

Series: Questions

Title: Should I Be Enquired of By Them?

Text: Ezekiel 14: 1-11

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Tonight's message is another question asked by God to a man, **“Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?” (Eze 14:3)**

Christ is Head over all things to the church. He is working in the midst of his people. The things we see God declare and do in this passage are the things Christ is doing in his church today through the preaching of the gospel and by his sovereign providence.

Our purpose in looking at this text is to prepare us for this Sunday's message from Isaiah 57. There, God promises to remove the stumblingblock out of the way of his people. Here God shows us that sometimes he removes the stumblingblock out of the way by cutting off idolaters from the midst of his people.

### **IDOLATRY IS FROM THE HEART**

First, hear God declare that false gods come from the vain imagination of the sinful heart, “Then came certain of the elders of Israel unto me, and sat before me.” (Eze 14: 1)

Outwardly, these men appeared to be true worshippers of the true and living God. They were “elders of Israel”, either civil or religious leaders. They sat down before Ezekiel to listen like men and women assemble to hear the gospel preached; they came to hear a word from God spoken through his prophet, to enquire of the LORD by hearing the word of his prophet; they appeared to pay attention, to be sincere, to be serious, and to have affection and reverence for God.

Yet, God is not fooled by outward appearances; God looks on the heart. “And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?” (Eze 14: 2-3)

Each one had a god pre-figured in his heart and imagination; each one imagined god to be how he imagined god to be; each one imagined ways in which their god was to be worshipped; each had his heart set on his false god.

That is exactly how religious, carnal, unregenerate sinners come to the house of God. In their hearts they have set up their god. Man does not have to carve out an image to be an idolater. Natural man is an idolater in his heart.

Also, because this is their heart, God declares this is what is before their face—before their minds eye while in God's house and what they literally put before them in their own places of worship--“and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face.” (Eze 13: 3)

In Isaiah 57, God called the “stumblingblock of iniquity” “the greatness of thy way.” Their stumblingblock was their way of zeal, of openness and acceptance of many gods and many meeting places. (Is 57: 5); their way of exalting themselves. (Is 57: 7); their way of ecumenical prostitution—hiding the truth of God behind the doorpost, while embracing every false way for the sake of gain. (Is 57: 8); their way of producing new means and new methods. (Is 57: 9-10); the life of their own hand, which causes them no grief (Is 57: 10);

their way of fearing man rather than fearing God. (Is 57: 10) It is called a stumblingblock because it caused others around them to stumble also.

Be sure to understand. Man's god—the god of the unregenerate but religious heart—always looks to man. Man's god depends on man to make him alive; to give him faith; to make him righteous and holy; to deliver him and make him persevere in trials. By nature, man's god is man! Every covetous desire for God's glory, every carnal lust of man, is an idol, dunghill god, set up by man in his own heart. Therefore, as they sit in God's house, before God's minister, their covetousness is for the glory that belongs to God. With all men, by nature, this is “the stumblingblock of their iniquity.”

This is the stumblingblock, which God commands be removed out of the way of his people, “he that putteth his trust in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain; And shall say, Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumblingblock out of the way of my people.” (Isa 57:13-14) While in our sinful nature, God's people have this same “stumblingblock of iniquity” in our hearts and before our faces. It is the pure sovereign and free grace of God, to remove this “stumblingblock out of the way” of his people and to keep his people.

### **THE QUESTION & THE ANSWER**

So seeing that these men were idolaters in their hearts, God asks a question of Ezekiel, “Should I be enquired of at all by them?” (Eze 14: 3)

Imagine a physician telling you the cure. But you spit in his face and give him a cussing. Then a little while later, you come to that physician asking him for help. That is what men do who despise God, despise his preacher, who separate themselves from the gospel yet continue to enquire of God's preachers concerning God and continue to pray to God. God says, “Should I be enquired of at all be them?”

Yes, God says he will answer the idolater. But God will do so far differently than the idolater desires, “Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols.” (Eze 14: 4)

God will do so for “every man” who approaches God with idols in his heart and before his face. It does not matter who the man is: be it an elder in Israel or be it a stranger, a Gentile, who has joined himself to the Lord's house; be it one in public office or a private person. God is no respecter of a man's person. God makes no distinction between men and shows no favoritism based on man himself.

Instead, God will answer the man “according to the multitude of his idols.” God will not give the idolater the answer he desires. He will not speak smooth things, saying, “peace, peace, where there is no peace.” The will-worker desires for God's preacher to “cause the Holy One of Israel to cease before” them. (Is 30: 10-11; Jer 6: 14) But God will answer according to the man's heart “according to the multitude of his idols.”

### **TO EXPOSE THE IDOLATER'S HEART**

God answers the will-working idolater according to his idolatry that God might expose what is in the idolaters heart, “That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols.” (Eze 14: 5)

Sinner, when you hear the gospel preached, why do you hear a message that is offensive to you? When sinners come to the true house of God and hear the gospel preached by God's true preacher, the reason they

do not hear what they expect or desire—the reason they are offended—is because God speaks according to the multitude of idols in their hearts. A man may pretend outwardly to rejoice in the gospel but sooner or later the word of God will reveal what is really in his heart. That is what the word of the gospel does.

