

How Not to Please God

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[0 : 00] Today, we're going to be looking at a passage that touches at the very core of our faith journey, and that is obedience to God's plan and guidance in our lives.

Our message title today is How Not to Please God. Now, you might be wondering why in the world that title. Well, the reason is simple.

Sometimes, in order to understand what we should do, we need to reflect on what we shouldn't.

Today, we're going to be diving into the book of Acts, chapter number 7.

And in Acts chapter 7, verses 1 through verse 53, we will uncover the pattern in our human relationship with God, and that is the tendency to resist His divine guidance.

We've seen that from generation through generation through generation, all the way back to the Garden of Eden, the human tendency to resist God's plan and to resist His guidance in our lives.

[1 : 12] Sometimes, that stubbornness is born out of fear or maybe a misjudged reliance on tradition.

Let me illustrate this with a story. Imagine you are on a boat and you have lost its way and you are in the middle of the Gulf. No land in sight.

It is an overcast day. You can't see the sun. But you have a GPS device that has been programmed to bring you back home, to bring you back to the shore.

But rather than following the path outlined by your GPS, you decide to ignore it and to rely on your own instincts instead.

You go south when the GPS is telling you to go north. And then you begin to go faster. What happens?

[2 : 17] Well, you drift further and further away from where you should be and where you want to be going. You're moving in the wrong direction and you're moving very, very fast.

Despite the perfect guidance tool, your journey becomes difficult and ultimately your journey becomes dangerous because you simply choose to resist the instructions and ignore the instructions.

This is precisely what happens in our lives. When we decide or when we just simply ignore God's instructions in our life, we have God's instructions in the Word of God, in the Bible.

And very often we resist God's plan or we choose to ignore His guidance in our lives. He seeks to guide us towards peace, towards fulfillment, and towards joy.

But when we resist His directives, maybe out of fear or pride or stubbornness, we drift away from God's divine plan for our lives.

[3 : 29] And as we go through this passage together this morning, let's think about how we can overcome our resistance to God's plan and potentially our resistance to God's divine guidance in our lives.

Now, rather than working through this chapter verse by verse and going more deeply as we typically do, which we would take far more time than we have this morning to go through 53 verses, I want us to make this a high-level pass and look at five ways the Jewish nation resisted God's plan and God's guidance down through the years that brought them to the point where they crucified their very own Messiah.

Also, there are some rather difficult historical issues that are brought about by Stephen's response. We're not going to look at those this morning.

If you're interested in learning a little bit more of that, find some good commentaries and study. I don't believe that there are problems. I believe that we can figure out how we can reconcile those, but we're not going to spend time there this morning.

We'll take a few verses at a time and we'll work through Stephen's response that he gave to the high priest. Let's begin. Chapter number 7, beginning with verse number 1.

[5 : 04] Verses 1 through 8 as we begin. Then the high priest said, Are these things so? A little bit of a recap from last week.

What we had was Stephen, who was one of the men who were chosen, one of the seven men chosen to help to operate the food bank to give the daily distribution of food to the widows. The Greek-speaking widows had complained that they were being neglected in the daily distribution. And so the apostle said, So that we can spend more time in prayer, studying God's Word and leading the church, choose seven men who are full of the Holy Spirit, who have a good reputation, and will place them over the daily food distribution.

So they chose seven Hellenist Jews, seven Greek-speaking men, to take care of that. And this is the Stephen from chapter 6 who goes out from there and begins doing even more.

And he goes to one of the Hellenist temples and he starts talking about Jesus. He starts talking about that Jesus is the Messiah. And he came to fulfill the law.

[6 : 24] And we no longer need the temple sacrifices because Jesus Christ is the one who embodies all of that. Well, these foreign Jews who had moved back to Jerusalem were possibly maybe even a little bit more sensitive to the Old Testament law because they figured they were outsiders so they had to pay more attention to the law than maybe others.

And so they got aggravated. They got upset with Stephen's message. And so secretly they went out and they got people to lie about what Stephen said.

And so much so that he was arrested, brought before the Jewish council. And then the high priest said to him, as he's being questioned, are these things so?

The claims were that he blasphemed against Moses and said that the temple was going to be destroyed. So here is Stephen's response.

And he said, Brethren and fathers, listen. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, Get out of your country and from your relatives and come to a land that I will show you.

