

Coming Out of Sin Means Leaving Your Comfort Zone

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As I'm sure most of you are aware, the Feast of Unleavened Bread for ancient Israel was a memorial of their exodus out of Egypt, and not only coming out of Egypt, but specifically being freed from the slavery that they were in in Egypt.

Well, for us in the New Covenant Church, the Feast of Unleavened Bread has a spiritual application. Because for us, it pictures the process of repentance and our coming out of sin and the slavery that sin can trap us in, in our personal lives. And as a result of these parallel meanings, there are important lessons that we can learn for our coming out of sin today. If we look back at Israel's journey out of Egypt, and the struggles that they went through, there are important lessons that we can learn and apply in our spiritual lives today. One of those important lessons is that coming out of sin requires us to come out of our comfort zone. And we're going to look specifically at that particular lesson today. So, if you'd like a title for this sermon, it's:

Coming Out of Sin Means Leaving Your Comfort Zone

And to start off with today, let's just review some of the scriptures that clearly tell us that the Feast of Unleavened Bread for ancient Israel is about their coming out of Egypt and coming out of the slavery that they were in. Because this is stated repeatedly from the very establishment of the Holy Days. If you'll turn over to Exodus 12, we'll see here from the very first time that the Feast of Unleavened Bread is mentioned, it's very clearly laid out for us that for ancient Israel, this was about a memorial of their exodus out of Egypt. And this is Exodus 12 in verse 15.

Ex 12:15 *“Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. 16) On the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you. 17) So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance. 18) In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. 19) For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land. 20) You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.”* (NKJV)

Now, if you'll turn over to the next chapter here in Exodus 13, we'll see here again, this isn't just about coming out of Egypt, but it specifically mentions the slavery that they were in. As we're going to see here later, that's an important lesson for us. Because again, we have a spiritual application for the New Covenant Church. It's not really about an exodus out of Egypt. Unleavened Bread is about coming out of sin. But sin can enslave us, just like the ancient Israelites were slaves in Egypt. So, pick up now in chapter 13, in verse 3.

Ex 13:3 *“And Moses said to the people: “Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage;...” (NKJV)*

Now, the word “bondage” here in the New King James, if you look up the meaning of the Hebrew word here, you'll see it refers to slavery. Because we know, if you read through the story of Exodus, they were clearly slaves in Egypt. And coming out of Egypt freed them from that slavery. And again, as we'll see as we go through this sermon, a similar analogy is applied to us spiritually. Because coming out of sin frees us from the slavery of sin. But continuing on in verse 3.

“...for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out of this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. 4) On this day you are going out, in the month Abib. 5) And it shall be, when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall keep this service in this month. 6) Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. 7) Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters. 8) And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, “This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt.’ 9) It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD’S law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt. 10) You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year.” (NKJV)

You see, it's very clearly laid out for us. What this is for ancient Israel, is a memorial of coming out of Egypt. It's to remember the importance of what God did for them freeing them from slavery. And again, the same point is repeated again in Deuteronomy 16. So, we'll see this one more time. Again, Deuteronomy 16. And we'll read verse 3.

Deu 16:3 *“You shall eat no leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it, that is, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), that you may remember the day in which you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life.” (NKJV)*

You see, God made a very big point of having Israel keep this every year. So they would remember what He had done for them, and the importance of coming out of slavery. But as I mentioned, all of this was basically just a physical type of what He was

teaching us for the New Covenant Church. Because for ancient Israel, that was just a physical covenant that offered them a comfortable life and the opportunity to live in the Promised Land if they obeyed the letter of the law. For us in the New Covenant Church, it's about salvation and the opportunity to receive eternal life. But that requires coming out of sin, of repentance, and putting sin out of our lives, and coming out of the slavery of sin. And this is what this pictures for us.

Because as I've mentioned in a number of sermons, to understand the Spring Holy Days, we have to remember that the New Testament teaches the meaning of the Spring Holy Days by basically making spiritual analogies based on the elements of the story of the Exodus. Ancient Israel's exodus out of Egypt, and their journey into the Promised Land. So, if you want to understand the spiritual applications of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and even Pentecost, it's important to look at the elements of the story and how this applied to ancient Israel and then apply those spiritual analogies. And to make sure we have the spiritual application correct, we have to stick with the elements and the layout of the story. Because if you ever hear someone present a spiritual application or meaning of the Spring Holy Days that doesn't match that story, that doesn't follow the layout, that's a screaming red flag that they've twisted it up. And they made a mistake somewhere. They've gotten it wrong.

But just to see how these spiritual analogies are drawn, turn over to 1 Corinthians 5. Because we'll see here that leaven -- although for ancient Israel, eating leaven was a memorial that they came out of Egypt in haste, and they were being freed from slavery - - for us, it has a spiritual application. Because leaven is a picture of sin. And we'll see this stated in the New Testament a number of times.

