

Series: Isaiah

Title: Old, New, False & True

Text: Isaiah 57: 5-13

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God says to the self-confident, **Isaiah 57: 10: Thou art wearied in the greatness of thy way; yet saidst thou not, There is no hope: thou hast found the life of thine hand; therefore thou wast not grieved. 11: And of whom hast thou been afraid or feared, that thou hast lied, and hast not remembered me, nor laid it to thy heart? have not I held my peace even of old, and thou fearest me not? 12: I will declare thy righteousness, and thy works; for they shall not profit thee. 13: When thou criest, let thy companies deliver thee; but the wind shall carry them all away; vanity shall take them: but he that putteth his trust in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain;**

God's description of sinners in Isaiah's day is God's description of sinners in our day. Man's depravity is the same. Satan's deceptions are the same. Sin is the same. We make a mistake thinking that sinners, and their ways, are different in our day. The wise man said, "Is there *any* thing whereof it may be said, See, this *is* new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us." (Ecc 1: 10) So as we hear God describe the way of the majority in Israel, we will compare it with our day and contrast it with God's way.

DEAD SINNERS LOVE THEIR WAY

The first problem sinners have is that dead sinners love their own way of religion. God says, "Thou art wearied in the greatness of thy way."

God warns through Solomon, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death." (Pr 16:25) Christ said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (Mt 7:13-14)

God shows us clearly in Isaiah 57 the way that vain religionists love.

THE BROAD WAY OF ZEAL AND VARIETY

The broad way is the way of zeal, with openness to many gods and many meeting places, "Enflaming yourselves with idols under every green tree." (Is 57: 5)

In Isaiah's day, the one true and living God set up one temple with one High Priest with one mercy seat where God promised to meet with his people. But the children of Judah added to that by each setting up their places to meet "under every green tree." Each imagined God to be how they thought god should be. These imaginary gods were there "idols." Each worshipped zealously according to their traditions "enflaming yourselves." Yet, all was total ignorance of the true and living God.

It is the same in our day. The little town where I attended high school had one traffic light but over 20 church buildings, in and around that little town. Would God establish churches under every green tree in such a small town? How does that happen? The root problem is the unregenerate heart. Unregenerate sinners are offended by the truth of the gospel. When they find fault with God's preacher and God's people each sets up their meeting place, each imagines gods like they want and each is zealous for their traditions.

God brings his child out of the broad way into the narrow way. He creates a heart which bows to Christ. God gives discernment to bow to his word. He gives a love for brethren, making his child keep peace among brethren and hate sowing discord, even as God hates those who sow discord. (Pro 6: 9)

THE BROAD WAY OF SELF-EXALTATION

God says, “Upon a lofty and high mountain hast thou set thy bed: even thither wentest thou up to offer sacrifice.” (Isa 57:7) The broad way is the way of self-exaltation.

False religion was big business then and it is big business in our day, “supposing that gain is godliness.” (1 Tim 6: 5) The false religionist is in the devil’s way. Those in false religion are like the devil. God said of the devil, “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *how* art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.” (Isa 14:12-14 AV)

Therefore, false religion seeks the preeminence with the biggest building, the tallest steeple, the most educated preacher, the most programs, and the most members. All the while they are making merchandise of men’s souls. God described the false preachers as “greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.” (Is 56: 11)

God creates a broken and contrite heart in his people. His church—his people—are a humble and lowly, remnant. God says, “Better *it is to be* of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.” (Pr 16:19)

THE BROAD WAY OF ECUMENICAL PROSTITUTION

God says they hid the truth of God’s covenant and committed spiritual adultery with others who worshipped false gods in order to increase their numbers, “Behind the doors also and the posts hast thou set up thy remembrance: for thou hast *discovered thyself to another* than me, and art gone up; thou hast enlarged thy bed, and made thee *a covenant* with them; thou lovedst their bed where thou sawest it.” (Isa 57:8)

The law of God was the covenant God made with the house of Israel. Believers are under the everlasting covenant of grace. In order to constantly remind them, and everyone around them, that they had no other God, that they were in the covenant of marriage to God alone, God commanded they display the law, outwardly, on the posts of their house and on the posts of their gates for all to see. The equivalent for the believer, who has the everlasting covenant of grace written on our hearts rather than the letter of the law on tablets of stone, is to preach to everyone the gospel of Christ in truth, without compromise.

