

Religious People, Stiff Necked and Angry

by Shane Idleman

Religious people are often stiff-necked and angry, but we must humble ourselves and be teachable in order to receive God's guidance and respond to His will.

Duration: 1:00:25

Scripture: Matthew 3:8, Matthew 23:27, Mark 8:34, Acts 2:38, Acts 7:44, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 5:18, James 4:7, James 4:10

Topics: "Religious Legalism", "Holy Spirit"

Description

This sermon addresses the issue of religious people being stiff-necked and angry, emphasizing the difference between religion and relationship with God. It highlights the need to surrender to God, repent of sin, and embrace a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit, humility, and the power of the cross is emphasized to overcome anger and religious legalism.

Transcript

The title is Religious People Are Often Stiff-Necked And Angry. Now if you know it, this will step on toes, I know it will. But if you know of any religious people, if you know of any religious people, and at the end of this sermon you'll know what religious people are, get the sermon on your way out and just say, hey you might want to check this out, just leave it on the coffee table, just drop it on the front seat of their car, leave it on their desk at work.

Because religious people, I actually have a heart for religious people because I was one. Good person, I have a Bible, I live in America, I'm good with God. And I actually have ministered to family members, one of them is dying of cancer, and when we talk about this subject they'll say, well Shane I'm good, I'm a Baptist, or I'm a Methodist, or I'm a Catholic, I'm good, but they're religious.

So you don't count on your denomination when you stand before Christ. You count on the cross, you will be able to stand before God and say because of what Christ did on the cross, I can be allowed into the kingdom of God. No denomination will ever save you.

And that's my concern for some of these churches that are caught in the religious system. There's some here close by our church, there's some in Lancaster, they're religious, they go through a bunch of rules, but they don't have a relationship. And often religious people are often stiff-necked and angry, and I'm going to draw this from Acts 7, 44, if you have your Bibles you can turn to Acts 7, 44.

But let me just throw this out there as an introduction. Religion says I have to follow rules, a relationship with Christ says I want to follow His plan for my life. Perfect example of this, follow rules, follow rules.

I wrote a, I don't even know if you have it, it might be on entertainment, but we released an article about the Filthy Shades of Grey that's out. That new movie that's out, and there's about 50,000 shares of it in four days. So we're getting lots of Facebook, lots of emails, people are like, that's legalistic, people should have the freedom to do whatever they want.

You can't tell people to, see that's, I have to, I can't go see that movie, oh darn it. It should be, I don't want to. I don't want to see pornography on the film, I don't want to, I have this desire to follow Christ.

So it's not have to, I want to. That's a difference often between religion and relationship. Because of my relationship with Christ, they're not rules to me, they're the plan for a healthy marriage.

And I want to follow those, so religion says I have to, relationship says I want to follow His plan for my life. Religion says I have to go to church, and I hear people say that a lot, I have to go to church. No you don't.

You should want to go to church. Here's a good test, time to get offensive right off the bat. If you're sitting there going, another song? You have a heart problem.

Because I, oh, five songs, I hope this guy is not long-winded today. Man. There's something wrong with your heart.

Most of us are back there going, why stop the worship? Let's just keep worshiping, Shane, can you just not give a message today? And that has happened before. That actually has happened before, and at the risk of being repetitive on this, I think it's important, I actually, there was a second service in Lancaster, I couldn't even come up to preach. We just need to keep worshiping.

And somebody actually left upset. They got mad at the other, I came here to listen to a message, well, hello. You need worship.

You need, you just, you're running from the very thing you need. So if you're saying another song, young adults do this, because I sit in the back row, oh, I hate this song, I can't wait to get home and listen to my secular music that feeds my fleshly passions, but I don't like worship. The reason you don't like worship is because your heart is not right in the sight of God.

You need spiritual resuscitation. Because it cries Abba Father, there's nothing you can do about it. It just, I love to worship.

You'll love to, you love to worship. You should not be bored with worship, that's a relationship. Religion offers a set of rituals, a relationship with Jesus offers a guiding light.

Religion is man's attempt to find God. You search all the religions of the world, and I've read up on a lot of them, they are attempting to find God, somehow. But relationship, true relationship with Christ is God reaching down to man and saving man.

Big difference. Now Act 744, boy, let me set this up a little bit, because some of you weren't here, Stephen, who was a disciple, early disciple, he's actually the first martyr, was accused of blasphemy. So he's giving this long discourse showing why it's not blasphemy, it's the truth.

And the religious leaders don't like what he's saying. So he's about to finish up in 744, he talks about the tabernacle in the wilderness. God, this is an interesting concept as well, God would have a tabernacle in the wilderness.

They would enter through this certain area, and then the Holy of Holies is this final place where they would go make sacrifices for the people. That's where God would dwell, that's where his presence would dwell. So sometimes people think, well, isn't God everywhere? Yeah, but when God's manifest presence shows up, you know it.

You know it. You study any revival in church history, and they knew it. God showed up.

It goes from a boring, dead service to a service where you don't get home until midnight tonight when God shows up. There's something tangible, his manifest presence, the closer you draw to God, the closer you'll feel that. So there is something different and distinct.

I pray for revival all the time because of this. But then Stephen says in verse 48, however, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says, heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool. Can you believe that? Heaven is my throne and earth.

He puts his feet on earth as his footstool. What house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Has not my hand made all of these things? And I thought for a minute, we're going to put up a slide real quick. That's God's, that's where he sits on the, do you see yourself there? Can you see your house? You can't even see earth.

That's where we are. God sits on that and I just got soaked. He sits on every problem, every situation you're going through.

He owns all that. He created all that. So look to the great God, how great is our God, the worship song says it.

Look to him for everything. Not the news, not the government, not this, oh, what's going on? He created that. He holds all of that together.

