**Series OVERVIEW**

Based on the book by David T. Lamb, this series will help us make sense of the seemingly contradicting pictures we see of God in the Old Testament.

From the book cover:

*Many think of God as wrathful and angry, smiting people right and left for no apparent reason. The Old Testament seems to portray God as capricious and malevolent, wiping out armies and punishing enemies with extreme prejudice. But alongside troubling passages of God’s judgment are pictures of God’s love, goodness, and slowness to anger. How do we make sense of the seeming contradiction?*

Without minimizing the sometimes harsh realities of the biblical record, in this series we’ll try to paint an overall portrait of God that gives coherence to our understanding of him in both the Old and New Testaments.

We’ll help equip people to navigate these troubling sections of Scripture by helping them learn to consider the “Cultural Context” of the passages and to place them in the “Overarching Narrative” of Scripture. (Perhaps we can point people to tools that can help them with these practices of biblical interpretation).

One thing we want to be intentional about in this series is how we refer to God...

In the Old Testament, God is simply referred to as “God” (elohim) approximately 2,600 times. God is also called “Lord” (adon or adonai) over 400 times. God’s personal name in the Old Testament, however, is Yahweh (typically translated in English Bibles as “the LORD”) used by far the most…over 6,800 times. It is significant that God tells his people to call him by a name (Yahweh) and not a title (the LORD). The biblical pattern of referring to God primarily as Yahweh in the OT and Jesus in the NT tells us God wants to be on a first-name basis with his people. This model of intimacy in relationship characterizes God in both the OT and NT (p. 19-20)

It is important for us to understand this intimate nature of God because our image of God will directly affect how we either pursue or avoid him. If we believe that the God of the Old Testament is harsh, unfair, and cruel, we won’t want anything to do with him. Interestingly, the people in the Old Testament who knew God best desperately desired to be with him. (p. 22) Our hope is that as we learn more about God as he is depicted in the Old Testament that our desire to draw near to him will increase.

Some overview “connecting tissue” from Lamb’s book that might be helpful in introducing these messages:

* Ask: “How does God reconcile the loving God of the Old Testament with the harsh God of the New Testament?” Think I got that mixed up? God in the Old Testament is consistently described as slow to anger and abounding in love, but Jesus speaks of hell more than anyone in Scripture. (Of course, the reality is the God of both the Old and New Testaments is characterized by love.) (p. 9)
* Old “Far Side” cartoons depicting God at a computer with his hand hovering over the “SMITE” key. (p. 12) https://thebarkingfox.com/tag/smite-button/
* In Bruce Almighty, Jim Carrey’s character screaming, “Smite me, O mighty smiter!” (p. 12)
* “The Simpsons” - Bart’s Sunday School teacher concludes a lesson with, “...and that’s why God causes trainwrecks.” (p. 13)
* Negative perceptions of God are even found in insurance terminology. Disastrous events outside of human control are called “Acts of God.” (p. 14)
* Richard Dawkins, in his best-selling book, The God Delusion: “The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving, control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty, ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.” The fact that Dawkins book has become an international best-seller indicates he has touched a nerve. (p. 13)

**Week 1 | June 2, 2019 | Violent or Peaceful?**

**Scripture:** 2 Kings 2:23-25, 2 Kings 19:35, 2 Kings 6:8-23, Romans 5:8-10

**Message Big Idea**

When we read certain stories in the Old Testament, it’s hard not to wonder… Is God violent or peaceful?

23 From there Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, some boys came out of the town and jeered at him. “Get out of here, baldy!” they said. “Get out of here, baldy!” 24 He turned around, looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the boys. 25 And he went on to Mount Carmel and from there returned to Samaria. -2 Kings 2:23-25

35 That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! -2 Kings 19:35

21 When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, “Shall I kill them, my father?Shall I kill them?” 22 “Do not kill them,” he answered. “Would you kill those you have captured with your own sword or bow? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master.” 23 So he prepared a great feast for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel’s territory. -2 Kings 6:21-23

8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! 10 For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! -Romans 5:8-10

**Message Description**

The Bible contains numerous examples of violent behavior. But should we assume that just because these stories are included in the OT that the behavior is being condoned? If that is true, what does it say about publications such as the Chicago Tribune that regularly record stories of murder, rape, and violence? We need to examine the context of a biblical story to determine whether the action is condemned or praised by a text. (p. 94)

