

Old Testament Lessons

OT Stories That Teach Us About God and Faith

June 28, 2020

- I. Warnings, Wisdom, Promises of God.
 - A. Today, we will look at God's warning to Israel to avoid covenant type relationships, or political, business, and marriage relationships with unbelievers because of the power of their beliefs, values, and cultural practices to influence us away from God.
 - B. Prayer

- II. God warns Israel about making covenant type agreements and intermarriage with the current inhabitants of the Land.
 - A. In **Deuteronomy 7**, Moses reminds Israel of God's warning not to enter into any covenant type agreements or intermarry with the inhabitants in the Promised Land, or those around it.
 1. The reason for this is that the influence of an ungodly spouse, the influence of ungodly business partners, the influence from a political alliance with ungodly people, the influence of an ungodly culture, and specifically, the influence of the beliefs and practices of those involved in idol worship would most likely infiltrate the Jewish religion, culture, family, and personal ways of thinking and living which in time would lead God's children away from God – much like wealth.
 2. However, before reading from **Deuteronomy 7**, I want to present one definition and two biblically based foundational principles in support of today's study that will give us a reasonable basis for applying to ourselves God's warning to Israel.
 3. **Definition: Culture** speaks of the promoted beliefs, values, and customs of a social group as depicted by their moral, religious, political, business, community, marital, and family practices.
 4. **First Principle:** Culture is a powerful force that influences the way we see God, see ourselves, think about life, interpret events and situations, deal with people, work, and live day to day.
 - a. Culture comes in various forms. There is the dominate culture of the society in which we live. Then there is what I call **sub-cultures**, such as the culture of the home, the culture of the local community, the educational culture, the business and financial culture, the culture of counseling and psychology, the

fashion industry, Hollywood, the political systems, and the cultures of the various religions.

- b. This is both a good thing and a bad – for in the right hands and right setting, culture can be an influence for good.
 - (1) But in the wrong hands – such as an abusive home, an anti-religious or anti-Christian educational system, Hollywood, or a church that strives for numbers at the expense of godliness, it becomes a destructive or evil influence.
 - (2) And in a society or nation where people are expected and pressured to blindly adhere to the beliefs, values, and practices of the culture, it becomes a harmful, mind-numbing influence that leads to thoughtlessly treating evil as if it were good.
 - c. This is the point God is making here in **Deuteronomy 7**, and it is a reality we are wise to be aware of and deal with in a cautious, biblically grounded, thoughtful way. Otherwise, we can become so desensitized or numb to ungodly values, beliefs, and practices that we will begin to think that way or practice those things as if they are right and good.
 - d. Paul provides a similar caution in **1 Corinthians 15:33**, “Do not be deceived (*that is, don’t think that you can hang around, partake of, or get immersed in the thinking, practices, and ways of the world around you and remain immune to their ungodly influences*): (*the reality is*) bad company corrupts good morals.”
 - e. And as we will see in the second principle, bad company can include fellow Christians or those identifying as Christians.
5. **Second Principle:** The biblical soundness of the church and its resulting culture is vital for influencing and progressively producing mature, spiritually healthy Christians who will be a godly light to the world and introduce the next generation to true spirituality. Anything short of a biblically sound church culture will produce spiritually unhealthy and perpetually immature Christians.
- a. According to Romans 16:17-18, 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, Galatians 1:8-9, 1 Timothy 6:3-6, 2 Thessalonians 3:14, Titus 3:10-11, 2 John 2:10, and Revelation 2-3, God makes it clear that the biblical soundness and spiritual health of the church is everyone’s responsibility – beginning with the leadership – of course – but also including the regular attendees.
 - b. Yet scripture, church history, and personal experience show that a church culture can become perverted – such as when the

church is run like a for-profit business, or when the leadership becomes proud and self-serving, or when numbers become more important than godliness, or when churches adapt and absorb practices, beliefs, values, and ways from the worldly culture that surrounds them. When things such as these happen, the spiritual health of the church deteriorates and the spiritual growth of its attendees is stunted.