Every time I see that picture, I go, why don't one of those little stars hit us? There's billions and billions. And as I'm studying for the debate, just the magnitude, the mathematical equations for all of this to work to support life, the gravitational, it's just amazing. And then you see in the middle a black hole and that black hole is where gravity is so strong that not even light can escape.

Not even light escapes. They say it's a place of outer darkness. Hmm, whoever read that before? Just interesting.

So that's your God. That's his throne. Earth is his footstool.

He dwells in, I mean, if we just concentrate on how great our God is, your problem would go from very big to very small when you focus on who he is. So that's what Stephen is reminding us. But then Stephen turns his direction in verse 51, and probably he's not trying to win a popularity contest.

Because they've been rejecting God, they've been rejecting Christ, they've been rejecting his message. He says, you stiff-necked, uh-oh, you stiff-necked. You know what that is, right? You get your neck, you stiff-necked.

You're arrogant, you're proud, you stiff-necked and uncircumcised and your heart and your ears. So uncircumcised is your heart needs to be rent open, it needs to be humbled before Lord. Stop stopping up your ears and start listening.

God, what do you want to say? Speak. Your servant is listening. So he's saying, you don't do that.

You always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the just one, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.

That time a serpent will get you killed. You stiff-necked people, you religious leaders, you killed Christ, you killed the anointed one, you killed God's Messiah. Everything the angels foretold, you are murderers and the Messiah's blood is in your hands.

What happened? Time to kill this guy, right? Stephen is on a course to being martyred. Let's stop there for a minute. The reason the stiff-necked, the neck reflects the heart often.

Think about that. The neck. You know, when somebody, they don't want to get arrested, what, what'd you say? The neck goes back.

The gangbangers. Right? I won't try that. But you know what? The neck is up.

What'd you say to me? It's this position of arrogance. But the teachable broken person is God. They're broken.

They're humbled. They're bent over. They're not stiff-necked.

Bowing down and lowering your head is often a mark of humility. That's why we do it when we worship. Now there's nothing wrong with praising God and you're looking up to God, but a heart that's worshipping is a heart inside that's bowed down, that's humbled before God.

And what he's saying here basically is we are stiff-necked when we reject the will of God. So a person who is rejecting the call of salvation, especially in our nation, look, we've got Bible apps. We've got preachers on TV.

We've got guys on radio. We've got churches. We've got everything.

You've got the conviction of the Holy Spirit. You've got all these things. You've got friends.

And they keep rejecting it. They're rejecting the counsel of God. They're stiff-necked and they're proud and they're arrogant when they're rejecting God's will.

Now bring that into personal application. I believe that we can be stiff-necked when we personally are rejecting God's will. Is there areas sometimes that you know God wants you to do, but you're stiff-necked about it? Please shake your head yes, because I don't want to be the only one.

Stiff-necked. Arrogant. And I would encourage you this morning, humble yourself.

Humble yourself. Take that stiff neck and turn it into a humble heart. Circumcise your heart.

Remove that fleshly aspect of the heart that is preventing you from hearing from God. Then verse 54, when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart. I bet they were.

And then they gnashed at him with their teeth. You know, this is a grinding of teeth. You ever seen people that angry? Just, they're so mad, they're going to explode.

Their face is red and they're just so mad. And I've noticed that when it comes to religious, when it comes to topics like this, that's why they say don't talk about religion or politics. When you talk about these things, people get very, very mad.

They go from very nice to very mad, gnashing their teeth. I remember, you're in Lancaster, remember this, for the other people that haven't been here, coming very long. You probably won't, but I was given the privilege, I guess it is, to go to a Mormon bishop's house.

And after about an hour of hearing them, I kind of broke it down. He said, so you're saying that the Book of Mormon is from the devil? I said, yeah, I think it is. You would have thought, you just lit his house on fire.

Get your shoes, get out of my house. Within one, two, within about three minutes, we were out of his house. What happened? You're sitting there, nice, cordial, let's just dialogue.

Sure you want to dialogue while you're doing all the talking. But then when you challenge him with, here's what the Word of God says, and they gnashed, I mean, he was mad. He would have killed me if he could.

If it was not against the law, I would have been dead. What stirs that? It's that demonic element. The demonic element that's working in an unbeliever's life gets upset when you shine the light of Christ into their eyes.

It's nothing new. So they were cut to the heart, they gnashed with their teeth, but he, Stephen, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God. And Jesus standing at the right hand of God and said, look, I see the heavens open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

This is just like when he says, I saw the glory of God. It's what I mentioned to you before. There is a time, sometimes, the more you press into worship, the more you press into God through fasting and prayer, and as reading his word, he'll start to unfold things.

The glory of God will fall upon your life. It reminds me of Isaiah in the sixth chapter. When it was in the year that King Uzziah died, he said, I saw the Lord high and lifted up.

The train of his robe, his entire robe, filled the temple. And the angels were there singing, holy, holy, holy is our God. He got a glimpse of God.

He was in God's presence. And what did he say? Oh, wonderful. No, he said, oh, man, I'm a man of unclean lips.

And I dwell among a people of unclean lips. I'm not worthy to stand in front of your presence. When God reveals who he is, when you're standing in the presence of God, you are not haughty and arrogant lifted up.

You are broken before him. You see your sin. I mean, if he ever opened your eyes spiritually, and you see the depravity, you have to weep.

And God says, I will fix that problem. I'll touch his lips with the coals that were on the altar representing the sacrifice. And he was made clean before God.

But he saw a glimpse, Moses saw God, Paul experienced Christ. There are times where you will experience the power of God in your life. And that's what was happening here.

The closer we draw near to God, the more we will reflect his glory. Glory is radiance. It's nature.

I think it comes from a Latin word that has to do with being renowned, famous. This renowned aspect, this glory of God. It will be reflected in your life.

