



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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## **Apostasy on Trial**

Jeremiah 2:1-19

Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 2 “Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD:

“I remember you,  
The kindness of your youth,  
The love of your betrothal,  
When you went after Me in the wilderness,  
In a land not sown.

3 Israel was holiness to the LORD,

The firstfruits of His increase.  
All that devour him will offend;  
Disaster will come upon them," says the LORD.' "

4 Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob and all the families of the house of Israel. 5 Thus says the LORD:

"What injustice have your fathers found in Me,  
That they have gone far from Me,  
Have followed idols,  
And have become idolaters?

6 Neither did they say, 'Where is the LORD,  
Who brought us up out of the land of Egypt,  
Who led us through the wilderness,  
Through a land of deserts and pits,  
Through a land of drought and the shadow of death,  
Through a land that no one crossed  
And where no one dwelt?'

7 I brought you into a bountiful country,  
To eat its fruit and its goodness.  
But when you entered, you defiled My land  
And made My heritage an abomination.

8 The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?'  
And those who handle the law did not know Me;  
The rulers also transgressed against Me;  
The prophets prophesied by Baal,  
And walked after things that do not profit.

9 "Therefore I will yet bring charges against you," says the LORD,  
"And against your children's children I will bring charges.

10 For pass beyond the coasts of Cyprus and see,  
Send to Kedar and consider diligently,  
And see if there has been such a thing.

11 Has a nation changed its gods,  
Which are not gods?  
But My people have changed their Glory  
For what does not profit.

12 Be astonished, O heavens, at this,  
And be horribly afraid;  
Be very desolate," says the LORD.

13 "For My people have committed two evils:  
They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters,  
And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.

- 14 “Is Israel a servant?  
Is he a homeborn slave?  
Why is he plundered?
- 15 The young lions roared at him, and growled;  
They made his land waste;  
His cities are burned, without inhabitant.
- 16 Also the people of Noph and Tahpanhes  
Have broken the crown of your head.
- 17 Have you not brought this on yourself,  
In that you have forsaken the LORD your God  
When He led you in the way?
- 18 And now why take the road to Egypt,  
To drink the waters of Sihor?  
Or why take the road to Assyria,  
To drink the waters of the River?
- 19 Your own wickedness will correct you,  
And your backslidings will rebuke you.  
Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing  
That you have forsaken the LORD your God,  
And the fear of Me is not in you,”  
Says the Lord GOD of hosts.

## A Cross-Section of Sin

One of the more fundamental questions asked when it comes to the fall of man is this: Where did sin come from? If God made a perfect world, how do we account for sin? At first this sounds like a formidable question; yet if you think about it, it really isn't that profound. Sin does not have mass; it isn't a substance, and it wasn't created. It is not a person, place, or thing. Rather, sin is an act of rebellion against the authority of God. To account for it in the garden is to recognize that while God created man perfect, nevertheless we were created with the option to rebel against God.

This is Thomas Boston's *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*. In the garden we were “perfect, yet able to sin!” After the fall we were “imperfect and unable to obey.” In redemption we once again are “perfect, yet able to sin.” In glory we will be “perfect and unable to disobey.”

From this, I want you to note three characteristics about sin in this state. First and foremost it is an act of rebellion against the authority of God. As such it is very individualistic and self-serving. Satan told the woman in the garden this:

Genesis 3:5, “God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and YOU will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Sin is an exercise of autonomy by which the sinning individual enjoys being separate, independent from God. As such, it is all about self!

Second because God has deigned to withhold many of the consequences of sin in this state. It is because of this withholding of consequences that sin can be quite pleasurable.

Hebrews 11:25, “[Moses chose] rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.”

In light of this, we speak of “temptation” and the “allure of rebellion.” Not only are we independent from God at the time of our sinning, BUT we do not immediately reap the consequences. This is the only reason sin is pleasurable; in hell, sin will not be a source of pleasure, but agony!