[7 : 49] Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans, dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, he moved him to the land in which you now dwell. And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on.

But even when Abraham had no child, he, God promised to give him for a possession and to his descendants after him. But God spoke in this way, that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress them for 400 years.

And the nation to whom they will be in bondage, I will judge, and said God, and after that they shall come out and serve me in this place. Then God, he gave him, Abraham, the covenant of circumcision.

And so Abraham begot Isaac, circumcised him on the eighth day. Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs.

What we see, first of all, and it's amazing the way Stephen, well, you remember if you read the last verses of chapter number six, when they laid these accusations on Stephen, he didn't rebut.

[9 : 11] All he did was, when the council looked at him, they saw the face of an angel. They saw possibly his face shown, but they were seeing that Stephen was, Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit, and he was someone that had been with God.

And so God gives Stephen this message to give to this Jewish council, and he simply goes through the history of Israel, and he shows them first that they misunderstood their own spiritual roots.

He said, you think you are children of Abraham. You don't even know who Abraham was. He said, because you misunderstood your spiritual roots.

Now, Abraham was the founder of the Hebrew nation, and his relationship with God, as we see here, and as we see more in the Old Testament, the relationship of Abraham with God was a relationship of grace and a relationship of faith.

God graciously appeared to Abraham, called him out of heathen darkness into the light of salvation, and Abraham, we see in the book of Hebrews, responded by faith.

[10 : 33] And it was that faith that saved Abraham, not circumcision, and not anything else, but it was his faith. Abraham was saved by God's grace through his faith, not because he was circumcised, not because he kept a law, and not because he worshipped at a temple.

Those came later. Abraham was made right with God through his faith. He believed the promises of God, and it was counted for him righteousness.

God promised to Abraham and his descendants an inheritance, and told Abraham that his descendants would suffer in Egypt for a period of time, which they did.

And from the very beginning, God had a wise plan for his people. He said, My people will be under bondage for 400 years, but he said, I'm going to judge the nation that puts them in bondage.

God had a plan. He said, Just let me have my plan and just follow it. And his plan would be fulfilled as long as they obeyed his word and they followed his will.

[11 : 42] Now the Jews greatly revered Abraham, and they still do to this very day. And they prided themselves in being Abraham's children. But they confused physical descent with spiritual experience, and they depended on their national heritage rather than their personal faith.

The Jews were blind to the simple faith of Abraham and the patriarchs, and they had cluttered it with man-made traditions that made salvation a matter of good works, not faith.

Here's the thing. God has no grandchildren. You're not born into a family right with God. That comes through faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone for what he did on the cross of Calvary in our place.

Each of us must be born into the family of God through personal faith in Jesus Christ. Just like Jesus said to Nicodemus, you must be born again.

You must be born from above. You need to trust Christ as your Savior. And also the Jewish nation prided themselves not only in being Abraham's children, they prided themselves in the right of circumcision, but they failed to understand that the right was symbolic.

[13 : 10] It was symbolic of an inner relationship with God. Circumcision had no saving power any more than any other right that we follow today.

The right of baptism has no saving power. It is just simply our public declaration that we're not ashamed of Jesus Christ and we're following Him publicly.

Communion. When we receive communion, it is not something that has salvation powers. It is simply something that Jesus said that would be a picture that we can remember that He shed His blood on the cross of Calvary, gave His body for us.

And He said, just do this in remembrance of me till I come back. And so circumcision had no special powers to it. It just was a symbol that they had removed those places of their heart that didn't belong or that shouldn't be there.

and it was an internal heart condition or relationship that it stood for. But over the years, the fulfilling of these rituals had taken place of the enjoyment of the reality.

[14 : 29] And they were still following these rituals. This happens even in churches today. We put more stock in traditions than we put into the relationship with Jesus Christ Himself.

So are we relying on our roots of tradition? Or are we willing to surrender to God's plan and His guidance in our lives? They misunderstood their own spiritual roots.

And then secondly, they rejected their God-sent deliverers. Let's take a look. A little bit longer section, verses 9 through 36. And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt.

But God was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles, gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

And now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan. And our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.

[15 : 36] And then the second time, Joseph was made known to his brothers and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh. And Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him 75 people.

So Jacob went down to Egypt and he died and he and our fathers. And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for the sum of money from the sons of Hamar, the father of Shechem.