The closer you draw to him, the more you reflect that. That's why I talk about entertainment often, and I weave it in sermons. Because if you're 50 shades of gray versus drawing near, what are you going to look like? What are you going to resemble? What's going to be in your heart? What are you going to be filled with? You reflect who you spend time with.

Also we see here that Bible preaching cuts to the heart. True Bible preaching will cut to the heart. Yes, it encourages.

Yes, it uplifts. But if it's all about love, which I've talked about often, so I won't take this rabbit trail even though I'd love to. If it's all about the good things and not the things that cut the heart, change doesn't take place.

Because what happens, it cuts to the heart, and then you point to Christ. It cuts to the heart, and then you point to Christ. It cuts, and then you show the answer, Christ being the answer.

So, on this, what do you do when you're cut? What do you do when you're cut, when you're badly wounded emotionally? Are you mad and defensive, stiff-necked, or are you open and teachable? Ouch. When you're cut, are we in defensive mode, or are we open and teachable? It's interesting, this word here, he says, they were cut to the heart, and then I immediately think of Acts chapter 2, when Peter preached his first sermon, and he said, you stiff-necked people, basically, you killed Christ, you put him on the cross. They were cut to the heart, and they said, Peter, what must we do to be saved? So you have this group, what must we do to be saved, and this other group, we're going to kill you.

All has to do with the heart. I bet Steve was going, darn it. I wonder what happened with Peter.

I wanted all these people to repent and follow God, not be the first martyr, not be stoned. Think about this. He preached the gospel, they took him somewhere where he was probably down low, and they threw large stones and boulders at him, hit his face, crushed his skull.

They were stoned for saying this. And I believe that God allows us to be cut to reveal the heart. God allows you to be cut to the heart to reveal the heart.

If you're here this morning being cut by a lot of these words, he's wanting to show you what is in the heart. You remember, you ever have little kids, and when a package comes from FedEx, I mean, you have to open it right then, right, or you never get, like, Daddy, what, what, what, it came in the mail. What's in it? What's in it? I don't know.

I have to cut it open. Same thing. We have to be, when we're cut, it reveals the heart.

My mom used to tell me when I was little, and I didn't like it because it was usually applied to me, but she would say, when a vessel is struck, what's inside spills out. So when you're cut, does humility and gentleness and meekness and understanding and grace and goodness flow out? Or when you're cut, does anger and cursing comes from this, and does this, does this come out? You're like, where did that come from? I'll tell you where it came from. It's what's within.

That's why, see, now you're seeing why spending time with God is so important in the morning, your devotional time and your worship time, and if you're crying out to God, you spend time with Him in the morning or in the evening, whatever, and you're just full of His Spirit. When you're cut or when something happens, grace will flow out. Love will flow out because it's been what's coming inside.

Now nobody's ever going to master this perfectly, but when things happen, what comes out? Here's the best way to do it and not beat ourselves up, is when we're cut, when we're challenged, when we're all these things, what comes out? What comes out? Is it a consistently anger? Is it consistently cussing? Is it consistently backbiting? If it's consistent, then there's a well there that needs to be dried up and replaced with living water, because everybody slips now and then, right? I have not perfected yet when I hit my hand with a hammer to say, glory be to God, or my kids do something, you little rascals. Get over here, you little guys. It's what comes out, so just be careful in this area.

We're talking about stiff-necked and being angry, but it's really what is in is what is coming out. Verse 57, then they cried out with a loud voice. Stephen convicted them, he challenged them, then they cried out with a loud voice.

They stopped their ears and they ran at him with one accord. And they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

Saul right now is the Apostle Paul, who has not yet been converted. So Saul hates Christians. That would be an encouragement to you who are upset at your past.

Not too many people can compete, unless you've been killing Christians, don't regret, or don't let your, it's okay to regret and learn from, but don't let your past stop you from moving forward with what God wants you to do. God will use your past. He used Saul's training, and his teaching, and his upbringing, he used all that past to get him where God wanted him to go in the future.

So they cast him out of the city, they stoned him, they laid their clothes down at the feet of a young man named Saul. They would probably take off their jackets, they'd take off their clothing, because you can throw a rock a lot harder, right? When you get the stuff off of me, and stoning him, and Paul, Saul held those things. So they stoned Stephen, and he was calling on God, saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

Then he knelt down and he cried with a loud voice, Lord, do not charge them with this sin. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. So Stephen's getting stoned, and he says, Lord, do not charge them.

Why? Because he's filled with the spirit of God. When you're filled completely with the spirit of God, overflowing, those are the things that come out. Jesus, dying on a cross, just got hit and beat up by his creation, says, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

Not Father, judge them. Bring the hammer, drop the hammer, get me off this cross. Kill these Romans, kill the Jews, start over.

It's this aspect of forgiveness. And I've noticed that a forgiving heart often doesn't have an angry heart. But when a person holds on to unforgiveness, that will foster anger.

Unforgiveness and anger go hand in hand, because it's the nature that you're holding on to unforgiveness, it's that same nature that drives anger. I'm unforgiving, I'm mad, how could they? I'm angry. It's the same, it's a one-two punch.

That's why when the Bible says don't let bitterness or wrath or anger, all these things, let them be put away from you, because God knows it has to do with spiritual healing. Not to mention the physical benefits. Do you know the physical benefits of being joy-filled and full of the spirit and not having anger, all these toxic emotions that wear the body down? God knows what he's doing when he says put these things away.

So being receptive is a good indicator of humility, since we're talking about anger and pride. Being receptive is a good indicator of humility. Now this should have read, once he convicted them, they cried out to God, they opened their ears and they embraced him.

That's what humility would have done, they were not humble and teachable. Anger is a by-product of being stiff-necked. But watch out also, I just put this this morning, watch out for false humility.

