

How are we? Let's get to work. Luke 17. Now let me explain what happened to me, and that will explain where we're going today. This next part of Luke reads very much like a proverb. And what I mean by that is there are some unattached ideas, and it almost reads like a proverb where you've got this truth and this truth and this truth. And then He ties it together with a parable at the end. And so my intent was to take all ten of these verses and unpack them and end with the story that pulls them all together. On Saturday morning about 6:30, I just kind of popped off the pillow and went, "Uh, no I'm not going to do it that way." Now I'm linear and well planned, so when that happens, I take that as divine prompting. And so what I want to do instead is take the first two verses and the first phrase of the third verse, because although the Scriptures are inerrant and infallible, the numbering system is not. So the Holy Spirit didn't come to Paul and go, "This is verse 1..." That's not what happened. The numbers were added centuries later, and they messed this one up.

Let's go. Luke 17, starting in verse 1. "And he said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come..." Now I'm grateful that Christ just said that, because it leads me to believe that I'm okay. If that's not here, then you buy into this idea that you come to know the Lord and all of that just melts away in the light of His divine glory. But He says here, "This thing's going to play out, but here's what you've got to know. Temptations to sin are sure to come. Temptation to sin is coming after you. There are going to be moments of your life, regardless of how much you read your Bible, regardless of how much you're in church, regardless of how spiritual you are, where temptation to sin is going to come." Now I think we have to do some work here, because we live in a time where I'm saying "sin" and most people are defining that differently than the way the Scriptures define it. I say "temptations to sin are sure to come," and most people think immediately of they personally struggle with or what somebody around them struggles with that hurts them. So I want to try to define it and talk about how these two temptations are going to work, at least at the root level, and then we'll go from there. Now the foundational element of all sin is pride or idolatry. From murder to adultery, from lust to lies, every external moral act deemed sinful has its root in idolatry or pride. You cannot think of a moral action that is deemed sinful that does not have at its roots idolatry or pride. Which is why so many of us struggle to break free from historic sin in our lives, because we are habitually trying to deal with that issue rather than the underlying issue. Maybe this is a great illustration since you live in Dallas. Everybody has weeds in their yard. It's just a fact of life. The temptation is, instead of dealing with those weeds, is just to mow over them. And if you mow over them, they blend into the grass quite nicely... for about two days. And since weeds grow faster than grass, it only takes about 48 hours to reveal you still have a weed issue. So the problem is most of us try to mow over sin instead of uproot it.

So if the root issue of sin is pride or idolatry, here are the two great temptations that are sure to come your way. The first temptation is to take something other than God and make it ultimate. Now I don't know what that thing is. For some it's cocaine or black tar heroin. It's usually for most of us a morally neutral if not a morally pleasant, morally right thing. Most of us are much more apt to make family ultimate than you are cocaine. So the first temptation that's coming for all of us is to take something other than God and make it our ultimate and to pursue it and chase it and own it. This is idolatry. You make your family an idol, you can make your children an idol, you can make making money an idol. You can make anything an idol. And the first temptation that will come for all of us is to take something other than God Himself and make it ultimate. That's idolatry.

The second temptation that's sure to come is around the idea of pride, and it works itself out in two ways. We don't like the God of the Bible, so we make our own. Usually that's us, we make ourselves god. We don't talk like that. We don't introduce ourselves as Yahweh. That's not how this thing works. If a guy goes that far, you're probably looking at mental illness. But there are those who operate like they are god. Like the God of the Bible is too fierce for them, so they'll say things like, "I just can't believe that God would command that, that God would want that, that God would ask that of me." This plays out all the time here at this church. And so somebody will be habitually in sin and we'll engage them out of love and go, "Hey, this thing you're doing, it's sinful. You need to repent, because this is the end. You don't want it to go this way. So out of love we're engaging you." I'm talking about our covenant body here, members of this church. I can't tell you how many times they go, "I just can't believe that that's what God would be asking of me." And so we'll go, "Okay, um there. That's where He asks that of you." And they go, "I don't care what that says. I'm doing it my way." Do you see what just happened there. They just went, "That God is inadequate for what I want. I'm going this way." And so the second temptation that is sure to come is to create another god other than the one in the Bible. Maybe that's us, maybe that's a different version of this God. These are the two great temptations. They're coming for all of us. Some of us might even be walking in them now. I'll tell you how I think they'll play out now is in the Christmas season. Even in Christian settings, watch how often the "reason for the season" is family and friends. Just watch that. All I ever ask of you is that you pay attention...and not even to me, just to the world around you. Watch how much that falsehood comes out of everyone's mouth this time of year. Now do you see what's happened? You've made something else ultimate.