- c. In my opinion, Paul addresses this threat to the health of the church's culture in **1 Corinthians 5:9-13**, "I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; [10] I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. [11] But actually, I wrote to you **not to associate with any so-called brother** if he is an **immoral** person, or **covetous** (*desiring the wealth and possessions that others have*), or an **idolater** (*treating something other than God as if it were their god*), or a **reviler** (*to use strong and even excessive language in degrading another person or proclaiming them to be worthless*), or a drunkard (*alcoholic*), or a **swindler** (*one who uses deception to cheat others out of what they have*) – not even to eat with such a one. [12] For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? [13] But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man [or woman] from among yourselves."
 6. Once again, the point of what we have covered so far, including these two biblically based foundational principles, is that we need to be cautiously aware of the power of the overall culture and its sub-cultures to exert their influence over us, and especially when it is influencing us away from God and toward the values, beliefs, fears, hopes, and ways of the ungodly world around us.
- B. This brings us to today's OT scripture where God is specifically warning Israel of this very thing. We find this warning in **Deuteronomy 7:1-6** . . . "When the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites (*The important truth conveyed here is that it is God who leads us. It is God who goes with us. And it is God who empowers us to complete whatever it is He is asking us to do! And though we may not see Him, we can, if we will look, see His*

presence and His activity in the results or outcome of what He has asked us to do. Remember last Sunday's worship about God bringing good out of bad? The good that He brings is an example of seeing the results of God's unseen activity on our behalf.), seven nations greater and stronger than you (It matters not how strong the enemy is when God is for us, as proven by Israel defeating the giants, walled cities, and well equipped armies in the Promised Land, and as proven by David facing Goliath.),

C. [2a] and when the **LORD your God delivers them** before you and **you defeat them** (*Notice that though it is the Lord our God who brings the victory, it is His people, which includes you and me, who must face the enemy and fight until victory is achieved. Therefore, Paul writes about God gaining the victory for us in everyday life in **1 Corinthians 10:13**, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it." And James writes about our defeating the enemy in everyday life in **James 4:7**, "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."*), **then you shall utterly** (*or completely or absolutely*) **destroy them.**"

1. These words, "then you shall utterly destroy them," may seem excessive because it required utterly destroying the evil people and their influences that were in the Land. Yet as we know, or as we ought to know, even the smallest sin, left unconfessed, unrepented of, and therefore undefeated, grows and grows – like cancer grows and grows. And as it grows, its influence in our lives becomes stronger and stronger.
2. Therefore, whatever sin we allow to remain in our lives, that sin will progressively dull our senses and conscience until we become numb or blind to its presence, or until we feel justified in committing it, or until we see what God says is evil as good.
3. God warned Israel about this in **Numbers 33:55-56**, "But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come about that those whom you let remain of them will become as pricks in your eyes and as thorns in your sides, and they will trouble you in the land in which you live. [56] And as I plan to do to them, so I will do to you."

D. [2b] "You shall **make no covenant** with them and **show no favor** to them. [3] Furthermore, you **shall not intermarry** with them; you shall

not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. [4] **For they will turn your sons away from following [God] to serve other gods.**”