Because false humility goes around with a facade and just trying to be humble, but really they're not. They often come up, I'm just humble, I'm just meek, I'm just mild, but they are explosive at home or when challenged or when upset. False humility is dangerous as well.

Now while we're on this, I thought I might just give you a few facts on anger. If you need help in this area, just in case you didn't know it, most men do need help in this area, and women as well, but mainly I've seen it in men. What you're filled with eventually comes out.

We already talked about that. Stephen was filled with the spirit, but these men were filled with rage, even though they were religious. So when it comes to anger, what you're filled with is what's going to come out.

Number two, selfishness and pride are the fingers that pull the trigger of anger. So those things have to be crushed. Selfishness and pride.

Isn't that why we get upset? Selfishness or pride? And it hurts and we get upset and we get angry. Things aren't going according to my plan. I didn't like that to happen.

You're overriding my authority. All these things, selfishness and pride often. Now number three, I was going back and forth on whether I should say this or not, but it's important.

If you struggle, if anger is a big deal, watch what you're consuming. Watch what you give your body. If you drink monster drink, you will become a monster.

The high level of caffeine, you are in fight and flight mode. That's what it does. It puts your body, come on, come on.

Yeah, I'm ready. I'm ready now. No, the anger, that just fuels anger.

So be careful. Medication, certain things. What we feed our body plays a huge role in what comes out.

Why would you give yourself something on an ongoing basis where you're always in fight or flight mode? Can't relax in traffic. Can't relax when somebody challenges you. You can't relax when the kids get, nothing, because you're always in fight.

I'm so angry. Sheena, I need help. God, I need deliverance.

Well, remove all that junk. No, I don't want to do that. Just give me deliverance without the obedience.

I always tell people, caffeine, nicotine, all those things that will play a huge role in anger. And then obviously the fourth one is when we live in habitual sin. What I mean by that is when there's areas that we just keep falling in and falling in and falling in and we walk around as a defeated Christian, are we happy? Or are we upset and angry? We're upset and angry because we're trying willpower.

I can't overcome this. I can't overcome this. And we just get through life not spirit-filled, not leading people to the cross, not being used of God.

We just walk around angry and defeated. Angry and defeated. They go together, don't they? I'm defeated.

I'm angry. I can't read the Bible. How did that happen? How do I keep falling into sin? Why is this? And we just stay in this cycle of anger and defeat.

Anger and defeat. What's the answer? Take it to the cross for the love of God. Take it to the cross.

That's the whole point of a message. You point back to Christ and the cross. You take these things.

When you pray, Lord, I'm an angry person, confession, Lord, I need help, dependence, Lord, I'm going to work on this, obedience, confession, dependence, obedience. You open up. You say, Lord, help me in this area.

I've seen Him change raging men into mild and meek men and women. I've seen God do it. I've seen it.

I've seen the dangers of anger. And I've seen how it hurts families and destroys marriages. Ecclesiastics 7.9, do not be quickly provoked in your spirit.

That's a tough one, right? You feel it ever rising up? You know, it just started in my feet. Now it's in my knees. It's about ready.

Let that be right here. It's coming out. But He says, do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.

So when you feel it coming up, do something. Pray. Remove yourself from the situation.

Take a drive and put on worship. You have to offset that. Proverbs 15.18, a hot-tempered person stirs up conflict, but the one who is patient calms a quarrel.

So, quick test. Please don't raise your hand. Do you like to stir the pot? Or do you like to, what it says at the end here, calm the quarrel, be the peacemaker? Now, it's interesting on this peacemaker thing, A.W. Tozer said that God calls us to be a peacemaker, but not a peace negotiator.

You don't have to negotiate the truth and kind of compromise things to make peace. A peacemaker is not a negotiator where they negotiate. They come and they make peace and they help to calm the storm, not

increase the storm.

You know those words that trigger your spouse or family, don't you? Come on, guys. You know how to throw a little bit of fire, or no, sorry, a little bit of gasoline on the fire? Let me do a little bit of gasoline over here, a little more gasoline over here. And then, how could you, gasoline, why don't you do this, gasoline, oh, well, you're never this, gasoline.

You're just constantly doing it. The Bible says put that away. This is an interesting challenge in the Bible on these types of things, because the Bible says put these things away.

Do not do these things. Put off this. And we're like, but I'm trying, I'm trying, I just can't do it.

If you're a believer, you can. If you're a believer, you can do what the Bible commands you to do through the power of the Holy Spirit. Here's what it looks like.

God, I have an issue with anger, I have a problem with anger. Or there's a situation, I do this quite often, Lord, this is making me upset, please, God, just show me what to do here, I'm just gonna, just give it a day, I'm just gonna seek you, and you just calm that spirit, you just calm that anger. Or you can start dwelling on it, right? You know, God, you guys are not, you know what I'm saying, right? Okay, good.

You just dwell on those negative thoughts, you just dwell, how could they, and why I need to tell them off? I need to give them a piece of my mind, and it just keeps increasing and increasing. And then we get to Acts 8, now Stephen is dead, and then Saul, it says, now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time, a great persecution arose against the church, which was in Jerusalem.

And they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. So the apostles stayed there, but this persecution began to move the people out. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made great lamentation over him.

As for Saul, who will become the apostle Paul, he made havoc of the church, entering houses and dragging off men and women and committing them to prison. That's what Paul did. So we see here that Paul was stiff-necked.

Paul was saying, how dare you challenge how I was raised, and how dare you challenge what I believe? And you'll see that in the church. We all get kind of defensive on this, right? When somebody challenges, that's why I think it's hard to get into some of these false cults, false religions in America, because they've been raised in that. Grandpappy was raised in that.

My mom and dad raised me in that. I've been raised in that. We are good people.