So you've got these two great temptations, they're coming for everyone and now look at this next line. "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!" So now you've got an active agent that brings the temptation. I think there are two kinds of temptation. There's the kind that just wells up in your sinful heart, and then there's a type of temptation that's otherly, someone brings it to you. You must mind your own business and it shows up. Now, it comes from one of two directions. One is from outside of the covenant community. The book of Proverbs says there's a type of woman that men should avoid. She is sensual, she is overtly sexual and in the end she wants to devour or destroy the man. Which means she doesn't really have any interest in the man; she just wants to see for her own gratification if she's pretty enough, beautiful enough and skillful enough to make him choose her over his wife. She has no love for him; she simply wants to destroy him. The Bible says such a woman exists. The Bible says that there's a type of man that women should avoid who is flirtatious, who is gifted at spotting weak-willed women and taking advantage of them. These are outside threats. If you've ever tried to leave a scene where you have partied with a group of guys, they don't want you to leave. And so they're going to try to woo you back in. They're going to say stuff like, "Well you don't have to drink, you don't have to do the drugs. Just come with us. Just hang with us." And it might work once or twice, but then you wake up in the back of an El Camino again. Or am I the only one that's happened to? Anyhow, you've got temptations that come from without, the temptation to make something ultimate and the temptation to create another god.

Now, I think we've been told a lot about that. There are all these great verses for that. "Do not be deceived. Bad company corrupts good morals." There's all these verses that say be careful of who you give influence to. But there is a second place that these two temptations flow from, and it's one that doesn't get talked about enough. And that's temptation from within the covenant community. Historically, there are men who rise up from among the church, among the covenant community and teach what's false, teach what is untrue and teach another gospel than the one that we know. And if you'll get into Christian history, the greatest damage done to the covenant community was not done by wicked kings and politicians but by seminary professors, pastors, authors and scholars. And I use the word scholar loosely, like our culture does anyway. It doesn't take much to be a scholar or an expert anymore. These days scholar means, "Here's my opinion." Don't believe me; just watch the news. So not only do these temptations that can destroy us come from outside, but they come from inside. And inside is much more insidious and causes much more damage than outside. Let me read for you just a couple of verses where you see this happening. 2 Corinthians 11 says this, "I wish you would bear

with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough." So what he's saying is within the covenant community, within those who are members of the body, there are those standing up, they're leading home groups, they're teaching, they're prophesying, they are getting up and proclaiming a different Jesus than the biblical, historical, orthodox Jesus. They are teaching a different Spirit than the biblical, orthodox, historical Spirit. They are teaching a different religion altogether, and the church in Corinth is doing absolutely nothing about it. They're actually letting them teach this garbage. And so he says, "I'm worried about you.

Let's look at the next one. The next one is one of my favorites. 2 Peter 3:15-18, "And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand..." I love that the Bible just said that the Bible is hard to understand. So whenever you're in Romans and you're like, "Huh?," the Bible said that you'd do that. Basically Peter just said, "I know some of you guys are reading the letters of Paul. Good luck." So that should be comforting for those of you who struggle at times with the Scriptures. Now look at what happens with those difficult teachings. "There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen." I literally could do this all day, but I won't. We'll just do a couple more. Now let's look at 1 John 4:1. "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world." 1 Timothy 1:5-7, "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions." So you've got it biblically. If you get outside of even biblical history and just get into church history, you'll find this occurring over and over and over again where men from inside of the church begin to teach to what is contrary to what is biblical, historical and orthodox. And in so doing, they lead people astray until they disappear. And make no bones about this. They do disappear. The first generation of heretics tend to be able to hold on to some semblance of Christ in the middle of their wrong teaching and the generation behind them always disappears.

So if we trace it, men who do this, women who do this, they have certain things in common. So I want to run through the list of what false teachers look like. They are always articulate and intelligent. Morons don't lead people astray. Just an absolute ignorant fool who can't articulate what he believes isn't going to lead people astray. That's not how it works. If you'll look back, false teachers are always articulate, intelligent and at some level charismatic in their personality. I know the charismatic piece isn't always true, but historically most of the time they are. A second characteristic they have is they start out orthodox and they have some semblance of success in ministry. This particularly happens in the West where all we know is the entrepreneurial spirit and capitalism, so anyone who can grow anything to any real size can teach whatever he wants, point back to that size and go, "See? That has to be true." That's crazy. How do you grow something quickly? By telling everyone exactly what they want to hear and not offending their sensibilities or by speaking what is true that must might be offensive? How do you grow quickly? Well, you tell everyone what they want to hear. This is what Paul says is going to happen when he's talking to Timothy. He goes, "Listen, there's going to come a time when men don't want to hear about sound doctrine. They want their ears tickled." And so here in the West, you've got guys who have just grown these massive things and they're teaching what is false. And if anybody questions them, they go, "How could this be wrong? Look at this bad boy. How could this be wrong? Look at this over here. If what we

