

SUMMER 7 - The Sin God Hates

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[0 : 01] Just a little bit of a story about that last song. I remember when it came to me most graphically was we had been up in central Western Australia.

My wife's parents had come along and we had gone up in a September in Western Australia to see the wildflowers and they were spectacular. And we woke the next morning to the news coming out on the radio about the Twin Towers.

And for the next day the words echoed through my brain because we need to number our days because there could be days of judgment coming and days of punishment.

And flowers will fade no matter how glorious they are. So there's a little bit of a background in terms of why that song means a significant amount to me. It made me reflect upon life and reality.

Now friends before tonight's talk proper I wonder if I could spend a little bit of time working through a particular issue with you. You see I've been interacting with a friend over Amos and I've moved a little in my thinking.

[1 : 04] And I don't think the move has changed much of the impact of what I've been saying. But it's an important issue of interpretation with Amos and so I thought we'd have a look at it together. I'll tell you how my mind has been changed.

Now to do this I want you to come with me on a survey of some key scriptures. So I wonder if you could turn in your Bibles to Exodus 32. So Exodus 32.

And don't worry we will eventually get to Amos. It's okay. And this is the incident of the golden calf which many of you will know and remember. The context is that God has rescued his people from Egypt.

He has in chapters 19 and 20 and then 24 entered into a covenant with them. And they have reiterated and agreed and accepted that covenant. And as it were entered into covenant with him. And Moses is now up on the mountain of God and God's people down below are getting a little fidgety. And so they request Aaron to make a God for them. And he accedes and you see it happening in the first few verses here.

[2 : 10] He builds them. He makes for them some calves. Or a calf. And then they transfer their devotion to Yahweh the Lord to in fact this image.

And they try and pretend that the two are the same. And you can see that in verse 5. Look at this marvelous little bit of, well terrifying bit of syncretism. They build an altar in front of the calf.

And they announce, tomorrow shall be a festival. And in your versions you'll have to the Lord. But it is literally the Lord's name. To Yahweh. So tomorrow, worshipping this calf, we shall have a festival to Yahweh.

The first three commandments have been broken in one fell swoop. They have put another God in the place of the real God. They have made an idol. And they have taken Yahweh's name in vain.

Now, I'm sure that some of them really thought that they were worshipping Yahweh. And that this was just an image of Yahweh. But they were not. You see, they were worshipping a God that they wanted.

[3 : 14] A God of their own making. An idol. A false deity. This is syncretism. And it is idolatry. And God strongly and vehemently rejected it.

And God eventually brought his people. And many years later, a very similar event happened. You see, God eventually brought his people into the promised land. And he gave them a king, David.

And he promised David that the destiny of humanity would flow through David. And he made clear that the temple of his choice was associated with David. And with the city of Jerusalem.

With Mount Zion. And then came a critical moment. You see, under Solomon, the nation, well, just after Solomon, the nation split into two. Under his son.

And two tribes stayed in the south under the leadership of the Davidic descendant based at Jerusalem. And ten tribes stayed in the north under the leadership of a non-Davidic king based in Samaria.

[4 : 13] Now, with that in mind, I want you to turn in your Bibles to 1 Kings chapter 12. So, 1 Kings 12. Now, I want you to look at verses 25 to 33.

1 Kings 12, 25 to 33. The split between the north and the south, remember, as it just happened.

The king of the south is Rehoboam, a Davidic descendant.

The king of the north is Jeroboam, not the Jeroboam from Amos, but a former Jeroboam. Jeroboam does not want to lose his people down to the south, you see.

And he knows that that's likely to happen if they think that worship must be done only in the south at Jerusalem. And so, he does, I think, what the people and Aaron did in Exodus 32.

That is, he fashions some calves and he repeats, he even repeats Aaron's words from Exodus 32. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Or similar sort of sentiment.

[5 : 21] And then he puts them strategically, these calves, strategically in his kingdom. One at Bethel and the other at Dan. Now, I wonder if you can see what he's doing. He is, in effect, setting up a rival religion.

And God gives his verdict on this religion in chapter 13, if you move forward. And he says he's going to bring it to an end. You know, he sends a prophet and he says this. He says this is destined for destruction.