How dare you now come and say that we are wrong? How dare you stiff-neck and arrogant? And when I talk to groups like this, often I'll say, what's the Bible saying? I mean, let's go, well, yeah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. No, what does the Bible say? Because see, the truth always invites scrutiny. The truth always invites scrutiny.

A person has a problem with eternity, look at the truth. A person has a problem with this, creation, look at the truth. A person has a problem with a prophet in their religion came to receive truth that doesn't line up with Scripture, what is the Scripture? It's actually very easy to determine what the truth is if you look at the Scriptures.

So Saul, Paul was stiff-necked. How dare you challenge me? How dare you challenge how he was raised, what I believe he was taught? He was a Pharisee. He was raised up by one of the top Jewish leaders, and he knew his stuff.

So this is a perfect example of religion versus relationship, isn't it? Look at the Apostle Paul who was well-qualified, Saul back then, well-qualified to preach, well-qualified to tell people about God. And then here comes Stephen, probably not been a convert very long. I mean, the church, I don't want to speculate here, but the church is not very old at all.

And he's filled with the Spirit, he's preaching a gospel. Here you have this guy who's a Pharisee, who knows the Bible inside and out, and he's on his way to hell. Had he not been converted, Saul would be in hell.

So we see religion versus relationship. Folks, they read the same Old Testament. Stephen, Paul, they read the same Old Testament.

They saw the prophecies in Zechariah. They saw the prophecies in Isaiah. They knew about the Messiah.

They knew, they had the same thing. That's why religion often looks like relationship, but it's got a blind, it's got a veil on their face. So they go through the same motions sometimes.

They'll say the same things, but it's like a programmed robot of religion and going through the motions of prayer, saying the same things, and the same type of things, reading this in Latin, doing this in prayer, and all these things. It's just the same religious emotion that has nothing to do with relationship with God. Because relationship is on fire for God.

It's doing different things. And this is, I want to bring this up, I think it's important because, and you, most of you know my heart, it's not to name these different religions, but I have to, to tell you the difference in what's going on. Say that the building down the street, or other ones in town, or other groups that are not, big organizations as well, that are not what we consider Christians.

They often say, look how structured we are, Shane. But you guys are all divided in all these different denominations. You've got, right, because living children are living.

Dead children are not. Living children need rules, dead children don't. So when they have this form of every church does the same thing, we've got this order of events, and we do the same thing, the same book of this, the same, the same.

We look identical, we look cookie cut. Right, it's religion, not relationship. So when the church is living and vibrant, growing, you've got people exercising gifts of the Spirit here.

You've got different denominations that believe in this. That's why you have the Baptists. They emphasize Baptists.

You believe in Pentecost because they emphasize the book of Acts and Pentecostal and Charismatic. Then you have Reformed, where they take their theology from John Calvin and Calvinism and total depravity of man and unconditional election and limited atonement and irresistible grace and perseverance of the saints. And they have this theology formed around it.

And the people that believe that will hang out with that group. People that believe Charismatic will hang out with that group. People that are non-denominational come here.

And we all just, we're all living and vibrant, trying to live the message of the gospel while bringing the message of the gospel out. That's why we're promoting this class is because we're not just, oh, that sounds good. Let me just go home like that.

No, we're here to bring it out to others, to get it out to people who don't know the gospel. If not, we're just getting fat on the gospel. And we need to lose some weight.

How do you lose weight? You get it out, you get it off. That's how you burn calories. All calories are, this is stored energy that I have not used yet.

And it's not healthy. Good energy that's stored is not healthy. So we come, we listen, we're fed, but we need to go out.

We need to send the message out. So what can we glean from here? God uses persecution to spread the word. God often uses persecution to spread the word.

Oh, I probably, I didn't read actually. I got ahead of myself, I'm sorry. We left off at committing them to prison.

Paul was putting them into prison. And then verse four, as in chapter eight, therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. It's interesting.

These people, they saw Stephen killed. They were scattered, they went everywhere. They weren't hiding under rocks and not saying anything.

They, okay, well, I'm gonna die here. I guess I'll go to this city and preach to God. Everywhere they went.

See, that's a typical response of a spirit-filled believer. That's why I've been preaching on this topic since we begin in the book of Acts. You have to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

Well, how do I know? You know, you know when you're filled with the Spirit because it's an overflowing aspect of God that he consumes everything. He's part of your life in the worship, in the message at home. It's everything, not perfection, but the Spirit-empowered life.

Without that, what are we even teaching for? Without, because that's where we engage what God wants us to do. So they went everywhere, scattered. Then Philip went down to the city.

There's a disciple named Philip. He went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. In the multitudes, with one accord, he did the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed. Isn't that interesting? People don't think you can get demon possessed. That was just allegory.

Jesus really didn't mean it. Yeah, right. Go to a different country sometimes.

Columbia or in the mission field in different nations, you will see this even more so. And many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city.

So we talked about God uses persecution to spread the Word. What about these miracles? Well, miracles are God's megaphone. Miracles, healing, this, this, set free.

That's God's megaphone. And it also confirms the message. Now, the question always comes up, why don't we see this anymore? And the quick answer is, I don't know.

Now, I have thoughts, I have theories, I've suggested, I've shared in the past. I think the closer you draw to God, the more miracles you will see. The closer you are in tune with His Spirit and devoting your life, you will see those because He can be used through you.

He can use you to do things and ministry take place through you. You talk to people out in different nations ministering, and you'll see a lot of, you'll hear a lot of miracles, blind eyes being opened, being cured of certain things. Well, are they all just making this stuff up? Of course not.

I believe in America that we don't rely on God very much. My back hurts, is there some Vicodin? Man, we're in a financial strap, put on Visa. And we don't rely on God as much.