were saying was wrong, there's no way it would work." Really? That's madness. Wrong stuff works all the time. Let's talk about a couple more characteristics of false teachers. They usually proclaim that they are faithful to the Scriptures. Can I tell you something that happens almost every day on the television that's almost comical? If you'll go turn on your TV at any time and just find one of the channels (and you know what I'm talking about), you will find a man holding his Bible teaching a crowd of people that have giant Bibles on their laps. And I mean *giant* Bibles. Like the old family one with the naked baby angel on the cover, 407 lb. monster crushing the blood out of their legs. And it will sit on their lap and the guy will start teaching away and they'll be taking notes in the margins, all the while teaching what is actually contrary to what is written in here. And trust me, that's very easy to do. Like I'll give you an example even out of what I taught three weeks ago. Remember when we were in Luke 16 and Jesus said, "Make friends for yourself by using your unrighteous mammon?" Now, we unpacked that and said, "This is what's going on here." But look how easy it would be to take that verse, don't read anything around it and go, "Make friends for yourselves with your cash...and I'm your friend. These are the Scriptures commanding you to make me your friend." How easy is that? So they say, "Hey, I'm not contrary to Scripture; I'm just reading to you Scripture." while at the same time going the opposite.

Here's another one. There is usually a great deal of ambiguity in their teaching, which means they won't come straight out and say it. What they'll do is ask questions that aren't really questions. They'll go, "Would God really do something like that?" Now what they're saying is, "No He wouldn't." But they can't say, "No He wouldn't," because the bulk of Scripture would say, "Yes He would." So there's a great deal of ambiguity. And when I get on my last point about these guys, I'll tell you why that ambiguity has to stay in place. There's a great deal of ambiguity in their teachings. Also, they argue that they're not denying anything essential to the faith but rather just dealing with a new perspective on something peripheral. This next one is very popular one because this is all of culture right now. They speak the language of love, peace and unity and anyone who would say what they are teaching is false just proves that they don't get it because they're attacking the unity, love and peace of the church. This one happens all the time. They're usually morally upright, very loving, very giving guys. And then this one will bring you back to the ambiguity. This next one tends to be a little more modern, and by that I'm talking about the last 150 years. There is almost always money to be gained and power to be gained in what they're teaching, which is why you have to continue to operate in some ambiguity. If you are a full-on, flaming liberal, don't believe the Bible, don't believe the resurrection, don't believe in the virgin birth, are Evangelicals going to widely purchase your books? But if you believe all of those things and question all of those things without really coming out with exactly what you believe, will they buy your books? Every day. They'll buy one for their coffee table, one for their friend and one for the back of the toilet. So the reason why there's almost always ambiguity and they don't want to come fully out where they land on things is because if they do, they can't make any money. You have to lie a little bit. And by lie, I don't mean outright lie. I mean just not tell the full truth.

I think we could go on here, but I'm not going to just for time's sake. "And he said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.'" So it's going to go bad for them eventually. Look at verse 3. This is why I think the beginning of verse 3 goes with verses 1 and 2 and not the rest of verse 3. "Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him,..." So why would "Pay attention to yourself" go with "If your brother sins...?" That would be you paying attention to your brother. "Pay attention to yourself" goes better with the first idea that you had better watch your soul, you had better watch your mind because there are false teachers out there that will lead you astray into the two great temptations and you might be one yourself. You had better pay attention. So how do we pay attention to ourselves? I think you could do all these things where you go, "Um, read the Bible. That will help. Read meaty, thick books." And I think we could go on like that, but here's what I would rather do. The best way I know for you to pay attention to yourself would be for you to know what the gospel is and for you to know what the gospel is not.

