

Living in a Pluralistic Society

Leaders Guide



"You shall have no other gods before me."

Deuteronomy 5:7

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Living in a Pluralistic Society

Idolatry and modern society

Preface | Idolatry

IDOLATRY – A topical Bible study

Idolatry is one of the main themes of the Bible.

Idolatry as the story of the Bible

The entire story of the Bible can be seen as a struggle between true faith and idolatry.

Idolatry in the beginning

In the beginning, human beings were made to worship and serve God, and to rule over all created things in God's name (Gen.1:26-28). Instead, we "fell into sin". When Paul sums up the "fall" of humanity into sin, he does so by describing it in terms of idolatry. We refused to give God glory (i.e. to make him the most important thing) and instead chose parts of creation to glorify in his place. *"They exchanged the glory of the immortal God... and worshipped and served created things rather than the creator."* (Rom. 1:21-25) In short, we totally reversed the original intended order. Human beings came to worship and serve created things, and therefore the created things came to rule over them. Death itself is the ultimate emblem of this, since we toil in the dust until finally we become just dust (Gen.3:17-19).

The Law against Idols

The great sin of the Mosaic period is the making of a golden calf (Exod.32), and the Mosaic law most emphatically forbid the use of any concrete "form" for the worship of God — whether it was meant to represent the Lord or not (Exod.20:4; Deut.4:12-19). When God made a covenant with Israel, he gave them a code of covenant behavior in Exodus 20-23, and it ended with a warning not to make *"a covenant with... their gods"* (v.32) lest they *"snare you"* (v.33).

Just like in Romans 1, this passage does not envision any "third" option. We will either worship the uncreated God, or we will worship some created thing (an idol). There is no possibility of our worshipping nothing. We will *"worship and serve"* (Rom.1:25) something. Whatever we worship we serve, for it "snares" us. Therefore every human personality, every human community, and every human thought-form will be based on some ultimate concern or some ultimate allegiance to something.

The Polemic against Idols

The prophets, especially Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, leveled an enormous polemic against the worship of idols. Some of the key elements in their teaching:

1. First, an idol is empty, nothing, powerless.

The idol is nothing but what we ourselves have made, the work of our own hands (Is.2:8; Jer.1:16). Thus an idol is something we make in *our* image. It is only, in a sense, worshipping ourselves, or a reflection of our own sensibility (Is.44:10-13). It has no ability or power of its own (Is.41:6,7); it will eventually rot (Is.40:20); it cannot tell the future nor control it (Is.41:22-24). Even within its own claims, each idol or god is only part of a pluralistic world. No idol is all-powerful and lord over every area of life. Every god is simply the god of this or that city, this or that vocation, this or that arena, this or that person. Everyone has his or her own gods. No god demands exclusive superiority over all of life and over all people.

Idols, then, contrast with the true God, who makes us in *his* image, who is not a reflection of our experience but one who shows himself through authoritative self-revelation. He is the only true God, the Lord of heaven and earth.

2. Second, (paradoxically) an idol is all and only about getting power.

Idolatry is so often associated by the prophets with social injustice (Amos 2:6-8). Why? Because the dynamic of idol worship was to achieve power and security by appeasing the god through rituals and good works. All systems of idolatry were always centered on localized dieties that were mediated by royal and priestly elites. This is why when Naaman went to Israel's God to get healed of leprosy, he went to the King of Israel with loads of money (2 Kings 5:6,7). The idols helped people "at the top" maintain the status quo. Idolatry is a way to perform and appease a god so it will give you security, influence, comfort, and power.

Idols, then contrast with the true God, who saves us completely by grace. Idols are manipulated by religion and performance, while God can only be responded to by repentance — a loss of power. While idolatry is the attempt to manipulate God to obtain power and security/salvation for oneself or one's group, the gospel is that we are saved by sheer grace, and thus we surrender ourselves in grateful love and become willing, sacrificial servants of everyone. We now become agents in God's kingdom which comes full of justice and mercy to all who are suffering.