We're not open for the miracles. We're not wanting to see those things. Now, granted, I believe there was a time when the Gospel first came out that there was clear, I mean, the shadow of Paul, handkerchief.

I mean, God was moving in a miraculous way in this area. However, I still think that God can do the miraculous. For it to just stop for no reason does not make a lot of sense.

So the closer you draw to God, the closer you will begin to see Him work in your life. Now, this interesting, we're possessed. And if you look up the Greek, some of you I know have, it's probably better worded as demonized or have a demon.

And then the question comes up, can Christians be possessed? And you'll see some teaching, it says yes, some says no. It really all depends on how you're defining the word. Can a Christian who has the Holy Spirit residing in them, then suddenly and somehow be open, demonic comes in, you're now possessed with the demon, the Holy Spirit leaves, and now you're possessed with this demon? Of course not.

But if you look at the word demonized, can a Christian open themselves up to demonic activity? Can a person, absolutely. So a person can say, you know what? I wonder what this new movie is that was out recently, Ouija. And Ouija board, isn't that entertaining? Maybe we should get together and try it out.

And then we look, well, horoscopes just for fun. And we start to drift from God. You begin to what is open the door.

The Bible talks about opening the door and giving the enemy a foothold. And as we open ourselves up, isn't that entertainment? Isn't that, I mentioned that the movie that's out there, Fifty Shades of Dark or whatever it is, those kinds of things. You begin to open your door.

You begin to own the enemy comes in the demonic realm. Like, why am I struggling with lust like this? I can't believe in the demonic realm. You've opened your door to that.

So we believe that believers can be harassed, influenced by the demonic realm. But it comes in, if you're talking about being possessed, like I can't control myself and I'm just a robot. Whatever Satan wants me to do, that cannot happen to a believer.

When you see people being delivered and set free, often it's those who are unbelievers who had a demon. But you also see believers who've opened themselves up to. It's interesting, this whole debate on marijuana.

I wrote about it in the paper, you know. Who doesn't see the medicinal use of certain things, of course. But if you look at the word pharmacy, it comes from a Greek word pharmakeia or pharmacia.

And it means sorcery, witchcraft. The thing on Walgreens, up on their sign. Witch's pot, brew, you know, medicine.

So you've got to be careful in these areas because you can open your up. Drug use will open the door. You see somebody who has a couple drinks and that leads to a couple more.

How did that happen? That's why it's called spirits. You open yourself. I would never do that.

Of course, you wouldn't sober because you're in control. You begin to open yourself up and you give yourself over to a six pack of such and such. You're no longer controlled by your Holy Spirit, who's now quenched in grief.

You're controlled by this demonic influence. It's serious business when we play with these things. Because you can open that door to the demonic realm.

It was interesting. I was reading that verse. Many of you know what it is.

I knew I should have wrote it down. God does not give us a spirit of fear, but of peace and timidity. It's interesting.

God does not give us a spirit. It's the word pneuma in the Greek language. It's where we get a word pneumatology or the study of the Holy Spirit.

But that word pneuma, it's the same with the Holy Spirit. He does not give us a spirit of... He does not give us that spirit. So is that a spirit? A lying spirit? A fearful spirit of intimidation? Does that spirit come upon a believer and they're gripped with fear and intimidation? It's something to think about.

God, that fear and intimidated, you can rebuke that in Jesus' name and say, if this is some type of demonic realm, this is some type of spiritual nature, in Jesus' name, I am not going to be fearful. I'm going to be bold and I reject that. I'm not going to be intimidated.

I'm not gonna be pushed down. I'm not gonna live in a state of fear because God has not given me a spirit of fear. So if I have that spirit, it's not God.

That's how the demonic realm works. They look for open doors. That's why you're wrestling right now.

You're not wrestling with flesh and blood. You're wrestling with principalities and darkness and the rulers of this age and up in the heavenlies, this dark demonic realm. What's the wrestling match? The wrestling match is He's trying to get you to open certain doors.

I mean, I can't tell you how many problems have started from small open doors. Now we see a sorcerer getting converted, or some say it was a false conversion because he turned away. And later we'll read next week that the sorcerer says, the Bible says he believed, so we'll have to unpack this next week.

He wanted the same power of laying on of hands and seeing the Holy Spirit. And he was rebuked and they said, you will have no part nor portion in this matter because your heart is not right before God. So it's an interesting debate on, and then the Holy Spirit falls in Samaria, but they're already believers.

So what is the Holy Spirit falling later? And so we're going to cover that next week. You want to be here next week, because I'm going to try to better understand what happened here. But verse nine, there was a certain man named Simon who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great and to whom they all gave heed from the least to the greatest, saying, this man is the great power of God.

Obviously he was doing some type of sorcery, some type of witchcraft. And it's interesting, always remember this, it's helped me a lot. The demonic realm knows all about your past because they were there.

So they will bring up, remember when you're abused as a child, how would you know that this must be of God? No, the abusive spirit might've been there too. But they won't be able to tell you what's happening in the future. The horoscopes, all these things, astrology, turn away from it quickly.

I just asked one person a couple weeks ago about this, and they go, oh, it's just for fun. Really? The horoscope is just for fun? You're opening yourself up to that demonic realm. So this sorcerer here, he previously practiced sorcery, and he had the great power of God, they said, just because obviously he was doing something that was extraordinary.

And they heeded him because he astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. But when they believed in Philip, as he preached the thing concerning the kingdom of God in the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed.

And when he was baptized, he continued with Philip and was amazed seeing the miracles and the signs which were done. I want to just kind of stay calm right now, but this scripture, I was just so blessed this week because I realized not even the demonic realm. This guy's into sorcery.

He comes and preaches the gospel. This guy's set free. So you don't have co-equal forces going on here, God and the devil battling it out.