He even names the great king who will do it. It will come from the south. A hand of a Davidic king will come. And Josiah the great, as it were, the great, sort of almost second David, will decimate this altar.

Now, Bethel had had a great religious history. It was a place of worship by Jacob. And people undoubtedly thought that as they worshipped at the sanctuaries in Israel, they were worshipping Yahweh.

Or many of them did. But they were mistaken, as mistaken as the people in Exodus 32. They were syncretistic. Idolatrous. What they were doing was not pleasing to God.

[6 : 27] Now, that in mind, I'm sorry it takes so long to get there, but turn to Amos chapter 1 with me. And I really just want to push some things a bit harder that I said on our first night together.

Look at Amos chapter 1 and verse 2. It says, The Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem.

Now, the very first thing that God does here is to locate where his voice is coming from. It comes from the south. That is, it comes from Zion or Jerusalem.

That is where the truth of God is to be found. That is a place that represents God's rule and God's sovereignty. Now, let me tell you, this does not mean that true godliness is found down in Jerusalem.

Because you only have to read anywhere else. In fact, you only have to read Amos to find out that Jerusalem, and our passage tonight says this, has got it as wrong as the north has in terms of what it means to really worship Yahweh.

[7 : 34] But, and in fact, if you want to flip back, the prophecies against Judah, that is the south in chapter 2, verses 4 to 6 indicates that.

And the rest of the Old Testament indicates that the southern tribes corrupted true religion just as much as the north. In fact, one king says that, sorry, two kings says that the north was tame compared to the south.

That the south excelled more than the north in idolatry and corruption. So, friends, the point is being made here is that true religion follows the true god and follows the commands of the true god.

And the true god has said that worship is to be made in Jerusalem. And the true god has said the calf idols that the north had made, they're not true gods. And this is part of the reason why, as we read through Amos, places like Gilgal and Bethel are not to be worshipped at.

Because they represent false religion. They represent a rival religion, a rival usurping of God's rule. And they're destined for end and punishment.

[8 : 46] You worship there, you go into exile with them because God's already prophesied in 1 Kings 13 that that's where these places will end. These worship sites represent worship of emptiness and idolatry.

In fact, in Hebrew you can play a little, you can do a little word play on Bethel and change it to, not, it literally means the house of God. But you can just do it just to change a vowel and you get the house of emptiness.

And there's a little bit of that going on. Bethel is not the house of God. No, it's the house of nothingness. Now it's at this point that I have not, that I want to say I've not emphasised that as much as I could have so far.

I said it, but not as strongly as I could have. It's not, let me say that Jerusalem is any better than Bethel or Dan or Gilgal as a worship site. And the rest of the Old Testament indicates that even a focus on Jerusalem can be corrupted.

The south got it pretty wrong too. No, Jerusalem in the south is no better than the north. However, Jerusalem does represent God-ordained worship and the north needs to humble itself and recognise this.

[9 : 50] So friends, please hear me. There are two things wrong in Israel. Two very strong and potent things and they don't have a monopoly on them. They need to flee from them because they're first, their religion is a false religion.

It is corrupt and idolatrous. They need to flee from it. That's number one. Number two, and this is clearly emphasised through the book. Their religion is wrong in another way as well. Not only does it not keep the first three commandments, but it doesn't keep the rest either.

It does not practice godliness, kindness and God-likeness. Now you see, these are the people of God. We're told that throughout the book. And their neighbours, like their neighbours in the south, they have corrupted religion in their practice.

As Amos chapter 3 verse 1 and 2 says, God's whole family, by which I think he means north and south, are ungodly and deserve judgement.

And the passage we read tonight indicates that is so for Judah and Zion are singled out as well. So friends, there's my little correction. I needed to say it before we moved on. But now we can move on to the focus of tonight's talk.

[10 : 55] And so with that in mind, I wonder if you could stand and stand for prayer. And let's ask God to help us as we look at our specific passage for tonight. Father God, please help us to flee false religion, no matter where it is found.

Father, please help us to flee to Jesus, for we know that only in him is your kingship found, for he is your God-ordained person to worship.

He is your God-ordained focus of true religion. He alone is the place where we should worship.

Father, may we worship him in spirit and truth.

We pray this in his name. Amen. Please sit down. Now friends, most of you know that over the past few years in Australia, and in many places around the world, there has been significant debate about racial and religious vilification laws.