3. Third, an idol is a spiritually dangerous power which saps you of all power.

Paradoxically, idols are seen by the Bible as terribly dangerous evil powers.

First, the idol brings about terrible spiritual blindness of heart and mind (Is.44:9,18). The idolater is self-deluded through a web of lies (Is.44:20). When we set our 'worship apparatus' in our hearts upon something smaller than the true God, it produces a 'delusional field' which causes us to live in deep denial of the truth and reality. This can be the delusion of an idol that makes something into a *psychological* idol — such as power, approval, comfort, or control. This can be the delusion of an idl that makes something into a *social-*

cultural idol — such as nationality (fascism), the state (socialism), reason (rationalism), science (empiricism), experience (existentialism), ad infinitum.

Second, the idol brings about slavery. Jeremiah likens our relationship to idols as a love-addicted person to his or her lover (Jer.2:25). We cannot help ourselves — we *must* follow our god. They poison the heart into complete dependence on the idol for salvation and hope (Is.44:17) and yet, when we are in trouble, they cannot save us (Jer.2:28). In Ezekiel 14:1-11, we have the unique term “*idols in their hearts*” which the people “*set before their face*” (v.3, 4). God says that we set up idols in our hearts, but he will seek to “*recapture the hearts of the people*” (v.5) This means that an idol is not primarily a material image, but some thing or relation or person or cause that we make the center of our hope and affection. It is that thing that we “face” with our whole being, that which absorbs our thoughts and imaginations.

The New Testament and Idolatry

“ If ‘idolatry’ is the characteristic and summary Old Testament word for our drift from God, then ‘lust’ [inordinate desires], **epithumiai** is the characteristic and summary New Testament word for that same drift. (See summary statements by Paul, Peter, John, and James as Gal.5:16ff; Eph.2:3, 4:22; I Pet.2:11, 4:2; I John 2:16; James 1:14ff, where **epithumiai** is the catch-all for what is wrong with us.) The tenth commandment [against ‘coveting’, which is idolatrous, inordinate desire for something]... also... makes sin ‘psychodynamic’. It lays bare the grasping and demanding nature of the human heart, as Paul powerfully describes in Romans 7... the NT merges the concept of idolatry and the concept of inordinate, life-ruling desires... for lust, demandingness, craving and yearning are specifically termed ‘idolatry’ (Eph.5:5 and Colossians 3:5).

– David Powlison – “*Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair*”

Sum: The sin under every sin.

The Ten Commandments begin with two commandments against idolatry. Then comes commandments three to ten. Why this order? It is because the fundamental problem is always idolatry. In other words, **we never break commandments 3-10 without first breaking 1-2.**

“The principle crime of the human race, the highest guilt charged upon the world, the whole procuring cause of judgment, is idolatry. For although each individual sin retains its own proper feature, although it is destined to judgment under its own proper name also, yet they all fall under the general heading of idolatry... [All murder and adultery, for example are idolatry, for they arise because something is loved more than God — yet in turn, all idolatry is murder for it assaults God, and all idolatry is also adultery for it is unfaithfulness to God.] Thus it comes to pass, that in idolatry all crimes are detected, and in all crimes idolatry.”

– Tertullian, On Idolatry Chap. I

“There is not one in a thousand who does not set his confidence upon the works, expecting by them to win God’s favor and anticipate His grace; and so they make a fair of them, a thing which God cannot endure, since He has promised His grace freely, and wills that we begin by trusting that grace, and in it perform all works, whatever they may be.