Thirdly, in this age sin thrives in contexts of plenty and ease. This is why we read of David’s prayer:

Proverbs 30:8b-9a, “Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is my portion, lest I be full and deny *Thee* and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’”

Think of it. When things are rough and the going hard, we need God in our lives. But in times of plenty when dependence upon God is not so necessary, it is easy to forsake Him for the life of independence, self-pleasure, and autonomy! Such is the soil out of which apostasy arises. It grows NOT because God somehow lets the person down, BUT because the sinner has grown bored with Christ, loves himself and his independence, and has the time and resources to rebel!

Apostasy involves the formal transgression when a people fall away from their love, service, and devotion to Christ. It involves two transgressions:

1. The Rejection of God.
2. The Worship and Service of a False God.

The rejection of God involves a rejection of His provisions.

Jeremiah 2:11, “my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit.”

This word “profit” words means literally ‘for that which does nothing.’ The word is translated as “nothing,” “phantom,” “without a being,” and so “that which brings no help or profit to the worshipper.” (C. F. Keil, 2006, pp. vol 8, 38)

The contrast couldn’t be more striking. On the one hand there is the idol or false god which is nothing and can do nothing. The same branch wood is used to make a fire by which to keep warm AND to make an idol on which to rely for protection, say from a forest fire! Recall the words of Paul:

1 Corinthians 10:19-20, "What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No [absolutely not!]"

Now in contrast to the idol, what do we have in God? A Being who has involved Himself intimately in this world such that though He is not seen, He is seen everywhere and is known at all times through the eye of faith.

Romans 1:20, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made..."

God is a God of substance! In the words of Isaiah 64:4b: "[He] acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him!" And we see this in the passage before us! In contrast to the idol which can do nothing and is nothing, notice what Jeremiah means by the "glory" or "weight" of God. In Jeremiah 2:2 we read of the love-relationship which God enjoyed with His people. In Jeremiah 2:3, we read of the privileged position Israel had before the Lord such that God protected the nation and its people from any and all who sought her harm! In Jeremiah 2:4, we read of a God who speaks to His people. In Jeremiah 2:5, we read of a God who is offended, hurt by His people's sin. In Jeremiah 2:6, we read of God's drawing near to His people and leading them for 40 years through a land of treachery and hardship. In Jeremiah 2:7, we read of God leading His people by the hand and bringing them to a paradise on earth so that they could enjoy its bounty. This is "the glory" which God's people rejected when they turned to idols. These are the provisions we reject when we give our heart to sin!

So why do we do it? We sin because we deem temporal pleasure to be of higher value than the riches of God's provisions! It is the difference between a meal of meat, beans and rice and cotton candy. While meat, beans and rice is a complete meal which could sustain a person for years, nevertheless nine out of ten times most of us would we'd rather have the cotton candy!

- Saul did when he opted to make the public sacrifice for show rather than trust the Lord to fulfill His word (1 Samuel 13:8-10)
- David did when he chose adultery, deceit, and murder over submission to the calling of God (2 Samuel 11:2-5).
- Demas did when he rejected God for the world (2 Timothy 4:10).
- Judas did when he sold his soul for 30 pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14-16).
- Peter did when the praises of men were more important to him than the praise of God (Galatians 2:11-14).
- At the time of Jeremiah, God's people did when they rejected the worship and service of God for the always-exciting-yet-shallow-worship of Baal (Jeremiah 2:11b; 23)!

This is the path of apostasy. It is lured by the promise of temporal pleasure such that the participant willingly forfeits the provisions of our glorious/weighty Lord for the fleeting

sensation of sin!

Apostasy involves a rejection of God's provisions and His glory! Notice secondly it also involves a rejection of His Person.

Jeremiah 2:13, "for My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me..."

Whatever else God/Jeremiah is going to say about Judah's sin (there is much in this prophecy that is said), notice that apostasy always begins with a rejection of God Himself! The sinning Christian thinks that it is only a little sin, it is only a little rebellion! Yet one must realize that every choice we make for sin is an outright rejection of God!

Paul speaking of the sin of mankind in general writes this:

Romans 1:21-23, "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God [notice the emphasis here is one and the same as in Jeremiah: the God we reject in our sin is a God of substance/glory! So they have "exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God..."] for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."