Let me give you this example. We go to the same restaurants over and over and over again here. We do that because we want to be intentional about our life and we want to build relationships with people who don't go to this church. So there is a store I frequent often. I went in with my daughter and son and ordered, and somebody must have told the guy that owned the shop that I was a preacher because he said, "Someone told me you're a holy man." I said, "Well, yes I am, because of what I believe that Christ did, but I'm very human." So he said, "Well my name is Muhammad. I'm a Muslim." So I asked, "What kind of Muslim are you?" He went, "Oh no no no, I'm peaceful." I went, "I'm not asking you if you're a terrorist, bro. Are you Sunni? Are you Shiite? Are you orthodox? What type of Muslim are you?" And he said, "I'm a non-practicing Muslim." I was like, "Oh, okay. Awesome." And then that was it. We left. I came back a couple of days later. We were ordering and he said, "How are things in the world of religion?" And I said, "I have no idea. That's not what I do." He said, "Well I thought you were a priest." I was like, "I am but not how you mean it. The gospel, what I believe and what I teach is actually contrary to religion. In fact, if you listed out what religion is, the gospel would not qualify. Let me give you an example. Muslims believe you can be born a Muslim. Because your parents were Muslim, you can be born a Muslim, which is why you can have a non-practicing Muslim. That's not how Christianity works. You cannot be born a Christian, so there's not such thing as a non-practicing Christian." And I swear to you, he laughed. He said, "Yes there is." And I said, "No, there's not. There's not such thing as a non-practicing Christian." He swore there is and that he's met people who were non-practicing Christians. I said, "You meet people and talk to people all the time who grew up in church and were baptized when they were nine, so they think that makes them Christian, but there's no relationship with God, there's no relationship with Jesus Christ, there's no pursuit of Him. They are not believers; they just think they are."

See, the gospel isn't that you're an American and you're good people. That's not the gospel. You've got to believe that. You're not a believer because your parents were. That's not the gospel. The gospel is not, "You're okay, I'm okay." The gospel is not therapy. That's not what it is. It's not that deep down inside, you are who God made you and if you would just accept who you are, warts and all, you would be able to walk in the fullness of life that Christ created you to walk in. Wrong. You're not okay. Neither am I. The gospel message is not that you're okay and that everything is alright. That voice in your head that says you're not okay and something has gone wrong is actually telling you the truth. The gospel isn't "God is love" That's not the gospel. Now there's an aspect of God's love in the gospel. But what kind of love are you talking about? Are you talking about "love" like you love tacos? There's this weird of love right now that love would never deny and love would never wound. And I just don't know what type of love that is. If you'll check definitions, that's actually more the definition of hate than it is love. My daughter was playing out front yesterday and I said, "I don't care that you play out front, but you stay out of the ditch and you stay away from the street." We live in a 35 mph zone, but we've got some teenagers in the neighborhood who can't read 3's. And so sometimes it gets quick and I don't want my daughter on the street. So I head back in side and sit down where I can see out the door. And where do you think she ended up not even a minute and a half later because she has a wicked little soul that Christ needs to save? She immediately went to that ditch and rolled around in the ditch and got right next to the road. So I went outside and said, "Boo, come here." We went inside and thought about that. And I will tell you that it is not hatred that makes there be commands and disciplines in my house; it's deep, desperate, fiery love. So the gospel is not "God is love." The gospel is not "Jesus wants to be your friend." Now there is an element to that in the gospel. I believe Jesus does want a personal relationship with you. I do believe that in Scripture parts of that are defined as friendship. Yet you already have a past with him that's going to have to be dealt with before that can be a reality. The gospel is not that you should live rightly. I've talked about that once or twice in my six years here. The gospel isn't "Let me behave better today than I did yesterday and God will be pleased with me." That's not the gospel at all. It's not that God wants to give you everything that you've ever desired. It's not that if you believe in Jesus life will get all better as you define better and all your relationships will be restored rightly. Has anyone else in here ever been obedient to what God has commanded and have it go bad for you? It's like God goes, "Do this and I'll bless you," and then you do it and eighteen years later God finally gives you the blessing. You're like, "You're about eighteen years late on this mug. I did what You told me and it just went bad." That absolutely happens. You can't preach that as the gospel message, because it's not the gospel. It's not just

social and material living. It's not that we take care of the poor and fight injustice. That's not the gospel. Now there are elements of all these things within the gospel, but none of them are the gospel.