– Excerpts from Martin Luther, *Treatise Concerning Good Works* (1520) (Part IX)

“All those who do not at all times trust God and do not in all their works or sufferings, life and death, trust in His favor, grace and good-will, but seek His favor in other things or in themselves, do not keep this [First] Commandment, and practice real idolatry, even if they were to do the works of all the other Commandments, and in addition had all the prayers, fasting, obedience, patience, chastity, and innocence of all the saints combined. For the chief work is not present, without which all the others are nothing but mere sham, show and pretense, with nothing back of them... If we doubt or do not believe that God is gracious to us and is pleased with us, or if we presumptuously expect to please Him only through and after our works, then it is all pure deception, outwardly honoring God, but inwardly setting up self as a false [savior]...”

– Part X. XI

“This faith, faithfulness, confidence deep in the heart, is the true fulfilling of the First Commandment. Without this there is no other work that is able to satisfy this Commandment. And as this Commandment is the very first, highest and best, from which all the others proceed, in which they exist, and by which they are directed and measured, so also its work, that is, the faith or confidence in God’s favor at all times, is the very first, highest and best, from which all others must proceed, exist, remain, be directed and measured...”

– Part IX

“Note for yourself, then, how far apart these two are: keeping the First Commandment with outward works only, and keeping it with inward trust. For this last makes true, living children of God, the other only makes worse idolatry and the most mischievous hypocrites on earth...”

– Part XII

Point: All people sin in general because we are sinners, but why do we sin in any particular instance? Luther — any sin is rooted in the inordinate lust for something which comes because we are trusting in that thing rather than in Christ for our righteousness or salvation. Therefore, in sin we are always ‘forgetting’ what God has done for us in Christ and instead are being moved by some idol. Luther says that to fail to believe God accepts us fully in Christ and to look to something else is a failure to keep the first commandment — love *God* with all the heart. Thus beneath any particular sin is the general sin of rejecting Christ-salvation and indulging in self-salvation.

Belgic Confession Chapter 24

"We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Spirit, regenerates him and makes him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin. Therefore it is so far from being true that his justifying faith makes men remiss in a pious and holy life, that on the contrary without it they would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation. Therefore, it is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in man; for we do not speak of a vain faith, but of such a faith which is called in Scripture a 'faith working through love,' which excites man to the practice of those works which God has commanded in His Word... We would always be in doubt, tossed to and fro without any certainty, and our poor consciences would be continually vexed if they relied not on the merits of our Savior."

Point: Unless we believe the gospel, we will be driven in all we do — whether obeying or disobeying — by pride ("self-love") or fear ("of damnation") because we are serving God idolatrously. We are manipulating him for power with our good-works. Apart from 'grateful remembering' of the gospel, all good works are done then for sinful motives. Mere moral effort, may restrain the heart, but does not truly change the heart. Moral effort merely 'jury rigs' the evil of the heart to produce moral behavior, out of self-interest. It is only a matter of time before such a thin tissue collapses.

Sum: This means then, that *idolatry is always the reason we ever do anything wrong*. Why do we ever lie, or fail to love or keep promises or live unselfishly? Of course, the general answer is "because we are weak and sinful", but the specific answer is always that there is something besides Jesus Christ that you feel you must have to be happy, something that is more important to your heart than God, something that is spinning out a delusional field and enslaving the heart through inordinate desires. So the secret to change is always to identify the idols of the heart.

Living in a Pluralistic Society

Half-way discipleship

Study 1 | Judges 1:1 - 2:3

1. Read Joshua 1:1-9 and 23:3-13. Here is the mission of the Israelites, given by God through Joshua just before he died. a) What are the specific directions they are given? b) Why do you think God is so careful to insist that military bravery be combined with whole-hearted discipleship in this campaign? c) Do you see in this passage any of the reasons (mentioned last week) that this is not a warrant for other “holy wars.”

a) Specific directions.

1) First, they are told the dimensions of their new land in 1:4.

2) Second, they are told to “*take possession of the land*”, as the nations are “*pushed out*” (23:5) and “*driven out*” (23:9) by God when the Israelites do battle with them.

a. This does not envision genocide, but decisive battles with every nation, no matter how strong. They are to be brave in their fighting, expecting God to give them military victory (1:9; 23:3, 9-10).

b. It also precludes enslaving the nations or using their forced labor. They are to be sent away.