This is the heart and soul of apostasy; the rejection of God! In order for the sinner to enjoy his sin, he first must cast off God. It has always been that way! When Israel endeavored to replace Samuel with a "king like the nations" Samuel was offended. And God gave this message to the prophet.

1 Samuel 8:7, "...they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them."

There can be no sin without first rejecting/casting off God! We see it in the garden and the first temptation. Notice a key element to the fall of man that is revealed in Genesis 3:

Genesis 3:1, "Now the serpent was more crafty [he was skilled at being a stumbling block and so deceptive, cunning, and treacherous] than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God said, "You shall not eat from any tree of the garden"?'"

Whether you realize it or not, the question involves an accusation leveled against God; specifically that in some way God did NOT have man's best in mind and that God was stingy and withholding good from man. Satan's loaded question contains an unjustified presupposition that God is not good. "Has God really said...? Is He that stingy?" And Eve took the bait hook, line, and sinker!

Genesis 3:2-3, "And the woman said to the serpent, 'From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, "You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die."'"

Nowhere in the command regarding the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in Genesis 2 is there a prohibition concerning Adam and Eve touching the tree. Yet Satan planted a seed in Eve's heart which Eve watered, *"Not only did God say we couldn't eat of the tree's fruit, but we can't even touch it! He is that stingy and mean!"*

Family of God there is no sin that does not first involve a rejection of God! W. s. Plumer put it this way:

We never see sin aright until we see it as against God... All sin is against God in this sense: that it is His law that is broken, His authority that is despised, His government that is set at naught... Pharaoh and Balaam, Saul and Judas each said, 'I have sinned'; but the returning prodigal said, 'I have sinned against heaven and before thee'; and David said, 'Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned.' (Jerry Bridges, 2006, pp. 20-21)

You say, "If that is what is involved in sinning, then why would any of God's children rebel? We love God; He is our Savior and Lord!" Because sin is black hole of lust and desire which at the end of the day must find something wrong with God in order to be enjoyed! And brothers and sisters, we want to enjoy our sin, don't we?!

This is why one of the first doctrines we compromise in our lives as sinners is the goodness of God! If God is good, then sinning is a moral travesty. But if God is to blame for anything in our lives, then sin is nothing less than the claiming of our rights as an offended lover, *"God did me wrong; I deserve this sin!"*

Apostasy involves a rejection of

1. God's Provisions and of
2. God Himself.
3. A Rejection of God's Program.

Jeremiah 2:13b, "for My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters..."

The phrase "fountain of living waters" is used throughout the Bible in reference to the life that God gives to His people; in contrast to the "bitter/stagnate waters" which in the end is all that sin has to offer.

When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they and mankind died (Genesis 2:17b). Accordingly they died mentally, physically, spiritually, and eternally, In light of this, we know that the non-Christian constitutes the living dead. They are unaware of their actual state by which Satan

holds them in captivity, 2 Corinthians 4:4. They hate God and the things of the Lord, Matthew 8:12; 2 Corinthians 1:18; 2:14. They are not free, but subjects and servants of the devil, Ephesians 2:1-3. As such they do not live in reality, but in the delusion with which Satan has blinded them.

In this context we note that when John said that Christ is “the word/logos” (John 1:1, 14), he was making the important statement that Christ constitutes reality! Thus, though mankind walks in the light of the sun, they live in darkness until Christ shines on them the TRUE light of salvation.

Psalm 35:9, “...in Thy light we see light.”

Though mankind believes themselves to be free, moral agents, in reality they are enslaved to sin and can do nothing other than sin (Galatians 4:9; Titus 3:3). Though mankind eats the best food that money can buy, they in fact are eating dung in comparison to the manna which God provides in Christ. Christ is real food (Jon 6:35)! Though mankind might drink the best of libations from the chalice of a king, they in fact are drinking death if they don't drink from Christ- “the fountain of living waters!” (Jeremiah 2:13; John. 4:13-14)!