We're going to just jump into a context here in 1 Corinthians 5. Now, what Paul is addressing here, he's addressing a problem that was happening in the Corinthian Church. The specific issue was, the congregation was tolerating sin that was taking place right there in their congregation. They had a guy that was attending services regularly with them who was openly in an adulterous affair with his stepmother. And Paul is correcting them for this and telling them that they shouldn't tolerate this. They should disfellowship this guy until he repents of this behavior.

But we're going to see here as we read through this, he basically compares this to leaven. How leaven has that infectious nature, that having this sin in the congregation has an infectious nature to the congregation and the people around it by tolerating this sin. But let's just pick up here in 1 Corinthians 5.

1 Cor 5:1 *"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! 2) And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you."* (NKJV)

In other words, they were basically taking the attitude that's oftentimes promoted in our culture today of being "open-minded" and "tolerant" and "accepting" of other lifestyles.

That's the attitude that the congregation was having. Paul is telling them, "This is totally unacceptable. You should not be accepting of this kind of behavior." Now, pick up in verse 3 here.

"3) For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. 4) In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5) deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." (NKJV)

Now, he's basically saying disfellowship this guy and don't have contact with him until he's willing to repent. Now, if you read 2 Corinthians, you'll see this guy later repents. And Paul says, "Okay, now forgive him and welcome him back into the congregation because he stopped the offending behavior." Now, pick up in verse 6.

"6) Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7) Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. 8) Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (NKJV)

See, what Paul is revealing to us here is that for us in the New Covenant Church, leaven is a picture of sin. And that's what the Feast of Unleavened Bread means for us. Putting out the leaven means getting sin out of our lives and pursuing righteousness. But what we're going to see here is Christ teaches us a lesson in the Gospels that leaven, sin, is not just overt acts like sexual immorality. False doctrine fits into the picture of leaven as well because it leads people into sin. And to see that, turn over to Matthew 16. We're going to pick up here in verse 5.

Matt 16:5 *"Now when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. 6) Then Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees." 7) And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have taken no bread." 8) But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? 9) Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? 10) Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up? 11) How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?—but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 12) Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees."* (NKJV)

See, He's comparing false doctrine to leaven because it's infectious just like leaven. And just like the example we just covered in 1 Corinthians 5, where Paul is saying, having this sinful behavior being tolerated among the congregation, this has an

infectious nature. And tolerating this will cause people to basically get lackadaisical about guarding against sin and it'll cause sin to spread in the congregation. Well, what Christ is saying here is false doctrine has the same type of effect. If we tolerate false doctrine in the same way that they were tolerating the sinful behavior of this guy in 1 Corinthians 5, false doctrine can have the same infectious effect. So, we should see it as leaven and as just as unacceptable as blatant, sinful behavior like sexual immorality. And we should get away from it in the same way. Because as I mentioned before, with ancient Israel, it wasn't just coming out of Egypt. It was specifically also the slavery that they were in because there's an important lesson in that. And again, it directly applies to our coming out of sin. Again, our application of the Spring Holy Days.

And to see that we can be enslaved with sin, turn over to Romans 6. Because we'll see here where in Paul's letter to the Romans, he expounds upon this. But we'll notice here, again, both applications of this. Not only is sin slavery, in terms of the overtly sinful behavior, again, just using the analogy that we looked at earlier in 1 Corinthians. That blatant sexual immorality is a sinful behavior that can enslave us. Notice here he refers to doctrine as well because false doctrine can enslave us in sin as well. And pick up here in verse 15 of Romans 6.

Rom 6:15 *“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! 16) Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?”* (NKJV)

He's saying that sin can enslave us.

“17) But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.” (NKJV)

See, he's saying that correct Godly doctrine from the Bible, this leads us out of sin. But false doctrine leads us back into sin and can enslave us.

“18) And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. 19) I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. 20) For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21) What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. 22) But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. 23) For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (NKJV)

So, we can see here that sin can enslave us, just like the ancient Israelites were enslaved in Egypt. Again, that's the direct parallel in the meanings. In fact, the Bible directly uses Egypt as a symbol of sin, as a symbolic picture of sin and being enslaved

in sin. And to see that, turn over to Revelation 11. Now we're going to break into a context here that's addressing the two witnesses that will be on the scene at the very end time. But we're going to pick up here in verse 7.

Rev 11:7 *“When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. 8) And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.”* (NKJV)

So again, this is a symbolic picture here, but you can see it's comparing Egypt to sin and to slavery to sin and following the way of sin and wickedness. And if you turn over to Hebrews 11, we'll see another reference here that directly compares Egypt to sin. This is Hebrews 11, and we'll pick up in verse 24.