Elisha, the Boys, and the Bears (p. 95)

* 2 Kings 2:23-25
* Most readers are justifiably troubled by this story for three reasons:
* Elisha was a prophet of God. Shouldn’t he have been able to control his anger better?
* The boys seem young, only misbehaving as young boys tend to do.
* Most significantly, Yahweh seems to be the primary one behind the attack.
* However, here are some points to consider…
* There are two Hebrew words for “boys” in the passage (naar in v. 23 and yeled in v. 24.) Both words can mean “boy,” but can also mean “adolescent” or “older teenager.” The word is even used for Joseph’s brother Benjamin when he was in his 20s. A large group of boys hanging out unsupervised in the wilderness would likely have been older than “boys.” This was not a harmless teasing by some elementary kids, but serious taunting by a pack of young men. It is reasonable to assume Elisha’s life was in danger.
* In the United States, we don’t take insults serious, but in the rest of the world throughout history, insults are taken very seriously. To our 21st century Western mindset, it seems Elisha is overreacting. Within his cultural context, his behavior was justified.
* Studying the broader context of his life, Elisha was an individual who regularly heals the sick, feeds the hungry, purifies poisoned water, prays for a barren woman, raises the dead, prevents a war. His life is characterized by miraculous acts of service. It would be a mistake to characterize who he was by this one story.
* The main point of the story is not that Yahweh picks on children but rather that Yahweh protected the life of Elisha. Elisha didn’t start the fight but did act in self-defense.

Question: Is violence always wrong? (p. 99)

* Would it have been good for the assassination attempt of Claus Von Stauffenberg (the character played by Tom Cruise in the 2008 film Valkyrie) against Adolf Hitler to succeed? If the assassination and subsequent coup had been successful, WWII might have ended a year earlier and perhaps hundreds of thousands of lives could have been saved.

The Assyrian Slaughter (p. 102-103)

* 2 Kings 19:35 - dramatic example of divine violence as an angel of Yahweh slaughters 185,000 Assyrians.
* Why did God kill so many people? Three reasons…
  + First, people get killed in the context of war. The Assyrians had already killed many Judeans. Yahweh was fighting defensively to protect Judah from an Assyrian invasion.
  + Second, Assyria was a brutally violent nation. They were the aggressor in this conflict.
  + Third, the Assyrians mocked Yahweh declaring that he couldn’t defeat their emperor (2 Kings 18:32-35, 19:4, 10, 22-23).

Not all violent incidents in the OT can be easily resolved, but a pattern emerges that Yahweh is willing to punish individuals and even nations severely to protect the weak and preserve life.

Elisha, the Kings, and the Horses (p. 106-107)

* Bookend this talk with Elisha… 2 Kings 6:8-23.
* Once again, Elisha’s life is in danger. Elisha was confident, however, that he was safe because God had protected him in the past.
* Elisha and Yahweh’s actions promote peace.
* While Jesus tends to get exclusive credit for the “love your enemies” idea (Matthew 5:44), we see Yahweh promoting that in stories like this.

Yahweh prefers peace to violence. Yahweh used violence only to punish the wicked or protect the weak. Ultimately, he promoted peace within Israel and between Israel and her neighbors. (p. 112)

**What Now:**

We, too, are to prefer peace to violence. We can promote peace by healing, feeding, loving, and praying for enemies.

Jesus revealed God’s love for his enemies on the cross. While we were his enemies, Jesus’ death reconciled us to God (Romans 5:8-10). Because of Jesus’ willingness to be a voluntary victim of violence, we were reconciled with God. It was the ultimate act of peacemaking. (p. 112

**Week 2 | June 9, 2019 | Sexist or Empowering?**

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:26-28, Genesis 2:18-23, Genesis 3:1-6, Genesis 3:14-19

**Message Big Idea**

When we read certain stories in the Old Testament, it’s hard not to wonder… Is God sexist or empowering?

26 Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” -Genesis 1:26-28

18 The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” 19 Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. 20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. 21 So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. 22 Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. 23 The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” -Genesis 2:18-23

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?” 2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,3 but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” 4 “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. 5 “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. -Genesis 3:1-6

**Message Description:**

This previous COMMUNITY message on God’s Dream for Men and Women can be a resource for this talk.

The first three chapters in Genesis are used by both those who suggest God is anti-woman and those who believe he is pro-women so we’ll start there...in the beginning.