But when the time of the promise drew near, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt till another king arose who did not know Joseph.

This man dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies so that they might not live. At this time, Moses was born and was well-pleasing to God and he was brought up in his father's house for three months.

But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was mighty in words and deeds.

[16 : 39] Now when he was forty years old, he came into his heart to visit his brethren and the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffering, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed and struck down the Egyptian.

For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand. But they did not understand.

And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting and tried to reconcile them, saying, Men, you are brethren. Why do you wrong one another? But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?

Do you want to kill me as you did that Egyptian yesterday? Then at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian where he had two sons.

And when forty years had passed, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight and he drew near to observe.

[17 : 46] And the voice of the Lord said to him, saying, I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

And Moses trembled and dared not look. Then the Lord said to him, Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.

I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and I have come down to deliver them. And now I will send you to Egypt.

This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge, is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush.

And he brought them out after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness forty years.

[18 : 46] Stephen lets the council know not only that they had forgotten their roots, but also that they had rejected their God sent deliverers.

I have combined these two sections with Joseph and Moses because they share something in common. They were both rejected the first time as deliverers the first time, but they were both accepted the second time.

Joseph's brethren rejected their brother and they sold him into slavery. And there was a famine in the land and he had talked Pharaoh into taking all of their crops, storing them in silos for the seven years of famine that would come.

And Joseph's family became hungry and they said, Let's go to Egypt. Let's buy grain. And came up a few times, they came back and forth and finally he revealed himself to his brothers and they recognized him and they accepted their deliverer the second time.

Israel rejected Moses the first time and they said, Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? But God sent Moses back the second time to Egypt and Israel finally accepted his deliverance and through God and through Moses God delivered his people.

[20 : 16] These two events illustrate how Jesus was treated by his own people. Jesus came the first time nearly 2,000 years ago.

He came to his people and he presented himself. But God chose or God saw that the Jewish people would not accept him.

They rejected their Messiah when he came to them the first time. John chapter 1 verse number 11. But when Jesus comes again the world will recognize him and they will receive him.

In spite of what they did to his son God hasn't cast away his people. God hasn't cast away Israel yet. Now individual Jews are being saved today.

Same way we as Gentiles are. Through faith and trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior. The nation of Israel today is partially blind to the truth about Jesus Christ but one day God is going to receive them back as a nation.

[21 : 26] are we not prone as well to reject God's plan and maybe to resist his plan in our lives just like just like the people of Israel did.

Have you ever found yourself in a difficult situation because you ignored God's guidance or maybe you ignored the counsel of another believer.

Maybe they said just be careful God's word says you need to be careful about what you're doing and we ignored that and we found ourselves in a difficult place.

God gives us many opportunities to surrender to his will. His Holy Spirit if we are a child of God his Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin or convicts us when we drift away from God.

God may send others to come and to exhort us and to let us know that we need to come back to him. He gives us opportunity after opportunity to deliver us but we sometimes resist and we run the risk of ignoring them.

[22 : 33] It reminds me of a Boudreaux joke but I won't go there this morning. They misunderstood their spiritual roots. They rejected their God sent deliverers and then they disobeyed their own law.

Let's look at verses 37 to 43. 43. This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel the Lord your God will raise you up for a prophet like me from your brethren him you shall hear.

this is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai with our fathers the one who received the living oracles to give to us.

Stephen was accused of blaspheming he was accused of speaking against the law. He says you guys revere Moses Moses was the one to whom God gave the law on Mount Sinai to give to us whom our fathers would not what would not obey.

He said you love the law God gave the law and how did my people respond in their hearts they turned back to Egypt saying to Aaron you remember that in the Old Testament make us gods to go before us here they were they were slaves in bondage in Egypt Moses comes he delivers them God says I will give my law and after having just been delivered they said hmm we liked Egypt as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt we do not know what has become of him verse 41 and they made a calf in those days offered sacrifices to the idol rejoiced in the works of their own hands then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven as it is written in the book of the prophets did you offer me slaughtered animals 40 years in the wilderness