Heb 11:24 *“By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, 25) choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26) esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. 27) By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.”* (NKJV)

So, you can see here there's a direct parallel meaning between coming out of Egypt and coming out of sin. So, you can see these analogies directly apply to what the Feast of Unleavened Bread means for us. Because putting leaven out of our lives means putting out sin. But it also means coming out of the slavery of sin, because the whole mindset of sin becomes very infectious. It's just like leaven.

I'm sure you're probably familiar with the fact that you can make up dough and you can just leave it out exposed to the air. If you just leave it exposed and you don't take action to keep that bread from being leavened, you just keep it exposed to the air and the yeast spores will get into that bread. And then they will just infectiously spread through all of it. And it'll all become leavened if you don't take action to stop it.

Well, one of the lessons in all this is sin has a similar effect in our own lives. But again, as I mentioned in the introduction, an important lesson that we can learn when you look at the parallel meanings of what the Spring Holy Days meant for ancient Israel and what they mean for our journey of coming out of sin and pursuing the Kingdom of God, there's important lessons that we can learn from this. And one of them is the issue of coming out of our comfort zone.

Because as we're going to see here, that was an issue that tripped up ancient Israel. And particularly that first generation of people that initially came out of Egypt. Their inability to come out of their comfort zone and basically just to trust God and to face the pain and uncomfortableness that coming out of Egypt and facing the trials that they would have to go through to successfully make it into the Promised Land. That literally cost that first generation their reward of being able to enter into the Promised Land. And

as we're going to see, if we're not willing to come out of our comfort zone, it can cost us our Promised Land, which is the Kingdom of God.

But to notice this, turn over to Exodus 14. We're going to pick up here in the story of the Exodus at the point where ancient Israel had -- they had already seen all the plagues that had been done to the Egyptians to finally free them from slavery. They had seen all these powerful miracles that God had done. And now they've been released from slavery. They've journeyed out of Egypt all the way up to the Red Sea. But now Pharaoh's army is pursuing them. And as soon as they see the threat of physical violence -- now that Pharaoh's army is quickly approaching them -- they quickly get scared. And what is their reaction? They want to run back to their comfort zone. To notice this, pick up in Exodus 14 and verse 10.

Ex 14:10 *“And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD. 11) Then they said to Moses, “Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? 12) Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, “Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness.” (NKJV)*

And notice, even though that they were miserable in Egypt and suffering under slavery and crying out to God to relieve them of the burden of slavery, now they've been released from slavery, and they're fleeing. But the first time they face a painful threat, what's their reaction? "Let me return to my comfort zone." As bad and as dysfunctional as it was and as oppressive as slavery was, what do they want to do? Run back to what was familiar and comfortable.

If you'll turn over to Exodus 16, we'll see here, it wasn't just the threat of violence that would cause them to have this reaction. It was even just the pain of suffering hunger. Having to face some discomfort from not having all their daily needs met and just being uncomfortable and maybe some fear of the food supply. Again, they have the same reaction. Well, they just want to return back to Egypt and go right back into slavery rather than enduring that and pushing through. Pick up now in Exodus 16 in verse 1.

Ex 16:1 *“And they journeyed from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt. 2) Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3) And the children of Israel said to them, “Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” (NKJV)*

And see, instead of being grateful, "Hey, we've been freed from slavery, and yeah, we're facing some physical pain, but this is better than being a slave in Egypt," now, what's their initial reaction? "Well, let's just run back to Egypt, because that was familiar. That was our comfort zone. So, let's run back to our comfort zone, as horrible as it was."

And if you turn over to Numbers 14, we'll see here where they literally make a plan to return to Egypt. Once again, to go back to the comfort zone. As oppressive as it was, as bad as it was, being a slave in Egypt. As soon as they're faced with some fear and some uncomfortableness, of uncertainty of what's about to happen in their future, their immediate response is, "Well, let's just run back to our comfort zone."

Because just to summarize the context here, in the beginning of chapter 14, this is the point where the Israelites have not only gotten successfully through the Red Sea, Pharaoh's army has been drowned. They've journeyed all the way up to the edge of the Promised Land, and then they pick out 12 spies. They basically take one representative of each of the tribes of Israel, and they send them out to do some reconnaissance of the land. Basically, to see what they're up against, before they try to conquer the Promised Land.

Well, the 12 guys come back, and 10 of them have a very negative, catastrophic view of things. "We're all going to die! There's giants in the land! They're just going to squash us like bugs!" It's a catastrophic end. "We're all going to die, and everything's going to be horrible." Well, Joshua and Caleb give them a positive report, and say, "No, we have nothing to be afraid of. God is on our side. If we just have faith in Him, He's delivered us all the way here. We saw all these incredible miracles. If we just trust in Him, He's going to deliver it into our hands."