They look different in different countries, but nevertheless, there's been significant debate. Such laws have been introduced in various parts of the world and in some states of Australia, such as our own.

[12 : 08] And the general, or similar things, and the general purpose of these laws, I think, is to make it unlawful for a person to engage in any conduct that incites hatred against, serious contempt for, or revulsion of, any other person or class of persons.

The wording of these laws is critical. You see, underneath them is a view that prizes tolerance, and therefore views hatred as something very, very negative. Hatred is linked, isn't it?

You see, you can see it in the wording that I used, with revulsion and contempt. It's a very negative emotion, hatred, isn't it? And those of us who have been hated, or who have hated someone else, know just how negative hatred is.

To hate something is to, in effect, regard it as evil. It is to have a very intense dislike for it. It is linked with words such as, think of the words that are linked with hatred.

Enmity, animosity, malevolence, rancor, malignity, detestation, loathing, abhorrence, repugnance, antipathy, intolerance.

[13 : 20] We in the modern world know that hatred destroys relationships. We cannot see anything positive about hatred. It is something to be shunned.

That's what our modern world thinks. Something to protect people from. And something we need to strive to get rid of in our lives and in our society. We view hatred, don't we, as something incredibly

evil.

There is nothing positive about it. And that makes it very strange that the Bible sometimes talks about hatred in a positive sense.

And I think some of us find that very uncomfortable. In fact, the Bible sometimes talks about God hating both people and things. In Isaiah chapter 61 verse 8, God tells us he hates robbery and iniquity.

In Psalm 5 verse 5, we're told that God hates all who do wrong. That's not just what they do. It's them that do it. In Proverbs 6 verse 16, we've got a long list of things God hates.

[14:29] Listen to them. Here are six things the Lord hates. Seven that are detestable to him. You know, so there's six really bad ones and one really, really bad one.

A complete list, in other words. Can you see what's going on here?

The Bible generally agrees with our modern view that hatred is something very negative. It's something powerful, something destructive. However, there is a good hatred. A positive hatred. Positive hatred can be seen in God's holy revulsion at sin and sinners. Positive hatred can be seen in God's intolerance of evil.

God finds evil odious. In Old Testament language, it is a stench to his nose. It revolts him. It angers him.

[15:40] It loathes. He loathes it. He finds it repugnant. Detests it. God hates sin. But Proverbs 8, verse 13 tells us that there's a particular sin that God finds particularly repugnant.

And this one sin is one God particularly hates. And that sin is pride. Listen to what God says in his word in the second half of Proverbs 8, verse 13.

I hate pride and arrogance. And the rest of the Bible agrees. Pride, you see, is the sin that Adam and Eve were guilty of when they thought, we know better than God and we think that eating of this fruit is going to be better for us than God said it would be.

Pride is a sin that characterizes the devil and his cohorts, for they exalt themselves above God.

That is pride and arrogance. It's saying we could do a better job of this. We are better than God.

Pride is the main sin of some of the great sinners of the Bible. It is the sin of David that he walks around the roof of his palace. It is the sin of Nebuchadnezzar. He walks around the roof of his.

[16:55] And it's the sin of many, many others. And perhaps it's our sin as well. And God hates this sin of pride. He hates the arrogant. Now, starting today is talking a fairly tough way.

By talking about God's hatred of sin and his hatred of pride. Because Amos talks about these very things in Amos 5 and 6. Have a look at it. Amos 5. In verse 21, we read this.

You see, the original Hebrew here.

We're told that God hates and despises Israel's religious feasts. He can't handle their assemblies.

The original Hebrew refers to God's sense of smell and of sight and of hearing.

He has a severe dislike of what he looks upon and smells and sees and hears among his people.

And then in chapter 6, verse 8, we're told this.

[18:17] The Lord of hosts has sworn by himself, says the Lord, the God of hosts. I abhor the pride of Jacob and I hate its strongholds.

And I think these verses are particularly about God's hatred of sin and pride. Because that is what Samaria reeked of. Now, let's have a closer look at these verses.

And as we do, I'll show you the places where the sin of pride often hides and tries to find shelter. I want to show you the camouflage that pride often uses and the characteristic environment in which it lives.