Instead, they concealed their remembrance—concealed the law of God—behind the doorpost, hiding it from view. Then like an unfaithful wife, they discovered themselves to another than God and went up to them. They enlarged their bed—inviting others into their bed—and made a covenant with them—breaking their covenant with God. Also, they loved the bed of others where they saw it—uniting with them in their bed. (Isa 57:8)

This is the adulterous sin of compromise: concealing the truth of God in order to unite with others who hate the truth of God, simply for the sake of gain. God describes it through the prophet Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 16: 25: Thou hast built thy high place at every head of the way, and hast made thy beauty to be abhorred, and hast opened thy feet to every one that passed by, and multiplied thy whoredoms. 26:

Thou hast also committed fornication with the Egyptians thy neighbours, great of flesh; and hast increased thy whoredoms, to provoke me to anger...28: Thou hast played the whore also with the Assyrians, because thou wast unsatiable; yea, thou hast played the harlot with them, and yet couldest not be satisfied. 29: Thou hast moreover multiplied thy fornication in the land of Canaan unto Chaldea; and yet thou wast not satisfied herewith. 30: How weak is thine heart, saith the Lord GOD, seeing thou doest all these *things*, the work of an imperious whorish woman;" (Eze 16:28-30)

This is as popular in our day as it was then. Churches set aside the truth in the name of loving one another. But the love which God's true children have for each other is in the truth. John wrote, "The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth." (3 Jn 1: 1)

I heard a preacher actually say, "We will not let a minor issue like the doctrine of particular redemption keep us from receiving our brethren." Brethren, we should invite and receive anyone who wants to hear the gospel of Christ preached. But the redemption of God's chosen, particular people, by Christ on the cross—limited atonement, particular redemption—is not a minor issue; it is the gospel! We must never compromise the gospel of the victorious Redeemer for any reason! To do so is not love for God or brethren; it is the deceit of the devil!

So we must not hide behind the door posts the truth which God has written on our hearts. We declare to everyone the truth of man's total depravity, of God's sovereign free electing grace, of Christ's particular redemption, of the necessity of the Holy Spirit regenerating and giving faith to each one purchased by Christ's blood, of God's preserving grace which makes his saints persevere in faith unto the end. This is the doctrine in which the everlasting covenant of grace unites us in marriage to Christ! God declares that to compromise the gospel is to play the harlot!

THE BROAD WAY OF MAN'S METHODS AND MEANS

The broad way is the way of man's methods and means. It includes using the power of politics, the power of man, rather than trusting our sovereign King to accomplish his will, "thou wentest to the king with ointment." (Is 57: 9) It includes marketing with new, ever-increasing earthly attractions and sending messengers with man's message rather than God's word, "and didst increase thy perfumes and didst send thy messengers far off and didst debase *thyself even* unto hell." (Is 57: 9)

All of these things is man's way. God says, "Thou art wearied in the greatness of thy way;" (Is 57: 10)

THERE IS NO HOPE

The second problem with self-made religious sinners is that they never consider that there is no hope trusting in the works of their own hands, "*yet* saidst thou not, There is no hope: thou hast found the life of thine hand; therefore thou wast not grieved." (Is 57: 10)

In Isaiah's day, the children of Israel were so convinced that they were true believers, truly God's people, they could not even consider that "there is no hope" in their works. God sent true prophets to them as he is doing with Isaiah, as he is doing here now. God declared to them, "thou hast found the life of thine hand; therefore thou wast not grieved." Still, they would not say of their own works, "There is no hope."

The life of your own hand involves no grief. When God turns his child into his way it is grievous to us at first because God resists our pride, humbles us and God's way goes against our flesh. God's way requires us to confess our sins, that we are wrong, and that everything about our religion is wrong. But the flesh, the carnal mind, looks at the grief he will suffer in God's way and thinks that is not the way God would have me to go. He says, "There is no hope in that way. That way is too full of heartache and sorrow and humility."

Yet, in his own way, he is not grieved. The way of our flesh never involves grief. It is the easy way, the smooth way, the path of least resistance. So the flesh thinks this is God's way, "There is hope in this way." When a man is confident that he has found life by the works of his own hands, while he is saying that there is hope in his own hands he is saying that there is no hope in God's hands. God sent Jeremiah with this word,

Jeremiah 18: 11: Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. 12: And they said, There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart. 13: Therefore thus saith the LORD; Ask ye now among the heathen, who hath heard such things: the virgin of Israel hath done a very horrible thing. 14: Will *a man* leave the snow of Lebanon *which cometh* from the rock of the field? *or* shall the cold flowing waters that come from another place be forsaken? 15 Because my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity, and they have caused them to stumble in their ways *from* the ancient paths, to walk in paths, *in* a way not cast up; 16: To make their land desolate, *and* a perpetual hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished, and wag his head. 17: I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will shew them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity.