That is the background behind Jeremiah's words in this passage. In contrast to the “stagnate waters” of sin, it is God's intent to sustain His people upon a “river of life” which once and for all time will quench the thirst of all who partake. The Sons of Korah wrote this:

Psalm 46:4, “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy dwelling places of the Most High.”

This “river” in Scripture is referred to as this:

- “River of Your delights” (Psalm 36:8).
- The “river of God” (Psalm 65:9).
- The “waters of Shiloh which flow gently” (Isaiah 8:6).
- The “springs of salvation” (Isaiah. 12:3).
- And perhaps the most famous reference to this “river of life” is found in John 14 and the well of Jacob.

John 4:13-14, “Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.’”

Two things are striking here. To drink of the “fountain of life” one time means you will never need to drink again (unlike sin which requires an increasingly stronger drink to make it exciting). For this “fountain of life” will do more than just revive the flesh, it will revive the soul for eternity!



This is God's program and so His plan with regard to His people. He approaches them in their fallenness/death and revives them once and for all with a drink from the "Fountain of Living Waters;" a fountain we cast off every time we sin!

So why do we rebel? Why would we reject this "living water" for the stagnate waters of sin? Because while the "fountain of living waters" brings life, health, and vitality to our soul, sin initially has a better taste going down and so it is the drink of preference for those wanting a cheap thrill. In the words of Cypher from the Matrix, the Judas figure, when he chose to go back to the Matrix/"Egypt":

I know this steak doesn't exist. I know that when I put it in my mouth, the Matrix is telling my brain that it is juicy and delicious. After nine years, you know what I realize? [Takes a bite of steak showing great pleasure] Ignorance is bliss.

Family of God, if you are honest with yourself, this is how we view sin and this truly is the allure of sin! It makes God out to be an ogre who doesn't have our best in mind. It then rejects this God in the name of freedom and pleasure. And then it dives into the excesses of sin! I think God's Charge here pretty much hit it on the head!

How do you level a counter-attack against the path and impulse of sin? First recognize that the counter-attack is already being waged by the Holy Spirit who convicts the world of sin (John 16:8). However recognize also that this counter-attack employs a variety of means like:

- Watching out for what we allow our hearts/minds to meditate upon (Proverbs 4:23).
- Guarding and maintaining a high and holy view of God (1 Timothy 4:14-15).
- Fleeing youthful lusts (2 Timothy 2:22).
- Avoiding bad influences (1 Corinthians 15:33; 2 Corinthians 6:14).
- Not being conformed to the world (Romans 12:1).
- Keeping our brains in reality (Romans 12:2).

One of the effective tools of parenting is the cultivation of a relationship with the child by which the parent is in a position to provide an active commentary on what the child sees and hears. In a relationship of trust and mutual respect, this can be quite effective, for in the process we give our children a mature voice with which to process life as it comes to them. As they age and mature our voice becomes their own voice:

- Our view of bullying becomes their view of bullying.
- Our view of teenage rebellion becomes their view of teenage rebellion.
- Our standards for acceptable conduct, dress, pleasure, and the like becomes their view of these things.

What would happen if we stopped the commentary say at age 10? The child would get it

exclusively from their peers, friends, media, and the culture in which they live. And though they might have accepted our standards as their own, how long would it take before our voice would be drowned out by the world in which they live?

We need this ongoing commentary! And this is the role of the word of God in our lives! It gives us an ongoing commentary on reality. Without it, though we love the Lord and want to serve Him, nevertheless all that we will hear is the commentary of delusion given to us in mass media, entertainment, our associations, our flesh, and the like.

That is why a major theme of the Bible is the importance of the word in our lives. As such; if you are not in it daily, get in it. If you are, stay there! Persist in the calling to read, appropriate, and then teach the word of God to others (Ezra 7:10)- even when:

- You don't feel like it.
- You are struggling with sin.
- You are not sure if you still believe.

The word of God is our only source for a commentary on reality! May God give us the grace ever and always to submit ourselves to it daily (Romans 12:2)!

## Works Cited

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## About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on June 23, 2013. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.

Note(s)