Well, the people believe the negative report and have a very fatalistic view. But notice here, they're not just wishing to go back into Egypt, they're literally making a plan to return back to Egypt. To return back to slavery, because it's their comfort zone. Pick up here in Numbers 14, in verse 1.

Num 14:1 *"So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. 2) And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! 3) Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" 4) So they said to one another, "Let us select a leader and return to Egypt."* (NKJV)

Notice, they literally want to make a plan to go back to being slaves. And why are they doing that? Because it's returning to their comfort zone. Because as we're going to see here, that's just kind of a characteristic of human nature. That even though our comfort zone may be a painful, dysfunctional, bad place to be, oftentimes, our human nature will choose to stay in that comfort zone, rather than facing uncertainty. Rather than facing the fear of what might be the unknown. Or facing some pain to get out of that. We'll

think, "Well, I'm familiar with this pain and it's comfortable. So, I'll just stay in my comfort zone." That's unfortunately kind of an idiosyncrasy of just human nature.

But let's notice how severe the costs were for ancient Israel. Because as we're about to see here, that first generation of people that came out of Egypt, who've experienced the pain of slavery and how horrible it was, who were released from it, literally lose their opportunity to go into the Promised Land. Because, again, that fear of the unknown and just not having the faith to follow God. Always wanting to go back to their comfort zone. And not willing to face adversity and face the uncertainty of the unknown. That fear wants them to come back to their comfort zone. And that literally cost them their ultimate reward. Because in their physical covenant, the ultimate reward was living in the Promised Land. And they totally lost that because they wanted to stay in their comfort zone. And to notice this, let's pick up in chapter 14 in verse 26.

Num 14:26 *“And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 27) “How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me. 28) Say to them, “As I live,” says the LORD, ‘just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you: 29) The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. 30) Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in. 31) But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. 32) But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. 33) And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness. 34) According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection. 35) I the LORD have spoken this. I will surely do so to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.’ ” 36) Now the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation complain against him by bringing a bad report of the land, 37) those very men who brought the evil report about the land, died by the plague before the LORD. 38) But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive, of the men who went to spy out the land.” (NKJV)*

So, you can see their inability to face some discomfort, to face the unknown and some fear, and their desire to return to their comfort zone -- which unfortunately was slavery in Egypt. They would rather run back to that than to face some discomfort. To face some uncertainty and some fear, and to be able to have their ultimate reward, which in a physical covenant was living a physically comfortable life in the Promised Land.

Well, for us, our Promised Land is the Kingdom of God. It's a spiritual reward that can last for all eternity. But the same principle applies. If we're unwilling to face discomfort

and uncertainty, or to face some pain in our journey of putting sin out of our lives and pursuing the Kingdom of God. If we insist on wanting to stay in our comfort zone, even though we know that it's dysfunctional and it's bad, and it certainly has lots of downsides to it. But if it's more comfortable for us to just kind of stay in this and do the status quo and not face uncertainty and not face the adversity to try to put sin out of our lives, we'll wind up just like that first generation. Losing our opportunity to get our Promised Land, which is the Kingdom of God.

You see, Christ told us from the very beginning of His ministry that signing up to be a Christian, to be a New Covenant Christian, means facing pain. It means facing adversity. It means facing uncertainty. And to make it successfully in the Kingdom of God, we just have to be willing to deal with that because it's part of the contract. And to see that, turn over to Matthew 7 and we'll start reading in verse 13.

Matt 7:13 *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14) Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”* (NKJV)

See, Christ directly tells us here that pursuing eternal life, it's going to hurt. It's going to be a painful struggle. It's going to be filled with adversity, uncertainty, and pain that we have to face. And if we're not willing to do that, we will lose out on the opportunity to receive salvation. Because see, Christ directly tells us here, there is an ugly attrition rate when it comes to pursuing the Kingdom of God. And the very reason why there is that ugly attrition rate is because it's painful. Because it's difficult. Because, unfortunately, human nature wants to stay in its comfort zone and avoid facing pain. And avoid facing uncertainty and avoid facing the stress that comes with it. And making that choice to not face it means giving up salvation. *That is literally what it means.*

Because see, the New Testament tells us that signing up to be a New Covenant Christian means being persecuted. It means facing adversity. Oftentimes, we like to think, "Well, as long as we're obedient and we're doing what's right and following God, well, God will just pave the way for us. And we won't have to face pain and adversity. He'll just make life comfortable for us." *That is simply not how New Covenant Christianity works.* And that's just something we have to realize.

So, turn over to 2 Timothy and we'll see here a very clear, all-inclusive dogmatic statement that Paul makes for us here. Oftentimes -- I know in my experience in the Church of God, which has been my entire life -- oftentimes we try to do some mental gymnastics around this. But if we just take this just as clearly as Paul states it, it paints a very clear picture for us. This is 2 Timothy 3 and verse 12.