You have the sorcery going on. Philip walks on the scene, tells them about Christ, the all-sufficient Savior, the great and mighty one who holds everything in his hand. He is high and lifted up.

And even the demonic realm had to submit to that, and this great sorcerer is converted. But it's just exciting because sometimes we get caught up in this, the devil and God. Oh, who's going to win in my life? Oh, I've got this challenging situation.

And who's going to win? Oh, no, no, no, no. It's not a boxing match to watch who's going to win. This is very interesting.

Some would call it dichotomy. But the victory has already been won. So you're not fighting necessarily for a position of, I've got to win, God's victory.

You're coming from a position of victory. You're just called. That's why the Bible says, having done all, stand.

Just stand there, hold the ground. The Bible's been won. Jesus Christ conquered hell, death, sin, and the grave.

So we fight from a position of victory. So if somebody, that demonic realm or whatever, I mean, I've had people that you know they're demon-possessed, and I just say, I don't care. I don't care.

You have to be under Christ's authority. Don't talk about that. Don't talk about that name.

Oh, yes, we will talk about that name. Why don't you like that name? Even the demons tremble because that name is high and lifted up above every other name. They will have to bow their knee.

They'll have to even be forced. I don't know if they're going to have to bow their knee at some point, get on the ground and say, God has highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name. They hate that.

So you walk in that power. You walk in the authority. You can walk into the hospital homes, not be intimidated.

You can walk on your job site, not be intimidated. You can present the gospel, not be intimidated. It doesn't matter because Christ has already won.

So you come from a position of victory. This guy is doing sorcery. Philip doesn't even debate him.

He just preaches the gospel. And people are converted. They turn from sorcery.

They turn from witchcraft because when they compare, they'll see the true source of power. Darkness, people always know that's not the true source of power. It has me bound.

It has a grip. But when the power of the light of the gospel comes on, they see that as the true source of power and strength. The gospel is always stronger.

Remember that. And it'll help you not get frustrated. Because you get, oh gosh, they're just not listening.

Oh yeah, they're listening. Because when you plant, I've noticed when you plant the word of God, that seed is staying there. Some people can't even sleep.

Ask somebody sometimes, hey, where are you going if you die? Oh man, they're just gonna think about that, think about that. Here's what God's word says. And you plant that seed.

What is sorcery? Just while I'm here, it's calling on the wrong spirit. Sorcery, looking to the wrong spirit for guidance and direction. And while we're on the topic of anger, anger often follows darkness.

Wrong anger, wrong anger is demonic. It's a demonic influence. Explosive anger.

What can cause a father to shake his one-year-old so violently that she dies? What is so demonic? Anger is destructive. There are kids addicted right now who are running away from God because of angry parents who yelled and lashed out and didn't represent Christ. Now, I've not mastered this area, but I will apologize to my kids.

And I will say here, and they see that spirit of humility and needing Christ. I tell her, I need Jesus too. I need Jesus too.

But anger, look what it destroys. Look at that. Look at little boys are hurt, little girls, their spirits are broke because of anger.

I know I came from a very angry, very angry home on my dad's side. You know, the whole thing, boy, you don't cry and this anger and walking on eggshells, every like, ooh, and it just crushes and breaks. And then you look to alcohol, you look to others, you look for self-esteem, you look for approval because you're broken by this destructive thing.

So anger is not good in this form. Now, there's something called righteous indignation, anger that like, I have to stop the sex slave trade. I have to stop abortion.

I have to, I'm sick and tired of this city being called the number one child abuse capital. What can we do? What can we do, Lord, and that anger fuels passion, that anger fuels you to do, I'm so angry, I've had enough, I'm gonna do something. Have you ever, really, have you ever done that? So that's a good kind of anger.

So on this, I forgot to tie this in with sorcery, but darkness should not entertain you. Here's something to keep the Ouija boards, astrology, horoscopes, spells, wizards, all that thing, darkness should not entertain you. So if there's something entertaining about darkness, check your heart.

Because all these movies about vampires and witches and the occult, and all these young adults are so attained, they love it, they can't get enough, but they hate being in church. Could it be that demonic element is influencing them? Oh, Shane, this hurts, good, it's time to hurt. If you open yourself up, you will close yourself off to the work of the Spirit.

And that's the key, Philip's power was stronger. And now I'll close with this. Simon himself also believed.

So Simon the sorcerer believed, and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done. That's where we're gonna pick up next week, because he wants to buy this power. He wants to buy the power he's seeing.

But he was, it's interesting, he was believed, and then he was baptized. And I don't wanna minimize this, because this is a perfect opportunity. Believe and be baptized is the norm.

A person who believes should wanna get baptized. Good plug, March 5th, after the second service, we would love to see a list of people wanting to get baptized. I was baptized as a baby.

I was baptized as a little kid. I didn't really understand it. Or Shane, I've come to believe.

We're hearing from people all the time. They're coming to believe through the church and through the preaching of the word. Get baptized, there's no reason why we shouldn't.

I mean, we should have a full every Sunday. Does anybody wanna get baptized? Okay, I'll just wear this. I mean, I believe today I wanna get baptized.

That's what we did. It's a step of obedience. Why? Here's what happens.

Nine times out of 10, when I ask people, are you ready to get baptized? Oh, I don't wanna get that serious yet. What? Do you have any scriptural support for that? You won't find anything. Now, I haven't quite put my hands around this yet, but often you have to wonder about their commitment.

It's like, I'll be, you know, I'll try it, Shane. I'll try it out, but I don't want anybody to know. I mean, when you truly believe, you know, and you want to get baptized.

So if you haven't been baptized, Jesus was baptized. Let us know, sign up for it. Nick, we're doing it on March 5th.

And it just, it's a point, I believe, of obedience. And it's also a point of humility. I explained it before.