So let me tell you what the gospel is. Any variance on this leaves what his orthodox, historical, biblical Christianity and becomes something else altogether, which by the way is one of the two great temptations. The triune God, in perfect harmony and out of an overflow of love, burst forth in creation. One of the things that makes the Christian creation narrative different from all other religions is all other religions believe that the universe was formed because of some power struggle. So the universe was formed because these two gods got in a fight and wrestled and then mountains appeared and the sun was made. So they believe that the universe was birthed out of angst and power and violence. Our narrative says the universe was created out of an overflow of love, which is why we come to our God like we do. God creates everything in that creative order to have a higher purpose. He creates everything so that when we partake in it, it stirs in us gratitude and worship for His name and His renown, so that nothing terminates on itself but that everything creates worship for Him, because that's what we were created for. So He creates food and food is supposed to be one of those things that doesn't just terminate by going into our belly but in that eating we are to be filled with gratitude in the flavors that He's created, in the abundance that He's given and the provision that He's given to us. And out of a simple meal, worship would be born. That out of a man and a woman coming together in marriage, out of that relationship, worship would be born. That out of sex, worship would be born. The purpose behind everything is to create gratitude that flows out of our hearts into worship for His name. Which is why when sin enters the world and fractures that, those things begin to terminate on themselves, which leaves us insatiable because none of that was supposed to terminate on itself. Which is why we can eat and eat and eat and all we want to do eat and eat and eat more. It's why sex, although pleasurable, doesn't bring the fulfillment that it was created, the worship it was created for and marriage becomes combative. And on and on and on we go, because everything was designed to have a greater purpose and have a greater flow than it currently does, which sticks us in a level of superficiality that's frustrating to our souls. Because according to Romans 8, our souls remember what it was like before that happened.

So sin enters the world, pride and idolatry enter the world, it fractures that and our relationship with God is severed so that everything loses its taste. God in His ferocious, holy love comes as a man, Jesus Christ comes as a man and lives perfectly, sinlessly until He is arrested, beaten and murdered. And in His crucifixion, all the requirements of the Law are fulfilled for those who would believe and all the wrath towards sinners was absorbed in Jesus Christ. He goes into the ground and three days later God raises Him from the dead. The resurrection is the objective evidence that the Law has been fulfilled and that all of the wrath of God was spent. If there is no resurrection, we don't know that the Law is fulfilled and we don't know that the wrath is gone for those who would believe. But because of the resurrection, we have the objective evidence that both of those occurred. So that if we would believe and put our faith in Christ and Him alone as the forgiver of our sins and we would repent, we would have full life here on earth and eternal life in that perfect union with God. That's the gospel. Any variance on that ceases to be what the Bible teaches as our faith.

The reason why I think this is such a big deal and the reason why I didn't go on and preach the rest of this text in order to camp out here is because there are very popular ideas that are beginning to spread through Evangelicalism that are contrary to this gospel. There is tons being written and tons being taught right now that the gospel is social justice and it's material. That's absurd and for the record, we tried that in 1890. And as I said before the first generation was able to do it and hang on to some semblance of Jesus, but the second generation completely left and just built out a lot of Unitarian churches that now sit empty. We tried it again in the 60's. And it's crazy, because the same thing happened there. And now you've got it happening again in the first decade of the 2000's where people are writing books and teaching that social justice and helping the poor is the gospel. It's not. Now there is a transformation of the soul that leads us into that because of the gospel, but that's not the gospel. There's also teaching going on right now that "the cross of Jesus Christ was not about absorbing the wrath of God because God didn't have any wrath for us. He just felt

sorry for us. It's just an example that to get where we're trying to get sometimes there's going to be trials and suffering." Do you see how contrary that is to the gospel? My favorite is "God pouring out His wrath on poor Jesus, that's divine child abuse." Except for the fact that Jesus said, "No one takes my life from Me. I lay it down."

And I thought we had to stop here and breathe a little bit because I'm worried about you at times. Because I think that the men who teach things that are contrary to what the gospel is, they do it subtly, they do it very carefully, they do it very inspirationally, they do it in a very crafty way. And it only takes a few degrees off to end you up out in the cold. "Pay attention to yourselves." Do you know what the gospel isn't? Do you know what the gospel is? Here's four questions that you've got to answer. Are you being tempted now or tempting others to pursue something as ultimate rather than Him? Fathers, husbands, this is a strong implication on you to view how you lead your home. Are you being tempted or tempting others right now to create a god other than the One that really is? Do you know what the gospel isn't? Do you know what the gospel is? I think you've got to answer those four.

Let's pray, "Father, I thank You for these men and women, and I thank You for just a chance to open up the Scriptures. I know that there is temptation coming for all of us. I know that there is temptation to make something ultimate. I know that there is temptation to at times not understand the ferocity and size of who You are, God. It's hard to see sometimes how You're leading us into joy when it feels like You're leading us into sorrow. Some of us have misunderstood what it means to be a believer in Christ and bought into things that in the end are lies. And so some in here thought they were a believer because their parents were or because they were good. I pray that You would bring clarity to minds and hearts on what the gospel is. I pray that we would hear and understand every piece of it, that You created the world, that the world broke and when it broke the relationship with You was severed making everything tasteless. But you came as a man, Jesus the Christ, lived perfectly, went to the cross, fulfilled the Law, absorbed the wrath and raised on the third day. So that all who would believe and trust in You would find full life here and eternal life forever. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."