Turn to Amos 5, 20 to 27. Now, these verses are about the religious practices of Israel. And what God does is he takes a good hard look at the whole religious practice of the people of Israel.

He examines their religious holidays, their feasts, their sacrifices, and even their surrounding hymns and songs and musical practices.

[19:16] He has a good hard look at the religious life of his people. And what he finds is they are very religious. Their religion is, in fact, lavish and full.

They sacrifice great sacrifices. They throw great festivals. They sing wonderful, strong songs or great songs. But justice and righteousness, well, they're absent.

But I want you to notice something else about these verses. Did you notice, as we read through, the constant repetition of yore? The festivals, the songs, the sacrifices do not have God as their source and their center.

No, the crunch comes in verse 26 where God says that they are lifting up and worshipping a God of their own making. Can you see it there? You shall take up Sakhoth, your king, and Kiwan, your star god, your images, which you made for yourselves.

Who did they make them for? Themselves. Therefore, I'll take you into exile beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts. You see, in other words, the center of their religious life lies where?

[20 : 22] In themselves. God is not there. Nor are God's concerns. Amos is exposing the most characteristic place in which human pride hides.

It hides in self-made religion. In religion that has human interests and human glory at its focus. In our day, such pride, if we're looking for places, it might find itself and be hidden.

It might find itself in its place in a group of Christians who make sure that they have the most gifted preachers, or the straightest theology, or the liveliest music, or the most talented musicians, but are empty of love and compassion and justice and righteousness.

And there hides pride. You might find people who know about God, but really don't know God. You might find people who love knowledge, but don't love others.

You might find people who close their eyes to rapturous music, but who don't have a place for obedience of the word of God. Now, let me tell you, friends, that the word from Amos is that such religion is despised by God.

[21 : 35] He has no time for it. And people who practice it are really not worshipping the real God, but worshipping a God of their own making. That's very tough stuff, isn't it?

We just sort of transpose it a little and see its implications. Now, turn to Amos 6, verses 1 to 7. Now, as I've indicated in my previous talks, the time in which Moses was prophesying was a golden age of the northern kingdom.

It was a time of great economic expansion. It was a time of military and territorial expansion. It was a time when the elite grew rich and thrived. Their lives were full of wealth and of luxury.

And they thought that such wealth and luxury were signs of God's blessing. They thought to themselves, God's pretty pleased with us, isn't he? And so they became complacent.

They felt secure. God's favourably disposed to us. We were all right. And that's the focus of Amos 6, 1 to 7. And these verses, there are whole lots of word plays that Amos uses to emphasise his criticism.

[22 : 37] For example, in verse 1, the New International Version uses the term foremost of nation. But the notables here, the first of the nations is how it's referred to in the NRSV.

The ESV is probably a little more helpful at this point. It calls them the choicest of nations. The word choice is then used throughout these verses.

And these people, you see, think of themselves as the choicest of nations. And verse 4 tells us that they lounge around on ivory couches and dine on the choicest of lambs.

Verse 6 says they drink wine out of huge bowls rather than cups. And they throw the choicest of oils and lotions over themselves. Can you see the picture?

This is a picture of a massively huge, luxurious setting. Great people pampering themselves. Lounging around in their wealth.

[23 : 40] Eating the best food. Drinking the best wine. Singing songs of their own making that they think are as good as any of the songs of the great songwriter, King David. But their complacency and their security and their comparisons with David just show off how proud they are.

As verse 6 makes clear, they're unconcerned about the reality of their situation, about the fact that the nation is standing under judgment for this neglect of righteousness and compassion. So can you see what's going on here?

You see, wealth and luxury often lead to pride. And such pride often leads to apathy and complacency. And that leads to a false sense of security. And you think everything's going to be okay.

And they often then lead you to think that you and God are friends. Well, they often lead you to think that, well, in fact, you're better than God and don't need Him.

Again, friends, let me tell you, we can see this in our own day. There are people in our day who are hugely wealthy and are therefore entirely apathetic toward God. We see it in our rich and lucky country that soaks in the benefits that God has given it, but pays lip service to God.

[24 : 57] And not even natural disasters often can shake us in that. Or we see it in Christians who believe that prosperity is a sign of God's blessing, but who neglect the poor and fail to be generous.

