Bible and its words written to specific people as the means by which He continues to save and grow people from every generation.

Let the New Testament speak to you, but let all of it speak to you. Not a verse or two here or there.

Now that’s the New Testament. So what about the Old? Is it for Christians? Now there’s some division about how Christians are to understand their relationship with the Old Testament, but here are two principles that will generally lead you to a good understanding of how the promises of the Old Testament apply to Christians today.

First, look to see how the New Testament authors interpret the Old Testament. You’d be surprised at how many Old Testament verses are quoted in the New Testament (over 800), which will give you greater insight in to how the Old Testament applies to Christians today.

Second, and this is where Bible scholars have some division, I believe that the church and Israel are two distinct groups. Meaning, promises made to the Jewish people of the Old Testament don’t have the same guarantee to Christians. The questioner mentions promises in the Old Testament about land, property, family, etc...These were promises given to God’s people who were a nation—the nation of Israel. Promises that were based on their relationship with Yahweh that distinguished them from the other surrounding nations. For Christians, all of the promises of God have been fulfilled and find their yes in Jesus Christ (see 2 Corinthians 1:20). Just as the entire law has been fulfilled by Christ on our behalf, so to our relationship with the Old Testament is different than the Jews, but it’s the same as the New Testament Christians.

To summarize. The New Testament isn’t written to us, but it’s for us because it’s written to Christians. The Old Testament isn’t written to us, but it’s for us because both its promises and requirements find their fulfillment in Christ. Look to the New Testament in order to best understand how to interpret the Old Testament. Never elevate one promise from God above the others (nor one command above all others; nor one Bible verse above all others; etc...). And, finally, always interpret the Bible in Christian community. None of us knows everything, so work out your beliefs with other Christians who can help guide, correct, and encourage you as you interpret the Bible.

I hope my answers have been helpful and please keep sending in your questions!

Pastor Josh