3) Third, they are told not to enter into partnerships (covenants) with them, or serve their gods, or intermarry with them (23:7-8, 12).

4) Fourth, this military activity is to be accompanied by a very close and vital spiritual life — a walk with God. This implies that they are not to expect success if they do not accompany all their work with a) meditation on God’s Word (1:8) with the mind, b) obedience to God’s will with the life (1:7), and c) love to the Lord with the heart (1:11). A very complete description of the life of faith!

b) Why the combination of bravery and spirituality?

1) First, it is hard to be truly brave without faith in God. The kind of bravery that does not arise out of faith in God would be adventurism, or macho-heroics, or plain cruelty. Only faith-based bravery will keep people from atrocities on the one hand or cowardice and ineffectiveness on the other.

2) Second, it would take a lot of very strong faith in the Word of God in order to conduct this campaign in the way God wishes. On the one hand, they can never turn back from fighting any people-group in Canaan, no matter how much stronger they are than the Israelites. Ordinary military policy dictates that you don’t fight superior armies. On the other hand, they can never just plunder and enslave any people-group in Canaan, no matter how much weaker they are than the Israelites. Ordinary military policy dictates that you don’t go to the trouble of driving people out who aren’t dangerous and whom you can dominate and exploit economically.

c) Is this a warrant for other Holy Wars?

1) First, it is clear, especially from v.5, that this is a very direct judgment of the Canaanites by God himself. *"The Lord your God himself will drive them out... before you."* It is surprising how careful Joshua is in his wording. He never exactly says that the Israelites are to "drive out" the Canaanites. Rather, they are to be driven out by the Lord through the means of the military action. So God is coming down to mete out justice against these nations, and the Israelites are simply his instruments. This supports the idea that this is an "intrusion ethic", in which God carries out Judgment day "early." This is not a general warrant for believers to move against unbelievers.

2) Secondly, it is clear that the purpose for "driving out" the Canaanites is not vengeful or economic/political but spiritual. They are to be removed so the Israelites will thrive spiritually and not to follow their gods (23:7) or fall under their religious influence. They were to build a home country to serve God in. Thus this is not a warrant for imperialistic war, in which one nation expands its power by conquering another.

2. Read 1:19-35. Though beginning well (1:1-18), the Israelites eventually fail to drive out the Canaanites. Make a list of all the reasons given (or hinted at) in the text for why various tribes failed to do so.

a) In v.19, we are told that the men of Judah could not succeed because the Canaanites *had iron chariots*. The reason given is the superior military equipment of the opposition.

b) In v.27 and again in v.35, we are told that the men of Manasseh (and Dan in v.35) could not succeed because the Canaanites *were determined to live in that land*. Here there is no claim of greater military resources or numbers. Rather, the reason given is superior will-power and tenacity — superior bravery.

c) In v.28-33, we are told that many of Israel's tribes resorted to enslaving the Canaanites or putting them to forced labor. This reason implied seems to be that it was more economical and convenient to enslave them than to drive them out.

3. Read 2:1-3. a) How does God assess the reasons for the Israelites' failure to drive out the Canaanites? b) What does he say in v.2 the real purpose of the campaign was? c) In the light of Joshua 1 and 23, why do the reasons given in vv.19-36 constitute not just military failure but spiritual unfaithfulness?

a) How God assessed their failure.

To most readers of chapter 1, there seem to be very plausible reasons for why the Israelites did not succeed in their campaign — superior military might, superior fortitude, economic convenience, etc. How could they drive out iron chariots when they had none (v.19)? When the first chapter account says “*they were unable*”, we are inclined to agree. They should not be held responsible.