Friends, such people have become proud. They've not recognized that their wealth and their prosperity are the gift of God to be used in the service of God who made them and gave it to them. Now, let's move to verses 11 to 14. Now, these verses talk in various ways about the military strength of the nation. Now, you can see this most clearly in verse 13.

You who rejoice in Lodabar who say, Have we not by our own strength taken Kanaim for ourselves? You see, these people of Israel, they boast in their conquests.

They think it's our power, our own power that has made us this successful. Now, again, you can see where their pride lies, can't you? Just as it often hides behind wealth and prosperity, so it hides behind might and power.

[26 : 01] You see, might and power often inures you against God, doesn't it? It makes you think, well, I'm pretty powerful. I'm pretty strong. God's unnecessary, really, isn't he?

And so in other parts of the Bible, it is the strong and the mighty who often set themselves against God. It's the strong and the mighty that often try to raise themselves above God.

And friends, let me tell you, there's nothing new about that. In our own day, we see it. For even in our own day, the mighty and the powerful often seem to think, Oh, we can flout God's laws and act defiantly against God's wishes.

Isn't it interesting? In the last few days, did you hear about the WikiLeaks story about how many powerful companies and influential celebrities have taken advantage of various laws about finance and thought, Ah, we can do it.

You see, it's this whole concept that lies behind why the leaders of God's people are told not to lord it over others. You see, I've been given a position of authority and that means a position of power and pastors are not to lord it over congregations.

[27 : 22] Husbands are not to lord it over wives. Parents are not to domineer over children. You see, positions of power and might often mask pride and arrogance. Can you see what I'm saying?

You see, the signs of pride are really clear. They are glossy religious practices and ceremonies that are empty of God-centeredness, righteousness, justice and compassion. Or they are luxury and wealth that has no interest in using such wealth and luxury for God's purposes.

Or they are complacency and apathy about sin and its consequences. Or they are might and power that thinks that it's cut loose from God and not dependent upon God.

Now, friends, let me tell you, in our lucky country, in our rich and secluded, you know, religious existence, all of those things are so present in our society, in ourselves.

Now, I wonder if you might have noticed there are some sections of our passage I've missed out as we've moved through. I've missed out the end of each oracle as it mentions God's judgment. And I've missed out two longer passages in verses 18 to 20 of chapter 5 and 8 to 10 of chapter 6.

[28 : 36] And the two longer passages pick up the theme of judgment. Look at them. This is chapter 6, 8 to 10. Can you see the emphasis here? It says, The Lord God has sworn to himself, says the Lord, the God of hosts, I abhor the pride of Jacob, hate his strongholds, and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it.

And chapter 5, verses 18 to 20, tells us about the day of the Lord. Do you remember right at the beginning there? This is the very first time, chapter 5, 18 to 20, is the very first time in the Bible that the day of the Lord occurs.

And it seems as though, we don't know really a lot about what they thought before this, but it seems as though when you come to Amos' day, the term the day of the Lord meant something to Israel and they thought that it meant a good day for them.

Perhaps they thought it was the time when God would appear and that he would, when he appeared, what he'd do is judge the enemies of the people of God. In other words, they thought this is a great day of victory, of salvation, of revelation, of great glory for the people of God as their God reveals himself to the world.

But Amos says to us, it'll be a day of great surprise and of great reversals. You see, instead of being the day they long for, it'll be a day that they dread.

[29 : 59] Instead of being a day of light, he says, it'll be a day of darkness. And Amos captures it in this marvellous image. It is great, isn't it? Of the man who's had the ultimate bad day.

Look at it in verse 19. It really is good. You see, he imagines, Amos imagines this man going about normal daily business and he meets a lion and he does the natural thing. He runs for his life. And then he meets a bear, even worse. And finally, he gets into the security of his house. He's in there inside. He locks the doors. He puts up his hand against the wall and a snake bites him. It is a bad day. You see, that is what the day of the Lord will be like for Israel. The very God that they found security in will be the source of judgment and horror for them and terror. And the day they longed for would be the day they wished to flee from and dread. Now at this point, I want to ask why the day of the Lord would be such a surprise for the people of God? Well, start thinking about pride.