2 Tim 3:12 *“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”* (NKJV)

Notice it's not an if, it's a when. It's not saying just the Apostles, just the Prophets, just some select people will be persecuted. No, he's saying you can count on it because it's everybody. It's part of the contract. Unfortunately, sometimes we tend to look at persecution -- at least that's been my experience in the Church of God all of my life -- sometimes we think of persecution, "Well, that's just like what the Apostle Paul faced, where you're thrown in prison for preaching the truth. Or you're literally stoned or beaten up by lynch mobs and whipped and things of that nature."

Now that's a severe version of persecution. But we can face persecution in a variety of ways. Because we have to realize that Satan and his demons, they're the persecutors. And they can bring about all manner of painful situations in our lives that we have to face. But we have to face that in the same way that Paul faced being thrown in prison or being stoned. We may not face it to that severity, and I'm sure we would all prefer not to have to face it in that type of severity. But we all have to face the persecution that comes upon us. And we have to successfully endure through that. We have to be willing to face that. And again, not just run to our comfort zone to try to avoid the pain. Because again, sometimes that means compromising on our values, compromising on pursuing righteousness, or again, even just tolerating false doctrine, as we saw in Matthew 16.

And if you turn over to Acts 14, we'll see here another statement. Again, it makes it very clear to us how this works with pursuing New Covenant Christianity. This is Acts 14 in verse 21.

Acts 14:21 *"And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, 22) strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." (NKJV)*

Notice they weren't saying that, "Well, some people will face many tribulations, but the rest of you will have an easy, comfortable slide into the Kingdom. God will let you stay in your comfort zone and not have to face painful adversity." No, he said the exact opposite. He said, "This is going to hurt." He said, "If you want to make it in the Kingdom of God, it's time to" -- as we say in our modern-day culture today -- "suck it up, buttercup." It's just time to deal with that adversity and to realize that that's part of the equation because it's something we have to be willing to do. We have to be willing to get out of our comfort zone.

Because pursuing New Covenant Christianity will pull us out of our comfort zone. There's just no way around it. And see, Christ made it very clear in His ministry, while He was a human on earth, that we have to be willing to deal with that. And if we're not willing to deal with that, that is a deal breaker. That will result in the same thing that happened to that first generation of Israelites coming out of Egypt, where they lost their opportunity to go into the Promised Land.

Well, the same thing will happen to us with our pursuit of the Kingdom of God. And to see that, turn over to Luke 14. We're going to read here a section of scripture that's very

often covered in pre-baptismal counseling, and very rightly so. Because it paints a very clear picture of the contract that we're making at baptism and what we signed on for when we agreed to pursue the Kingdom of God. This is Luke 14 in verse 25.

Luke 14:25 *“Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, 26) “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. 27) And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. 28) For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it— 29) lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, 30) saying, “This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ 31) Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32) Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. 33) So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.” (NKJV)*

Notice how dogmatically He words that. He doesn't say, "I'd really prefer it if you're willing to give up everything else in your pursuit of the Kingdom. But if you're not, I'll live with that. And I'll still have you in the Kingdom if you're not." No, He says, "If you're not willing to give all that up, if you're not willing to put this first and forsake everything else, that's a deal breaker. I insist that it must mean that much to you, and I won't take second fiddle." That's an absolute deal breaker. He's rather clear about this. In fact, He says this again in Luke 9. Turn over to Luke 9 and verse 57.

Luke 9:57 *“Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, “Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.” 58) And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” 59) Then He said to another, “Follow Me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” 60) Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.” 61) And another also said, “Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.” 62) But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” (NKJV)*

Notice Christ is not saying, "Well, it's my preference that you put this first, and that would be great. That's what I'd prefer. But it's okay if you're not willing to do that." No, He said, "It's an absolute deal breaker if you're not willing to do this. It's a big deal."

So now let's look at some examples of how this can apply to our lives. So, turn over to Matthew 19. We'll see here that this can be as simple as just not putting God first and not willing to come outside of our comfort zone. This is Matthew 19. And we'll start reading in verse 16.

Matt 19:16 *“Now behold, one came and said to Him, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” 17) So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.” 18) He said to Him, “Which ones?” Jesus said, ““You shall not murder,’ “You shall not commit adultery,’ “You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ 19) “Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ” 20) The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?” 21) Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” 22) But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. 23) Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24) And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” (NKJV)*

And that is the example this lays out for us. He wasn't like the guy being spoken about in 1 Corinthians 5, where he's blatantly involved in an adulterous affair. And it's just a debauchery lifestyle that, as Paul said, even the Gentiles don't tolerate this kind of behavior. It wasn't like this guy was being rejected because he's involved in this blatant, sinful behavior. No, his issue was he just wasn't willing to give up his comfort and put God first above everything else.