Jeremiah was preaching the word of the Lord, telling them that God would leave the house of Israel desolate. Next, we hear their response.

Jeremiah 18: 18: Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words.

It is the same in our day. The natural heart is a religious heart. Men are so hardened in their vain religion, so fixed upon their vain works, so determined to go on in them, that they are enraged when they hear God's preacher declare God's word to them. That is the doctrine of depravity personified; the deceitfulness of sin; the hardness of the natural heart. Such would have been the case with all God's elect had he left us to ourselves, under a covenant of works. Thank God, he regenerates his people and makes Christ to be our Hope.

NO FEAR OF GOD

The third problem with self-made religious sinners is that they do not fear God, "And of whom hast thou been afraid or feared, that thou hast lied, and hast not remembered me, nor laid *it* to thy heart? have not I held my peace even of old, and thou fearest me not?" (Isa 57:11)

Since they had no fear of God, they spoke against those Christ made righteous, "Against whom do ye sport yourselves? against whom make ye a wide mouth, and draw out the tongue?" (Is 57: 4) They disagreed with God's preacher. They whispered to someone in the congregation about it. They created division and led others away. They all patted one another on the back for being right, for defending the glory of God.

But God says, "No man lays it to heart...Against whom do ye sport yourselves? against whom make ye a wide mouth, and draw out the tongue?" (Is 57: 4) God says, "Moreover this they have done unto me: they have defiled my sanctuary..." (Eze 23: 38) Christ says, "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me." (Mt 25:40) Here is the problem, "of whom hast thou been afraid or feared, that thou hast lied, and hast not remembered me, nor laid *it* to thy heart?" (Is 57: 11)

The greatest pressure that comes with being a pastor is two fold. One, it is knowing that I am speaking on behalf of God and am accountable to God for what I teach concerning Christ; two, it is knowing I am speaking to sinners who have an eternity to spend somewhere. It is due to the fear and reverence of God that God has put in my heart.

I tremble for those who are quick to speak to others the word of God, especially if they speak not according to God's word. And I tremble for those who divide brethren, who lead men away from the place where God has established the gospel. They will answer to God for every false word, for every divisive whisper, for every step in departing and leading others away from the gospel. God says, "of whom hast thou been afraid or feared, that thou hast lied, and hast not remembered me, nor laid *it* to thy heart? have not I held my peace even of old, and thou fearest me not?" (Isa 57:11)

It takes God creating a new heart to make a sinner truly fear and reverence God. When God writes his everlasting covenant promises on our hearts, making us rest entirely in Christ alone, he makes us come out from the wicked once and for all—and it is because he has put the fear of God in our hearts—"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2Co 7:1; Pr 9:10) And when you have the fear of God in your heart, then you submit to one another rather than sowing discord, "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God." (Eph 5: 21)

UNPROFITABLE

Lastly, the problem with self-made religious sinners is that they do not know that trusting in their righteousness and works is unprofitable. God says, "I will declare thy righteousness, and thy works; for they shall not profit thee." (Isa 57:12)

If you worship your will, if you trust your works, then your religion is vanity and soon the wind of God's wrath will take it away! God said, "When thou criest, let thy companies deliver thee; but the wind shall carry them all away; vanity shall take *them*." (Is 57: 13)

The Righteousness we must have, whose works we must rest in, is Christ Jesus the Lord, "But he that putteth his trust in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain;" (Isa 57:13) Christ is the Way of every true believer saved by God's grace and our Way is the way of true greatness. Christ is our Hope, our hope of righteousness, our hope of glory, our hope of the gospel, our hope of salvation, our hope of eternal life. Christ is our Life and our life not the life of our hand but the life of Christ's hand. Christ is our Wisdom by whom we have the fear of God in our hearts. Christ is our Righteousness, not by any righteousness in us, not by any works done by us, but through God-given faith in him, "he that putteth his trust in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain."

I pray that Christ make us hear his word effectually in our heart and bring this to pass, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (Mt 7:13-14)

Amen!