But God does not accept this evaluation, and he does not appear to give any credence at all to the reasons given. God’s assessment of the Israelites’ performance is scathing. “*You have disobeyed me*” (2:2). Period. This is a flat contradiction to the claim of v.19 that they were “*unable*.” He says in 2:3 that he had promised to drive the Canaanites out if the Israelites had obeyed him, but now “*therefore... I will not drive them out.*” The reader asks — “why didn’t God drive them out before, when the Israelites tried so hard?” But God’s lawsuit in 2:1-3 means that their efforts must have been half-hearted or non-existent. God had promised to drive them out, if they were “*very strong*” (Joshua 23:6a,10).

Since 2:1-3 is a direct message from God, we must conclude that chapter 1 (which seems to contradict God’s assessment) represents Israel’s perspective and their “spin” on why they failed in their mission. Some commentators have noted that chapter 1 and 2 together are a narrative *tour de force*. The readers are lulled into sympathy with the Israelites, by reading their own “press releases” about their campaign. Then suddenly we are confronted and shocked by God’s categorical condemnation. This leads us to realize that we are all like Israel in this self-deception. (See question #4 below.)

In summary, the Israelites said, essentially, “we could not drive them out” but God is said in response, “you *would* not.”

b) The real purpose of the campaign.

In 2:2, God says that they failed to “break down their altars” (2:2) — which is an excellent summary of the purpose of the campaign. As we have noted previously (see “The Issue of Holy War”), the military campaign is not an “ethnic cleansing” because a converted pagan (Rahab – Josh.2:1ff.) is allowed to stay in Canaan. Also, the campaign is not an imperialistic conquest, since no one is allowed to take plunder or slaves. This is the purpose — to cleanse Canaan from idols. That is the point. By allowing the Canaanites to continue living in the land — for whatever excuse — the end result is that idols were being worshipped in the midst of the Israelites.

c) Why the Israelites were faithless not failures.

First, the Israelites were specifically commanded to go bravely to battle against superior forces (23:9-10; cf.1:9). In fact, Joshua at one time specifically commands them to go against iron chariots (Josh.17:16-18). God promised that

they would prevail in every instance. When Deborah actually did stand up against iron chariots, there was a victory (as we will see in Judges 4-5). To avoid superior armies is normal policy if you are conducting a campaign along "normal" imperialistic lines. When the Israelites failed to engage them, it showed a disobedient lack of faith in the purpose of God's mission and his power to help them.

Second, on the other hand, Israelites were specifically commanded to force out people that they could easily enslave. But the Israelites' decision to keep Canaanites as forced laborers shows that they had lost sight of the purpose of the mission. To not "waste" economic advantage and unnecessary bloodshed, and to keep people as a subjugated labor force is normal policy if you are conducting a campaign along "normal" imperialistic lines. But the mission was not to make money, but rather to have a place where they could serve God as the only God. So when the Israelites failed to drive them out, it showed a disobedient lack of faith in the purpose of God's mission and his power to help them.

Michael Wilcock says that between chapter 1 and 2 there is a "dialogue." He summarizes the dialogue like this:

'Why have my plans for occupation not been carried through?'

'We lacked the military capability for the final push.'

'But did I not say that if your willingness was wedded to my power, myself would see to the expelling of the enemy? Something has gone wrong with that 'wedding'?'

– Wilcock, p.27

- 4. a) Is there anything in your life about which you can say "I can't do" but about which God may say, "you won't do?" [Read 1 Cor.10:13. Is there any place in your life that you are not taking this promise seriously?] b) What two things does God say that the Israelites have forgotten in 2:1? How can we overcome our excuses by reflecting on the same two items?**

I suggest that if this is a large group, people break off in pairs to reflect and share on this question one-on-one for about 10 minutes. It will be easier to think of specific personal answers. Before you break up, read the categories of possible answers immediately below. Conclude by praying for each other in pairs.

a) Where are you saying "I can't" but God is saying "you won't?"