Because notice when Christ lists out the commandments, the guy says, "Well, I've done that all of my life." And Christ doesn't say, "Well, no, you haven't. You're bluffing." No, Christ just said, "Okay, you've done all that. Give up your wealth. Give up your riches." And then the guy was like, "Christ, you done quit preaching. Gone to meddling now. I can't give up my wealth." Because, you see, his riches gave him a comfortable life.

Because I'm sure you're all familiar with the fact that if you have a lot of wealth in life, there's a lot of just day-to-day life pain that you can kind of avoid. Problems that come up. There's a lot of problems you can face in day-to-day life that if you have enough money, you can solve and make those issues go away. That affords you a great deal of comfort in life. If you're struggling to get by paycheck to paycheck, there's a lot more pain that you face in life than someone who has abundant wealth would deal with.

Well, see, what Christ was saying to this guy is, "Give up all of your wealth. Give up your comfort zone. Be willing to do that for Me." And that's when this guy's reaction was like, "Christ, you done quit preaching, gone to meddling now. I can't do that." See, that was a deal breaker. And that's an important lesson for us to learn about how this works. Because see, it's not just physical discomfort that can be a deal breaker. Sometimes it can be social pressure. Just losing some friends or being socially ostracized -- not being willing to face that -- that can cost us our salvation as well.

And to see that, turn over to John 12. We'll see a reference that tells us that there were a number of Jews in Christ's time that while He's preaching, they recognize that He's

the Messiah. This guy really is who He says He is. But they were afraid to come out and acknowledge that and to act accordingly because that was going to get them social pressure. That was going to get them ostracized in their social circles. They were going to lose some friends and face some social pain as a result. And they weren't willing to face that. Again, they wanted to stay inside their comfort zone. And notice here, this is in John 12 and verse 42.

John 12:42 *“Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; 43) for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”* (NKJV)

And notice again, this isn't that they're blatantly living a debaucherous lifestyle with an affair with their stepmother. This is not what's happening. They realize who Christ really is. "But if I say something about it, if I act accordingly, well, then I'm going to lose my friends. Well, then that's going to get uncomfortable, and that'll get socially painful." And they're not willing to do that. That's denying Christ. That's a deal breaker for salvation. See, that's what was happening.

But the fundamental issue here is that human nature wants to stay within its comfort zone. And see, Paul even shows us examples of his fear with the Corinthians, that this would lead them astray as well. Again, just that desire to stay within your comfort zone and not speak up when you know things are wrong. So, to see this, turn over to 2 Corinthians 11.

Just to set the scene for this, we read earlier in Matthew 16 where Christ made it clear that when we think of leaven as a picture of sin, it's not just the overt debauchery behavior like Paul is addressing in 1 Corinthians 5. Christ told us that false doctrine, just being exposed to false doctrine, that was infectious just like leaven because it leads people into sin.

So we have to be on guard against that in the same way that we would be on guard against sexual immorality or lust or stealing or other just direct obvious sinful behavior that violates the commandments. Well, we realize that Christ compared false doctrine in a similar way because again, it has that infectious effect upon us. But notice here how Paul expresses the concern to the Corinthians that they would be subjected to an environment of false doctrine, but they just weren't willing to say or do anything about it because they want to stay in their comfort zone. But notice here in 2 Corinthians 11 in verse 1.

2 Cor 11:1 *“Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. 2) For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 3) But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”* (NKJV)

In other words, infected just like the same way that leaven infects bread.

“4) For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!” (NKJV)

In other words, you'll just sit there and not say anything. Not do anything about it. Not resist it, because that would be getting outside of your comfort zone. That may be facing some social pain, and there may be some negative consequences. So, I'll just not say anything. I'll just go along with the flow here, because again, I don't want to get outside my comfort zone and face any difficulties.

And see, this basically sets off a chain of events that results in the status that the book of Revelation tells us is the state of the end-time Church. Just, basically being lukewarm and in a state of delusion. Because see, if we just want to stay in our comfort zone, then all we want to hear is basically just reassuring things. We don't want to have our sins pointed out to us. We just want to be told basically that we're good. Just kind of like our self-esteem movement today in our popular culture. Nobody wants to be told that there are things that they need to improve upon, or that they're false, that they may need to overcome. No, it's just give me self-esteem and tell me what feels good. Just make me comfortable and make me feel good. The prophet Isaiah warned about this in Isaiah 30. So, Isaiah 30, and we'll start in verse 8.