[25 : 00] O house of Israel you also took up the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of your god Remphan images which you made to worship and I will carry you away beyond Babylon Stephen is quoting from the Old Testament that was showing to them that their very own nation of Israel disobeyed the law of God and they were still disobeying the law of God by rejecting their Messiah Stephen's opponents had accused him of speaking against the law the sacred law of Moses but the history of Israel revealed that the nation had repeatedly broken that law over and over again God gave his law to his congregation his people his living word through the mediation of angels no sooner had the people received the law than they were turning back over to idols idol worship even to the point of sacrificing their children can you imagine generation after generation after generation

Israel God's people the Jews showed that they continually rejected the law of God and even in the first century we're still continuing to reject God's law now Acts 7 42 we could compare with Romans chapter 1 verses 24 to 28 we see when God turns people over they choose to do their own thing they choose to be so wise in their own minds and reject God all these verses describe the judgment of God when he takes his hands off and permit sinners to have their own way and then when Stephen quoted Amos which we just read he quoted Amos chapter 5 verses 25 through 27 he reveals what the Jews had been really doing all through these years in outward form they were worshipping but in their hearts they really were not worshipping God they weren't worshipping God with their hearts they were worshipping Jehovah outwardly but in their hearts they were really worshipping their foreign gods and the form of the question in Acts chapter 7 verse 42 the construction demands a negative reply so in other words no you were not offering sacrifices to the Lord Stephen says the Jewish leaders in Stephen's day prided themselves in following the law of the Old Testament but in rejecting the fulfillment of the law Jesus Christ what they were doing was they were rejecting the entire spirit of the Old Testament law they rejected Jesus they crucified him and the law all pointed to one day there would be a deliverer the Messiah Jesus Christ they were following an empty system a system that had no power to give them life what did the law give the law gave death he said the law does not save you could follow the law to the letter if you could which nobody can we're told in the

New Testament all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God there is no one righteous no not one and so he says even if you could follow the law it wouldn't give you life only Jesus and what he did on the cross of Calvary only the Messiah only the Savior can give us new life in Christ they were following an empty system that couldn't save them you realize there are many people doing that today they're following an empty religious system they go through rites they follow their tradition

over and over again doing empty deeds oh maybe they're crucifying the flesh maybe they're doing penance maybe they're doing all kinds of things but as Stephen is saying the law can't save the works that we do cannot save us is only through it's only by grace through faith for by grace are we saved through faith not of yourselves it is the gift of

God not of works lest anyone should boast Paul tells us in Philippians chapter 2 verses 8 and 9 same with Abraham it's Abraham the book of Hebrews tells us that it was Abraham's faith that saved him not circumcision not the law not any of these things he said it was his faith that saved him the same is true today don't follow an empty religious tradition church membership doesn't save it's only faith and trust in Jesus Christ Jesus died on the cross paid the penalty for our sin the Bible says all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved so are we not ourselves sometimes disobeying God when we resist his plan and we resist his guidance in our life they misunderstood their own spiritual roots they rejected their God sent deliverer their law and next what we see is they despise their own temple look at verse 44 our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness as he appointed instructing

[30 : 48] Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen which our fathers having received it in turn also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles whom God drove out before the days of our fathers until the days of David who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob but Solomon is the one who built him a house however the most high the the most high does not dwell in temples made with hands as the prophet says heaven is my throne verse 49 and the earth is my footstool what house have you built for me says the Lord or what is the place of my rest has my hand not made all these things these religious leaders had accused

Stephen of talking against the tabernacle of despising the temple they accused Stephen of despising the temple but that was exactly what the nation of Israel was doing themselves Moses built the tabernacle and God's glory graciously dwelt in the holy of holies we see that in Exodus chapter 40 Solomon built the temple and again God's glory came into the temple but over the years the worship at the temple degenerated into a mere religious formality they forgot about the glory of God and eventually idols were placed in the temple we see that in 2nd Kings Jeremiah warned God's people against their superstitious faith in the temple and told them that they had turned God's house into a den of thieves Jeremiah chapter number 7 and this was still going on as a matter of fact Jesus had to throw some guys out of the temple because they had brought their inflated money exchange business into the temple and so these religious leaders in Jesus day were despising their own temple come on now and so what we see in Stephen's response to the high priest he's saying everything every single thing that I am being accused of you are guilty of our people have been guilty of all down through these years their defense of the temple was both illogical and unscriptural see God doesn't live in anything we build he doesn't live in this building if the