This is a very searching and threatening passage to apply to ourselves. It means that there may be all sorts of things in our lives which we think we are

"unable" to do, but which we actually are refusing to do. Much of the book of Judges shows how God is faithful to us despite our disobedience — that is comforting. But this shows that God in his grace will still insist on removing our self-deception.

There are an infinite variety of possible answers. I'll present three fairly common general categories. First, many of us justify ourselves by saying, "I can't forgive this (or him, or her)." I am "unable." Yet God commands forgiveness (Matt.18:35). This means that we can determine to put aside anger and soften our hearts with the knowledge of grace and the gospel — but we hide under. Another very common example is some kind of difficult truth-telling. We say, "I can't tell him the truth (or share the gospel with him or her, etc.)" I am "unable." But God tells us to "speak the truth in love" (Eph.4:15, 25). A third general category is temptation. We say "I can't resist doing this, though I know I am wrong." We must be careful, because sin has addicting power, and it is true that we may not be able, with sheer will power, to stop doing something by ourselves. But we can get help, admit our problem, humble ourselves and become accountable.

1 Cor.10:13 is a good verse to read. As usual, the Old Testament graphically portrays what the New Testament expresses as principles. 1 Cor.10:13 is a promise that God will never put us in a position in which we cannot obey him.

b) What two things does God say that the Israelites have forgotten?

From the inside, our excuses seem cogent and overwhelming. From the outside, God sees that any disobedience is a failure to remember a) what he has done, and b) who he is. In 2:3, before he tells them that they have disobeyed, God says, "I brought you up out of the land of Egypt." That refers to his saving work. Anyone disobeying God has essentially failed to remember what he did to save them. Then he says, "I will never break my covenant with you." That refers to his holiness and faithfulness. Anyone disobeying God has essentially failed to remember who he is.

5. 2:1-3. a) What tension do you see between the first "I said" in v.1 and the second "I tell you" in v.3? b) How does this dramatic tension make the story of the Judges gripping? c) How does Jesus Christ solve this dilemma? d) What practical implications are there for us when we break one of God's laws?

a) What tension do you see between the "I said"s?

The tension between the first and second "sayings" is probably stronger than the English translation indicates.

"2:1 and 2:3 should be read like this: 'I said, I will never break my covenant... and I also said, If you compromise with these nations I will not drive them out'. It is as though the Lord is saying, 'I have sworn to give you the whole of this land, yet I

have also sworn not to give it... to a disobedient people. You put me in an impossible position. What is this that you have done? And by what fearful means do you think I am to solve this dilemma?"

– Michael Wilcock, p.27

Wilcock puts it perfectly. Here is the impossibility. On the one hand, God is holy and just and cannot tolerate and live with evil. On the other hand, God is loving and faithful and cannot tolerate the loss of people he has committed himself to. (We see the same contradiction in Exodus 34:6-7, and in many other places.) This a tremendous, seemingly irresolvable tension in the narrative — but also in the whole Bible.

b) How does it propel the narrative — how does it enhance the story?

Commentators have noticed that this vicious tension in 2:1-3 creates a major "dramatic" tension for the story that will keep the thoughtful reader in suspense. Will God finally give up on his people (but then what of his faithfulness)? Or will God finally give *in* to his people (but then what of his holiness)?

c) How is this resolved in Jesus Christ?

It is only on the cross that we can understand how God is able to resolve the tension. On the cross, our sin was imputed to him, so that his righteousness could be imputed to us (2 Cor.5:21). There, God poured out his wrath on Jesus Christ in the sinners' place — he satisfied both justice (because sin was punished) and love (since now he was able to accept and forgive us). That is why Paul says only the cross makes God be both "*just and justifier of those who believe*" (Romans 4:26). This is the only way that God can both love us conditionally AND unconditionally. Jesus fulfilled the conditions of the law for us, so that now God can stay committed to us no matter what.

d) How does this effect us practically?