Genesis 1:26-28

* The first thing that God says about women is that they are like him. Women are made in the image of God. “Women are Godlike (Men are also Godlike, but most men think that already.)” Women are created by God to be a reflection of himself. (p. 50)

Genesis 2:18-23 (p. 50-53)

* In the second creation account, Yahweh made the man first and then the woman.
* This order doesn’t suggest a hierarchy. To use a writing analogy, the man was the first draft and the woman the second draft. Typically, the second draft of something is better than the first. :)
* The fact that the woman is called a “helper” (ezer) can sound sexist...like the man was a businessman who needed a good secretary. But to understand that word “helper,” we should examine its use elsewhere in the Old Testament.
* Consistently, the one who is doing the “helping” is God. With only one exception, everytime “ezer” is used in the Pentateuch, God is the helper (Genesis 49:25, Exodus 18:4, Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29). Elsewhere in the OT, particularly in Psalms and Isaiah, God is the “ezer,” the one who helps his people.
* So the “ezer” in Genesis 2 is another way to say that the woman is “Godlike.” She is acting like God in helping the man.
* Genesis 2 isn’t suggesting that women are superior to men, but it certainly isn’t saying they are inferior.
* When the text says the helper is “suitable” for the man, the Hebrew word (kenegdo) literally means “opposite like him,” the idea of a mirror image. There is a connotation of difference as well as sameness, but nothing suggesting the inferiority of either gender.
* The image Genesis is painting of women is a favorable one - one that would have been shockingly progressive in ancient Near Eastern culture.

Genesis 3:1-6, 14-19 (p. 54-57)

* If the woman was portrayed negatively and the man positively, we could argue that this chapter establishes a precedent for biblical sexism, but the man’s sin here is portrayed as bad (if not worse) than the woman’s.
  + The man ate the fruit without any resistance.
  + The man heard the prohibition directly from Yahweh (the woman through the man).
  + The man was with the woman when she ate the fruit and did nothing to stop her.
* Both the man and the woman receive curses. In the midst of these curses, the woman also receives a promise (while the man receives none).

It is critical to understand, Genesis 3 is not the way God wanted it to be. The ideal God established was Genesis 1 and 2. Genesis 3 involves a distortion of the ideal male-female relationship. (p. 58)

The negative consequences of the curses aren’t meant to be accepted. God himself acted to overcome them. Within the curses themselves, God declares how he will ultimately defeat the curses through the offspring of the woman. (p. 59)

With God’s help, we should strive to get back to Genesis 1 and 2.

It might be worth noting that there are a number of stories in the OT (i.e. Lot offering his daughters to an angry mob) that would seem to imply that God might be sexist, but we have to remember that just because the Bible records it doesn’t necessarily mean the Bible affirms it.

In truth, the Bible contains many stories of God’s affirmation of women.

Yahweh’s affirmation of women. (p. 64-65)

* Yahweh selected a female “president” Deborah (Judges 4) who was both the political leader of Israel and prophet of Yahweh.
* Deborah, Hannah, and Mary all composed writings that are in the Bible.
* Yahweh used wise women to advise kings and commanders.

Jesus’ affirmation of women. (p. 65-66)

* Jesus crossed cultural divides by speaking to women in public.
* Jesus told stories in which a woman was the hero.
* Jesus publicly affirmed Mary, a poor widow, and the unnamed woman who anointed him.

In the sexist context of the OT and NT, Yahweh and Jesus both affirmed women. So why do people think the God of the OT is sexist? Sexism in society and the church contribute significantly to the problem. Yahweh and Jesus were progressive within their context in honoring women, but often the church is not. (p. 67)

**What Now: Suggestions to implement...**

* Since women are made in the image of God, listen to them and learn about God from them. (Read female authors. Listen to female speakers.)
* Follow the example of Yahweh and Jesus and affirm women whenever possible.
* Talk about and call out sexism not because it’s politically correct to do so but because it is biblically correct.

**Week 3 | June 16, 2019 | Angry or Loving?**

**(Father’s Day)**

**Scripture** 2 Samuel 6:1-8, Mark 11:15-17, James 1:19-20

**Message Big Idea**

When we read certain stories in the Old Testament, it’s hard not to wonder… Is God angry or loving?