Holy Spirit resides in you if you've trusted Christ as your Savior the Bible said we are sealed we are adopted and we are indwelt with his Holy Spirit we no longer have sacrifices offered in a temple why because Jesus came he fulfilled that and he became the sacrifice the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world he died on the cross for in our place for our sin and the Holy Spirit dwells within you who know Jesus Christ as your Savior and you are the temple of God we are his temple temples of flesh so how do you think God responds when we resist his plan we resist his guidance in our lives when his

Holy Spirit is residing within us how do you think God responds when we dishonor his temple today our very own bodies the temple in fleshly form so the nation of Israel misunderstood their own spiritual roots they rejected their God sent deliverers they disobeyed their law they despised their temple and then fifthly lastly they stubbornly resisted God and his truth verse 51 this is the climax of Stephen's speech and here's the personal application that's now going to cut to the heart of those that he is speaking to they held his life in their hands and he says you stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears you always resist the

[36 : 09] Holy Spirit as your fathers did so do you which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute and they kill those who foretold the coming of the just one of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it they stubbornly resisted God and his truth throughout the century Israel has refused to submit to God submit to his plan for their life they resisted the truth that he gave them and they

disobeyed the truths that he had revealed to them their ears did not hear the truth their hearts did not receive the truth and their necks did not bow to the truth as a result they killed their very own Messiah the nation refused to accept any new truth truth the nation of Israel refused to accept the new truth that God was revealing from age to age instead of seeing God's truth as seed that produces fruit and more seed the religious leaders embalmed the truth and they refused to accept any new truth the only truth they were willing to receive was Old Testament and they even refused to accept the portions of truth in the Old Testament that talked about a suffering Messiah do you realize there are Jews today who do not accept Isaiah 53 because they cannot wrap their heads around a Messiah that would have to suffer that would have to be crucified and so they had embalmed the truth and they were so closed minded they weren't able to allow any new truth to come in to their minds by the time

Jesus came to earth the truth of God was so encrusted with so much tradition that the people couldn't recognize God's truth when he did present it man's dead traditions had replaced God's living truth that's why they rejected Jesus message that's why they rejected Jesus himself now our lesson are the lessons from Acts chapter 7 verses 1 through 53 are loud and clear resisting God's plan and resisting God's guidance in our lives doesn't lead us to a place of joy or fulfillment instead it leads us into a wilderness of confusion and strife just like it did the nation of Israel in Stephen's response to the high priest we see how not to please God don't disobey God's truth don't despise his temple don't disobey his law don't reject your deliverers those who are trying to guide you back to truth as we leave here today

I want to challenge you to reflect on your own life reflect on where you might be resisting God's plan for your life where you may be resisting his divine guidance in your life it could be forgiving someone who wronged you it could be reaching out to a neighbor in need or maybe stepping out in faith and following God's calling whatever it is surrender to him allow your heart to be soft towards God toward God's plan for your life towards his guidance and towards his leading in your life remember that surrendering to God's will doesn't mean we lose control we gain his wisdom we gain his strength and we gain his direction when we surrender to him and so may we not just strive to please God with our words and our external actions but with obedient hearts open and receptive to his guidance may we find the courage and may we excuse me find the courage this week and beyond to surrender our resistance to him and to obey him trust him and like the prophet Isaiah said Lord to say Lord here am I send me may God give us the grace to move from resistance to surrender from confusion to clarity and from merely surviving to thriving in his divine will for our lives let's pray Lord God we come before you this morning thanking you that you have given us your plan you revealed yourself in your word to us and father we thank you for giving us your holy spirit we thank you for offering us the possibility of a relationship with you through our Lord and our savior Jesus Christ we thank you that through his death and his resurrection we can have new life new life today and everlasting life with you in heaven father we thank you that through the apostle John you've told us that we can know that we have eternal life and that this life is through your son and through our relationship with him father if there's anyone here this morning who may be here in this building or watching or listening to this message i pray lord god if they don't know jesus christ as their savior they've never yet said lord i know i'm a sinner and i'm trusting what jesus did on the cross of calvary to be the payment for my sins in full right now where i am lord i trust you to save me give me new life and i thank you father i pray that you would send us out this week obeying you with open hearts and open minds ready to receive your truth your plan for our lives and to not resist your guidance in our lives we thank you father for this we pray it in jesus precious jesus holy name