Is 30:8 *“Now go, write it before them on a tablet, And note it on a scroll, That it may be for time to come, Forever and ever: 9) That this is a rebellious people, Lying children, Children who will not hear the law of the LORD; 10) Who say to the seers, “Do not see,” And to the prophets, “Do not prophesy to us right things; Speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits. 11) Get out of the way, Turn aside from the path, Cause the Holy One of Israel To cease from before us.” (NKJV)*

You see, our human nature doesn't want to hear about areas where we might need to overcome. Or changes we might want to make. Things we might need to give up that might be painful for us to do. It's like, "No, just tell us that we're good. Make us feel good. Tell us we're okay in the situation that we're in. And we can just coast along and be comfortable with where we're at. And not have to make any changes that might be painful for us."

Well, see, if we get into that kind of a mindset, what happens is, we wind up despising true doctrine. We don't want to tolerate it, because true doctrine will tell us that we're not perfect and we need to change. And see, we're warned that that's what's going to happen in the end time. The time that we're living in now. And to see that, turn over to 2 Timothy 4. We'll see here where Paul warned about the very situation that we're dealing with here in the Church of God today. 2 Timothy 4 in verse 1.

2 Tim 4:1 *“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: 2) Preach*

the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3) For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4) and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5) But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” (NKJV)

Because, if all people are willing to listen to is, "Tell me I'm good. Make me feel good. Don't challenge me to change anything. Don't challenge me to give anything up. Just tell me I'm good the way I am." What does that lead to? That leads to a state of delusion where we don't honestly see ourselves. And we don't honestly see what we need to change. What leaven is in our lives that we need to put out. Well, see, that is the very state that the end time Church is prophesied to be in.

And to see that, turn over to Revelation 3. We're going to pick up in verse 14 with the letter to Laodicea. But just to kind of set the context here, you're probably familiar with the fact that Revelation 2 and 3 contain seven letters to the seven Churches. Now, there's several ways to look at these. One is that there were seven literal Churches on a mail route in Asia Minor at the time that the Apostle John wrote this book. And obviously, this would apply to lessons for them. There's also spiritual conditions that can exist in the Church throughout time. I mean, there's valuable principles laid out in all of these letters that we can learn from regardless of what time frame we live in.

But if you also kind of look at the predominant conditions of the Church of God, from the time of the establishment of the Church in Acts 2, all the way up to the current day, there's kind of undeniable themes that play out through periods of time. Well, that places at the very end, right before Christ's return, that the predominant condition of the Church of God would be described in the letter to Laodicea.

Well, see, what is described in this letter is a Church that's living in a state of delusion. They're basically in the mindset of the self-esteem movement. "Don't tell us anything that we need to change. Just tell us that we're fine the way we are. That we can just sit in our comfort zone and just coast along and wait for Christ to return. Because we're rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing. We don't need to change anything. We're good the way we are. Just make us feel good." See, this is what happens if we allow ourselves to only listen to what makes us feel good. If we're not willing to get outside of our comfort zone and to face pain. So, pick up here in Revelation 3, in verse 14.

Rev 3:14 *“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15) “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16) So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.” (NKJV)*

Now, some translations put this more bluntly. "I'm about to vomit you out of my mouth." Because what Christ is saying is, "I'm about to eject you out of the body." In other words, you're on the verge of losing your salvation, is what He's saying.

"17) Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— 18) I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19) As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. 20) Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. 21) To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22) 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' " (NKJV)

So, the picture that Christ is painting here is an absolute frightening picture. Because He's obviously talking about the Church of God here. But He is saying that at the end time, it's a picture where Christ is on the outside of people's lives, knocking on the door trying to get in. And He says, "If anyone hears Me." In other words, He's expecting that He's going to be ignored. That they're not going to hear Him because again, this is a Church that thinks, "Oh, we're fine. We're in our comfort zone. We just want to hear what makes us feel good. Don't tell us that we need to change anything. Don't tell us that we have anything wrong. We just want to coast along and be comfortable and slide into the Kingdom of God." Well, nobody slides into the Kingdom of God. That is not how that works. It is a painful struggle.

But if we are in this condition, what is the solution to this? Well, in verse 18, Christ gives basically a three-step process for addressing this. Now, I won't tie all the scriptures together with each step here. I've done that a number of times in previous sermons, but He talks about getting "gold refined in the fire". Well, that symbolically represents faith. He says, "Basically, you need faith. You need to live by faith." He talks about white garments. Well, you'll see in Revelation 19, the white garments are the righteous acts of the saints. So, He's basically saying that you need to live by faith. Be willing to live by faith. Come out of your comfort zone and become an overcomer. And then that's going to result in putting on the white garments. It's going to result in righteous acts. And that gives you the eye salve to see. That clears up our vision to be able to see ourselves.