1. In God’s previous statements He warns us of the power of practiced sin to harm our spiritual, emotional, and mental health.
2. But here, in these three verses, God warns us of the power of culture – and in this specific context the political, business, and religious sub-cultures of the world around us – to at least turn our children, if not us as well, away from following Him to serve the gods of the world around us.
3. And it is important for us to be aware that **we are the ones** letting these ungodly influences in. And in this context, we do it by aligning ourselves with the political mindset and direction of the world, by taking on ungodly business partners and accepting at least some of the ungodly business practices of the world, and by marriage with a known unbeliever when we, or our son or daughter are confessing to be followers of God.
4. This alignment with unbelievers creates two dangerous problems.
 - a. **First**, these kinds of alignments with unbelievers or so-called Christians adds a level of acceptance and therefore legitimacy to their ungodly ways and continued practice of sin.
 - b. **Second**, when we become partners with those who live according to the ungodly culture around us, we are inviting their ungodly influence into our politics, business dealings, and homes – and this to the harm of our spiritual health, the spiritual health of the church, and God’s reputation.
5. The reality is, whether in politics, business, or marriage, the common result is that the unbelieving or so-called Christian partner is far more likely to influence the believing partner **away from** serious minded and intentional trust in God than the believing partner is to influence the unbelieving one **toward** faith in and obedience to God.
6. The effects of the influence may not be seen for a time, but unless you or your children are strong enough to withstand such ungodly yet tempting influences, both you and your children will eventually stop following God and turn toward following the thinking, ways, and gods of the unbelieving world.
 - a. This does not mean you will abandon your Christian religious practices, but you will abandon God as your provider and protector, you will forsake loving God supremely in order to love

the world and things in the world, and you will replace God with yourself as the authority in your life.

- b. In **Revelation 2:1-7**, we have the first of God's seven letters to seven churches. This first letter was written to the church in Ephesus, and they were highly commended by God – so much so that we are wise to learn from them how to be a God-pleasing church. **And yet, God had one thing against them – they had left their first love.**

- (1) I take this to mean they had stopped loving God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength and started loving people and things other than God more than God – which always results in no longer loving and valuing godliness above all else this world has to offer.

- (2) Therefore, it is my opinion that the Christians in Ephesus had fallen the farthest – even though the last letter, which was to the church in Laodicea, describes them as being a church God wanted to vomit out of His mouth.

- c. Now you may be wondering why I think the church at Ephesus had fallen the farthest? It is because in no longer loving God and godliness, **above all else**, they had lost the one, immovable rock to which they could anchor their lives in order to faithfully and carefully travel the narrow path in living a God-fearing, God-loving, God-pleasing life.

- (1) The reality is, we more easily see the church in Laodicea as a spiritually sick church because of what they had become.

- (2) And yet, they didn't start at that level of sickness, they progressively worked their way there – and most probably by taking that first, fatal step of leaving their first love.

- (3) Do you see the power of culture to influence? Ephesus's downward move opened the door for a piece of the world's culture to enter the church's culture, and we see the sad outcome of this in Laodicea – a church which was openly combining worldliness with godliness.

- 7. So what are we to do as God's people who gather as Redford Church? God's instructions continue in **vs 5** – where He gives both directions and the reason for following those directions.

- E. [5] **“But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, and smash their sacred pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire. [6] For you are a holy people to the**

LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”

1. Extreme threats require extreme action – and the safest way is to take the extreme action from the start.
 - a. But sadly, it is the rare Christian these days who sees the extreme threat of letting just a small piece of the world into the church and making it an accepted part of church life.
 - b. It is even rarer for Christians to look down the road far enough to see that what may begin as a “good idea” – in their way of thinking – will in time produce a church culture like the one in Laodicea and Christians like the Laodiceans.
2. The reality is, too many Christians are lulled to sleep on this issue because the immediate results of a good idea taken from the world are often increased attendance, increased ministry opportunities, increased offerings, and increased influence in the community.
3. Yet once we let the cultural influences of the world in, and we align ourselves with them so as to treat them as good, they become exceedingly hard to drive back out. And as with all evil, they grow and grow.
4. And so God’s way is take extreme measures to prevent the ungodly influences of the world around us from entering in and becoming an accepted part of our church culture. Why? Because we are **a holy people to the LORD our God** who has chosen us to be a people for His own possession.

III. Conclusion

- A. Therefore, if we have repented, put our faith in Jesus Christ, and are pursuing godliness, then we belong to God, and we are to be a holy people unto Him. To be a holy people means we must exclude being double-minded, or a mixed cultured people who are merging two opposing cultures and calling it Christianity.
- B. **Titus 2:11-14** . . . For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, [12] instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, [13] looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, [14] who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.