David again brought together all the able young men of Israel—thirty thousand.2 He and all his men went to Baalah in Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim on the ark. 3 They set the ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart 4 with the ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it. 5 David and all Israel were celebrating with all their might before the Lord, with castanets, harps, lyres, timbrels, sistrums and cymbals.

6 When they came to the threshing floor of Nakon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. 7 The Lord’s anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down, and he died there beside the ark of God. 8 Then David was angry because the Lord’s wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah. -2 Samuel 6:1-8

15 On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, 16 and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. 17 And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’” -Mark 11:15-17

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. -James 1:19-20

**Message Description**

If there is one popular image that instantly flashes to mind on the topic of God and anger, it would have to be being struck by lightning for doing something (usually trivial) that makes God mad.

When we read the Bible, we feel the tension between divine love and divine anger. There are many times God is portrayed as loving and gracious. Other times, God seems to be full of anger. So let’s ask...

* Why does Yahweh become angry?
* Does his anger make sense?

Story: Uzzah and the Ark (p. 27)

* Explain The Ark of the Covenant. This sacred item represented the presence of God (Exodus 25:22, Leviticus 16:2, 1 Samuel 4:4).
* The Ark of the Covenant has fallen into the hands of Israel’s enemies, but David was finally able to repossess the Ark and bring it back to Jerusalem.
* 2 Samuel 6:1-8 - Yahweh strikes Uzzah for reaching out and touching the Ark.
* Why was Yahweh so angry? Yahweh was angry for 3 main reasons:
  + Carrying the Ark - Yahweh had given the Israelites very specific instructions for carrying the Ark and they weren’t obeying. He didn’t want to send the message that obedience was optional since it was disobedience that led to the loss of the Ark and the slaughter of 30,000 Israelites by the Philistines in the first place (1 Samuel 4:10) After this incident, the Ark was always carried in the right way.
  + Riding in the Trunk - The decision to transport the Ark on a cart was not only disobedient, it was insulting...like asking someone important to ride in the trunk of your car. It was important for Yahweh’s symbolic presence to be treated in a royal fashion because he was their God and King. Placing the Ark on a cart as a mere “thing” was an insult revealing the attitude of the people’s hearts.
  + Losing the Ark - The lack of respect for the Ark was symptomatic of Israel’s lack of concern for their relationship with God.The Ark of the Covenant symbolized not only the presence of Yahweh, but also the covenantal relationship between God and his people.Yahweh valued the covenant with his people so highly, he would not tolerate disrespect for the object that symbolized that relationship. Would you want to follow a God that wasn’t passionate about his relationship with you?
* Yahweh gets mad to protect his law, his honor, and his relationship with his people. Compare the things that make me mad with the things that make Yahweh mad. (p. 35)

Slow to Anger

* Yes, Yahweh gets angry. But, over and over again in Scripture he is described as SLOW to anger (Psalm 103:8, Psalm 145:8, Jonah 4:2, Exodus 34:6-7, Numbers 14:18, Nahum 1:3, Psalm 86:15)
* Slowness to anger is so much a part of Yahweh’s character, he includes it in his name. When Yahweh reveals himself to Moses at Mount Sinai, he proclaims his name to be, “Yahweh, Yahweh, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:5-6). (p. 35-36)
* We tend to get angry instantly. Yahweh is slow to anger.
* The pattern in the OT: Yahweh delivers his people. They complain. He is patient. They promise to obey. The first opportunity they get, they disobey. Yahweh eventually becomes angry and punishes them. Eventually, his people repent and Yahweh delivers them. And the cycle continues. (p. 37)

The passages in the OT about divine anger are difficult, but we shouldn’t avoid them. If you are troubled by these passages, here are three pieces of advice: (p. 41-42)

* First, ask why Yahweh got angry.
* Second, read the whole context.
* Third, have reasonable expectations. You won’t be able to resolve all the problems.

Jesus got angry (Mark 11:15-18).

* All 4 Gospel writers include the incident of him overturning the tables in the Temple.
* Jesus got angry that people, particularly the Gentiles, were being deprived of the opportunity to pray and worship God (it’s always about relationship).
* Jesus got angry over injustice.

**What Now?**

* Some in the room need to be challenged about getting angry over stuff they shouldn’t get angry about.
* Some in the room need to be challenged to get angry over stuff we should be angry about. What should we get angry about?
  + God gets angry about a breakdown in relationship.
  + God gets angry about injustice.