We live in this "paradox" — though because of Christ we know it is not a contradiction. On the one hand, we know that we do have to obey God's Word. Why? If God's will and his holiness is so crucial that the Son of God would die to fulfill it, then we can never, ever give up on obedience. If we know what he did for us and why he did it, it makes us deeply long to be like Christ and have his obedient, holy, radiant character. Yet on the other hand, when we fail to obey God, even again and again, we know God never will give up on us. So if we know the gospel, we can not "resolve" this tension by either simply giving in to sin or living under a burden of guilt and fear.

6. 2:1. a) The Angel of the Lord comes up from Gilgal. Why would God want them to remember Gilgal as they heard the charge of disobedience? (Read Joshua 5: 4-10 on what happened there.)

Why did the Angel of the Lord “come up” from Gilgal? Surely the Angel of the Lord does not live in Gilgal! So why the reference? It was at Gilgal in Joshua 5 that the people made a covenant with the Lord, and where he said, *“Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you”* (Joshua 5:9) “Gilgal” means “to roll. It means on that day God forgave their sin and entered into a relationship with them by grace. When the Angel came from Gilgal, it was a reminder of the Israelites salvation by grace — which is the basis for all repentance. God is thus not saying, “now you won’t be saved because you weren’t good!” Rather, he is saying, “how can you live like this when I’ve saved you by my grace?” This is very important to remember! The Angel coming from Gilgal puts the repentance on a “grace” rather than a “works” basis.

7. 2:3 – God says that the Canaanites allowed to stay will now become a “thorns” and “snares.” What things have you allowed to stay in your life which should be expelled? How do they become a snare? Pray to God for a ‘wedding’ of his power and your willingness to remove it.

I suggest that people end the meeting by thinking of this silently and praying silently.

This again is an application question with many possible answers. Again, I will propose some very broad categories. First, there are sins — things that are like alcohol to an alcoholic. They need to be just removed, taken out totally. Second, there are idols — things that are like food to a person with an eating disorder. They must be put in perspective and not allowed to run our lives.

Living in a Pluralistic Society

Half-way discipleship

Study 1 | Judges 1:1 - 2:3

1. Read Joshua 1:1-9 and 23:3-13. Here is the mission of the Israelites, given by God through Joshua just before he died. a) What are the specific directions they are given? b) Why do you think God is so careful to insist that military bravery be combined with whole-hearted discipleship in this campaign? c) Do you see in this passage any of the reasons (mentioned last week) that this is not a warrant for other "holy wars."
2. Read 1:19-35. Though beginning well (1:1-18), the Israelites eventually fail to drive out the Canaanites. Make a list of all the reasons given (or hinted at) in the text for why various tribes failed to do so.
3. Read 2:1-3. a) How does God assess the reasons for the Israelites' failure to drive out the Canaanites? b) What does he say in v.2 the real purpose of the campaign was? c) In the light of Joshua 1 and 23, why do the reasons given in vv.19-36 constitute not just military failure but spiritual unfaithfulness?
4. a) Is there anything in your life about which you can say "I can't do" but about which God may say, "you won't do?" [Read 1 Cor.10:13. Is there any place in your life that you are not taking this promise seriously?] b) What two things does God say that the Israelites have forgotten in 2:1? How can we overcome our excuses by reflecting on the same two items?

5. 2:1-3. a) What tension do you see between the first “I said” in v.1 and the second “I tell you” in v.3? b) How does this dramatic tension make the story of the Judges gripping? c) How does Jesus Christ solve this dilemma? d) What practical implications are there for us when we break one of God’s laws?
6. 2:1. a) The Angel of the Lord comes up from Gilgal. Why would God want them to remember Gilgal as they heard the charge of disobedience? (Read Joshua 5: 4-10 on what happened there.)
7. 2:3 – God says that the Canaanites allowed to stay will now become a “thorns” and “snares.” What things have you allowed to stay in your life which should be expelled? How do they become a snare? Pray to God for a ‘wedding’ of his power and your willingness to remove it.