I probably explained this a lot now because it motivates people. But I was 30 years old, and I got baptized in 2000 around Christmas. I came back to the Lord.

I did it when I was a little kid in a pool. I had no clue what it meant. And I want to say, Jesus, I believe fully with my heart.

I want to follow you. Your word's been coming alive. I want to go in front of people and publicly confess that I want to be baptized.

And I had to fight a 30-year, Shane, you're, I mean, I was speaking at churches. Or I was, 2000, I was just starting to speak and write and different things. And I'm like, oh goodness, this is embarrassing.

Oh, 30-year-old. But nobody cared. Nobody could, we all know, we've baptized 70, 80-year-old people here before.

Or young adults who say, I want to make a professional face. So I don't want to minimize baptism. Here's why.

Jesus never did. Believe and be baptized. The Ethiopian believed and was baptized.

This person believed and was baptized. Why? Because I believe, now I'm going to show you by the sincerity of my commitment that it's real. I'm going to publicly declare that I'm a follower of Jesus Christ.

And that's where you know where the rubber meets the road. I often wonder if we could take a picture as you're leaving. Hey, we're going to put this picture in the Allent Valley Press newspaper, and we're going to let everybody know you're a believer around town.

Are you good with that? Not right now, maybe next week. Why is that? Because it's a heart check. That's why I bring these things up.

It's a heart check to see where we're at with that relationship. So here's the points to ponder. Is anger dominating your life because you are not filled with the Spirit? And it's a daily struggle.

Here comes anger. Empty yourself. Be filled with the Spirit.

And I want to focus our prayer and worship towards anger. It's destroying our homes. It's destroying our marriages.

It's destroying relationships with fellow believers. We need to humble ourselves. Who in the world do we think we are that we can't be challenged? Who? It was funny.

I think it was last Sunday. There were friends from out of town in Texas. My mom brought them.

And she goes, oh, son, that was a great message, but you never got to the cross at the end. You're right, I didn't. It's all about fearing God, fearing God, and fearing God, and fearing God.

I'm like, ah, that's right. Or, huh, will you tell me what to do? It was fine. People know.

See? So I said, yeah, I can't believe I forgot that. Because the people from out of town, you know, and they're like, oh, I thought you were going to get to the cross. I'm like, yeah, how did that happen? Never again.

Never again. I got to point people back to the cross. But to be open for constructive criticism, it's hard, right? Being a pastor is the hardest thing I've ever done in my life.

You have to have two-inch thick skin. You have to go around town and say, wonderful sermon. I love it.

And hear from somebody else, I hate you and everything you stand for. I probably hate your children because I hate you. I mean, you just, whoa, God's calling me to do it.

And you have to have, Morgan has to have thick skin. Oh, man, there's all this, you know. But that's part of dealing with anger and not being angry.

So I can, what I'm trying to say is, I should just say from the get-go, I can relate. I can relate. You think I just walk around all humble all the time and, you know, especially I come here early and these guys think the hill is NASCAR.

And they want to see how quick they can get to my bumper. You know, I'm just so humble. This is wonderful.

Like, do you have a baseball bat still in the backseat? You know, but it's a constant battle. So that is the point of application. Anger is a byproduct of frustration.

I keep falling. I keep falling, Shane. I can't.

Yes, you can. Yes, you can if you rely on the work of the Holy Spirit. Take it to Christ.

Repent. Bring it to the light. Say, I'm an angry, I need prayer for anger this morning.

Bring it to the light and let God change that. And Saul, the last point is Saul was religious. He followed a lot of rules and he knew the Bible.

But Saul was hellbound because he did not have a relationship. Hear me good. Hear me closely.

If that fits grammatically. Just hear me good. You can't say, I'm good.

I help people. I've read the Bible. I go to church sometimes.

Therefore, I'm good. No, you're religious. You're religious.

Are you religious? Do you truly have a relationship? Let me take my mom's advice and bring the cross in. Because that's the only hope. If you have not bowed your knee to the cross and repented of your sin and embraced Christ, and now you have this passionate relationship with God.

If you don't have any of that, you have religion and you're following rules. And you are hellbound if there's no relationship with God. Because when you stand before God, you don't say, well, here's my wife.

Here's the church I went to. You stand naked and bare before God Almighty. And all he's going to say is, what did you do with my son? I made the provision.

Not how good you are. Not how much you read the Bible. Not that you go to church.

Not you follow. Because there's people caught in a religious system. They say the same prayers and they go through the same thing because they're caught in that religion and not a relationship.

So humble yourself this morning. These people should have said, the Bible should say, they cried out to God. They opened their ears and they embraced him.

That's what my prayer is for you this morning. Some of you, I know some of you are walking strongly with God. My only encouragement would be to walk stronger.

Deeper. Because there is a deeper relationship. You can, the closer you draw to God, the closer he'll draw to you.

Begin to do that more. But those of you who might have religion and not a relationship, turn to Christ today. Repent of your sin.

And those of you maybe walked away or you're in that prodigal son state. You've been opening yourself up to demonic influence. Repent of that this morning.

And come back to Christ. And humble yourself. Don't be stiff-necked.

That's one of the challenges with preaching, is I see the same people month in and month out. A year in and a year out with the same problems. The same, this posture.

This posture. They want to usually sit in the back. They don't want to worship.

They just come to church with this posture. And I know who you are. And if it doesn't change, I might lovingly speak to you.

Because I love you. I love you enough to tell you, you cannot continue to be religious. Religion doesn't get anybody to heaven.

It gets a lot of people to hell. Jesus' strongest rebuke in the entire New Testament was to the religious leaders. He called sinners to himself, but religious leaders he rebuked.

You whitewashed tombs. You're beautiful on the outside, but you are dead men's bones on the inside.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/XeVMxUGVETI.mp4>

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