“Is the God of the Old Testament angry? Yes. Is the God of the Old Testament loving? Yes. Is the God of the New Testament angry? Yes. Is the God of the New Testament loving? Yes. Anger and love are not mutually exclusive. Love for people can lead to anger over broken relationship. Love for people can also lead to anger about injustice. The God of the Old Testament and New Testament is both quick to love and slow to anger (James 1:19) and we should be too.”

**Week 4 | June 23, 2019 | Legalistic or Gracious?**

**Scripture**: Genesis 1:28a, Genesis 2:16-17, Genesis 3, Deuteronomy 30:11-20, Matthew 5:17-18

**Message Big Idea**

When we read certain stories in the Old Testament, it’s hard not to wonder… Is God legalistic or gracious?

28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.” -Genesis 1:28a

16 And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” -Genesis 2:16-17

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?” 2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,3 but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” 4 “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. 5 “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” -Genesis 3:1-5

11 Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. 12 It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” 13 Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” 14 No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. 15 See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. 16 For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. 17 But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, 18 I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

19 This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live 20 and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. -Deuteronomy 30:11-20

17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. -Matthew 5:17-18

**Message Description:**

God’s laws don’t seem very appealing, as if he designed them to ruin our enjoyment. Cultural example: In an episode of The Simpsons, Lisa goes to a convent to rescue her baby sister and hears the nuns singing, “If you’re happy and you know it, it’s a sin.” (p. 115)

With laws that are demanding, boring, and no fun, God could appear to be legalistic. But is this an accurate picture of God...and of his laws?

The First Commands (p. 116-118)

* Genesis 1:28 - “Be fruitful and multiply.” These are the very first words God speaks to humans. God’s first command is basically, “Have a lot of sex.”
* Genesis 2:16-17 - “Eat from every tree but one.” God’s second command is to eat a lot of food.
* God’s first two commands affirm the goodness of his creation and his desire that we delight in his gifts of sexuality and food. Why does he initiate his relationships with human beings with these commands? Because he is generous and not legalistic. He clearly wanted human beings to be happy.
* God’s generosity, goodness, and graciousness are the foundation for all his laws. We should read all other OT commands through this lens.

Distrusting God

* At the heart of The Fall in Genesis 3 is the decision to distrust God’s goodness.
* “The serpent’s negative portrayal of Yahweh has effectively convinced the humans that God’s commands are not good for them and that God does not have their best interests in mind.” (p. 119)
* Two crucial lessons from this story: (p. 120)
  + First, temptation questions the goodness of God’s commands.
  + Second, sin results from perceiving God not as good, generous, and gracious, but as mean, stingy, and legalistic.
* A proper understanding of God and his laws is vital to resisting temptation and avoiding sin.

God’s goodness is behind all of his commands (Deuteronomy 30:11-20).

A person might conclude that Yahweh is legalistic because the OT contains so many laws, a lot of which seem random. But consider...

* We have many laws. We don’t like to be restricted by laws (traffic laws, tax laws, etc.), but we are glad other people are. Laws are good. The OT contains so many laws because Israel needed a legal system as they transitioned from an enslaved people to a new nation. Author Joshua Berman argues that the laws of the Pentateuch were revolutionary within their ancient context as they attempted to establish an egalitarian society. Just because the OT contains many laws, doesn’t mean Yahweh is legalistic. (p. 122-123)
* Yes, some of the laws seem random, but that’s because we don’t understand the cultural context (and in some cases never will). An example: Deuteronomy 22:9-11 “Don’t wear clothes woven with wool and linen together.” These types of laws address particular problems in a culture that we no longer understand. (p. 124)

Jesus said he came not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17-18).

The God of the OT and NT is not legalistic, but often Christians can be, and to those outside of the church that legalism makes God appear legalistic. Christian legalism takes three basic forms: (p. 131-132)

* First, God’s laws are viewed as a way to earn salvation. We can never earn salvation. We are saved by grace.
* Second, God’s laws are viewed as a means to pay God back. The problem with this view is that rather than the biblical laws being good for us, we view them as good for God. We think by obeying his laws we are somehow doing him a favor.
* Third, God’s laws are viewed as merely a duty or obligation. The biggest problem with this form of legalism is that it leads to pride.

God gives commands not because he’s legalistic, but because he wants to bless people and draw them closer into relationship with him. Psalm 119 - The Psalmist loved God’s laws because he loved God and following God’s laws brought him into a deeper relationship with God.