Well, the important thing there is step number one is again that "gold refined in the fire". It's faith. But see, oftentimes, we have kind of an incorrect version of faith. It's a definition of faith that you might say is kind of based on a prosperity gospel type of view. It's the idea that as long as we're faithful and we have enough faith and believe in God, well, He's just going to smooth out the path in front of us and take all the pain away. We won't have to face any adversity. As long as we have strong enough faith, He'll just take all the pain away. Well, that's not a correct view of it.

And to see a good example of this, turn over to Daniel 3. Now, we're going to look at a story here that's oftentimes referred to. Because again, it ends the way that we like to see. The way we like to think of faith in God. Where the good guys are protected from all the pain. And they come out not facing any real adversity. Well, that is how this story ends. But there's a detail here that we oftentimes skip over and don't pay enough attention to.

Now, in Daniel 3 here, what we have is the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, where Nebuchadnezzar puts up his false image. And he basically commands everyone that when the music plays, you're supposed to bow down and worship this image. Well, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to do that. Well, then Nebuchadnezzar basically threatens to throw them in a furnace, and in fact, he does throw them in a furnace.

And of course, you're probably familiar with the story, that they get thrown in the furnace and they don't even get singed. They don't get burned at all. God completely protects them from this. Well, we tend to love stories like that because we're like, "Hey, the good guys got totally protected, and they didn't face any pain." But we have to pay attention to the fact of when we look at the exchange between these guys and Nebuchadnezzar, they didn't know that that's how it was going to end. And they were prepared to deal with either conclusion.

In other words, they were prepared that, "Yes, the God that we serve can protect us, and we might get totally protected from all pain. Or He may allow us to die. We may be martyrs and die for what we believe in here." They were willing to face either conclusion. Because they were looking not just at being physically protected from pain. They were looking at the ultimate reward of salvation. And to see this, pick up in verse 14 here.

Dan 3:14 *“Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up? 15) Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, good! But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?” 16) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. 17) If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. 18) But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.” (NKJV)*

Notice, they were prepared to deal with either outcome. They were basically telling Nebuchadnezzar, "You might successfully kill us physically, but we want you to know for the record, we will not compromise. And we are willing to die for what we believe in because we know we'll get rewarded later."

You see, they're directly mentioned in Hebrews 11. If you'll turn over to Hebrews 11, we'll, notice here -- although these three individuals are not listed by name -- they're obviously alluded to as some of the heroes of faith who will be in the resurrection of the Firstfruits. This is Hebrews 11, in verse 30. We'll pick up here. But notice as we read through this, it's going to cover both the individuals who had the outcomes that we like to see, where the good guys get protected from all the pain. And were also going to cover the people who had to die for what they believed in, who suffered severe pain. Because faith means being willing to face both outcomes. Knowing that the ultimate reward is the resurrection and making into the Kingdom of God. So, pick up here in Hebrews 11 in verse 30.

Heb 11:30 *“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. 31) By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace. 32) And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: 33) who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,”* (NKJV)

Now, who's famous for being thrown in a lion's den and not being eaten? That's Daniel. But now, notice the next phrase.

“34) quenched the violence of fire,...” (NKJV)

Who's famous for being thrown in a furnace and not getting burned? It's Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So, see, they're directly alluded to here in Hebrews 11.

“...escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. 35) Women received their dead raised to life again....” (NKJV)

But now, notice that the rest of the examples are of people who didn't have the painless outcome. They faced severe pain and many even died for what they believed in.

“...Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36) Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37) They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— 38) of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. 39) And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, 40) God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.” (NKJV)

In other words, they will receive their ultimate reward in the resurrection at Christ's return, when they make it into the Kingdom of God. Because see, that's what we have

to look at. We have to realize, when we keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it pictures us putting out sin out of our lives. Again, not only the obvious behavioral sins. Things like sexual immorality or other overtly sinful behavior. It's also making sure that we're putting God first above everything else. That we're willing to give up anything in our lives, that we have to, to put God first. And to realize He considers that a deal breaker if we don't. It also means getting ourselves away from false doctrine. Realizing that it's leaven. It's infectious just like sin, as Christ makes that very clear in Matthew 16. And He tells us to avoid the leaven of false doctrine.

So, brethren, as we go forward, keeping this Feast of Unleavened Bread, let's realize that overcoming sin -- removing the leaven of sin in our lives and putting that out of our lives -- means coming out of our comfort zone. It means facing things that may be uncomfortable. It may be facing uncertainty, the fear of what might happen next in our life. It may mean facing social ostracization or losing some friends by choosing to put God first. It may mean pain in our lives in a number of ways. But realize that when we went into the baptismal waters and made a covenant with God, that's what we agreed to. We agreed to put Him first. So, let's realize as we go forward, Brethren, that putting sin out of our lives means coming out of our comfort zone.