[31 : 03] You see, the essence of pride is what? Well, the essence of pride is that it puts me or you at the centre of things. Isn't it?

That's what pride is. It says, I'm what matters. And the essence of the day of the Lord is what? Well, the term itself describes that it is the day of the Lord.

That is, it's God's day. It's the day when He alone will be glorified. It's the day when He will be the centre of everything. And if He's the centre of everything else, guess who's not going to be? Me. Humans will not be the centre on that day. On the Lord's day, there will be no room for anyone who does not have God at the centre. On the Lord's day, there will only be room for God and the things of God and the people of God who have God at the centre of their existence.

The Lord's day will be exactly that. The Lord's day. Friends, let me tell you that the day of the Lord is a day that is surely coming.

[32 : 10] The New Testament calls it a number of things, but it calls it the day of Christ. That is, a day when who alone will be exalted? Well, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It'll be a day of judgement. It'll be a day when all human confidence, complacency and pride will be crushed. So, what I want to do is to urge you to take a good hard look at yourself and ask if you're ready for that day.

And I want to tell you the secret of being ready for that day. The secret of being ready for the day of the Lord is to rid yourself of pride. It's to avoid pride like the plague.

You see, God hates pride. And God hates people who are proud. And the proud will not survive the day of the Lord, the day of Christ.

So, how do you avoid pride? I mean, it sneaks up on you, doesn't it? Doesn't it? Pride really does sneak up on you. Well, the opposite of pride is humility. Where pride shows itself in speaking, what does humility show itself in?

[33 : 18] Listening. Where pride shows itself in disobedience, humility shows itself in obedience. Where pride shows itself in independence from God, humility shows itself in being like a child, utterly dependent on its father, dependent upon God.

Where pride shows itself in trust in humans and self, humility shows itself in trust in God. So, the humble person is one who trusts God and his word.

And the humble person is one who lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. The humble person is one who lives in a manner that pleases God. Here's in the words of Isaiah 66, one who trembles at the word.

They're obedient. They're dependent. They love the things God loves, hate the things God hates. Let me give you some practical ways of avoiding pride.

First, determine that your only confidence before God will be in Jesus. He alone is sufficient to relate you to God. And friends, it's a very hard thing to do when you do it the first time.

[34 : 35] It's even hard when you do it after that. But that's what God wants. He wants to say, this man on a cross, this man who became human, this man who died in such an ignominious death, he's your salvation.

Can you accept it? That requires incredible humility in one sense. Second, determine that you'll be a student of God's word. That is, you'll search God's word for guidance and instruction.

And when it differs with your own opinion, you will choose to listen to God's word. Now friends, I as a Christian know that's an incredibly hard thing to do because at times I want to say, no God, you can't really mean that, can you?

I think I know a bit better than that, really. Now I never say it that way, but that's deep in my heart what I'm saying, isn't it? I'm saying I'm not sure you've got it right. That's no different to Adam and Eve when I do that.

No, it is to look to God's word for guidance and instruction and when it differs with your own opinion, choose God's. Third, deliberately work on not thinking of yourself greater or more important than other people.

[35 : 54] Cultivate an attitude where you do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to. That too is very hard to do. Fourth, don't think that rightness is your sole prerogative.

See, the Bible's clear. When a person thinks he knows, then he does not know or she does not know as they should know, as they ought to know.

Thinking you know everything is a gross display of ignorance, but it's also a gross display of arrogance and pride. Fifth, be a learner.

friends, in my view, teachability is the greatest sign of humility, and unwillingness to learn is the greatest sign of pride.

You can tell when someone is proud. They don't listen to people, and in the end, they don't even listen to God. They think that they alone are the source of knowledge and insight, and friends, churches are full of them.

[37 : 02] either in pulpits or elsewhere. So let me urge you to cultivate these things. Do you remember them? Cultivate a confidence in Jesus. Cultivate a love for God's word, and let that word shape your thinking and actions.

Cultivate a humble perspective on yourself, and cultivate a teachable attitude. Friends, if you had those things sort of set in your life and your practice, they will help you avoid the surprise on the coming day of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There will be good preparation for that day. So let me pray. Father, please help us not to be proud or arrogant.

please help us to depend upon the Lord Jesus. And Father, please help us when we hear your word to obey it.

We pray these things in Jesus' name.