Hebrews 4: 12: For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

## **TO CALL SINNERS TO REPENTANCE**

Through the gospel, God answers idolaters according to the multitude of his idols calling sinner to repent from their idolatry, “Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent, and turn *yourselves* from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations.” (Eze 14: 6)

In the general call of the gospel, God “commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17: 30) And God gives space to repent. When God speaks effectually, in the heart of his people, God commands his children to repent, to turn yourself from your idols and turn away your faces from all your abominations.

Every sinner is responsible to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. If we repent, God receives all the glory for granting us repentance. But if we do not repent, the only one to blame is us. God is not stopping anyone from repenting and coming to him. The problem is, left to our own will, sinners will not repent. (Re 2:21) Christ said, “And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.” (Joh 5:40) Paul said, “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.” (Ro 3:11) It is not God’s fault; it is the sinner’s fault.

God gives all men some amount of light—the light of creation, the written word, the preaching of the gospel—and God is just. If men walk in the light God gives them, God will give them more light. It will be to the praise of his grace.

But if men refuse and go to hell, it will be because they earned it; not because God randomly predestinated them to hell. God graciously chooses who he will save. But God does not randomly predestinate men to hell. When scripture speaks of men “who were before of old ordained to this condemnation,” it speaks of men who first, willfully rejected the light God gave them. (Jude 4) Therefore, God turned them over to reprobation, ordaining them to condemnation. (Rom 1: 19-32 ) Every sinner is responsible for himself. God says, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.” (Eze 18: 20) But each sinner who repents shall praise God because, as they hear God speak in the gospel, saying, “Repent and live”, the Holy Spirit regenerates them and God grants them repentance and faith in Christ like as he did through his preacher in the valley of dry bones. (Eze 37: 1-10) Let us not be as those who heard Ezekiel preach this. They said,

Ezekeiel 18:29: Yet, saith the house of Israel, The way of the LORD is not equal. O house of Israel are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? 30: Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn *yourselves* from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. 31: Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? 32: For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn *yourselves*, and live ye.

## **I THE LORD WILL ANSWER**

Through the preaching of the gospel, God answers men according to their idolatrous hearts to make them know it is God himself speaking to them through his minister, "For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to enquire of him concerning me; I the LORD will answer him by myself." (Eze 14: 7)

Sadly, when they enquired of the prophet, but the prophet's gospel was contrary to what they wanted to hear, they regarded it as only being the word of God's prophet. But God says, "I the LORD will answer him by myself."

Men will say things like "I just wish God would speak and tell me what he would have me to do." He does! God speaks through the preaching of the gospel today the same as God spoke through his prophets then. The apostle Paul said, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." (2Co 5:20)

The prophets of old were given spiritual gifts in order to bear witness that their word was from God because they did not have the complete written word of God. Today, God's preachers do not need those gifts because we have the complete inspired word of God to bear witness that what we say is true.

Therefore, when the gospel goes forth today, if the message preached is according to the word of God, hear it as God speaking because God says, "I the LORD will answer him by myself." The preacher is only an earthen vessel that the power may be of God and not of us. (2 Cor 4: 7) I usually do not know why God puts a message on my heart. But I know from God's word that through the message God himself is answering those who have enquired of God. He answers some who have been praying to God. God answers others, who are idolaters in their heart, by striking at the point of their rebellion. That is why God puts a certain message with certain points on the heart of his preacher at a certain time. Those who hear may not like the answer but it is God himself answering them.

Does the preacher's message on the absolute sovereignty of God, supported by the word of God, offend you? It is God himself declaring your problem is that you think you have some power in you. Does the preacher's message on the electing grace of God, clearly supported by the word of God, offend you? God himself is declaring to you, "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth but God that showeth mercy." (Rom 9: 16) Does the preacher's sermon on Christ's particular redemption of God's people, the love of God for God's elect alone, offend you as being too narrow? God himself is declaring your problem is that you think God's love is toward all men when his love is in Christ toward those he puts in Christ. (Rom 8: 39; Jn 10: 26) Do you find the message on God's willingness to save all who come unto him as being too open to sinners? God himself is declaring that your problem is you are too cold, too set on dry doctrine, rather than having the love of God in your heart for needy sinners.

Yet, though God clearly says it is he himself speaking, when sinners are offended by the gospel rather than bowing to God speaking to them, they reject the word as only being the word of a man. Most do that when looking for a church. The will-worker visits churches until he finds a preacher that flatters him with what he wants to hear: man's works and man's will. Likewise, when sinners are offended at the word of God spoken through his preacher, even though the message is directly from the word of God, rather than bowing to God and repenting, they make the rounds till they find a preacher that will tell them what they want to hear.

Oh, that God would give you grace to heed this word. When the word of the preacher is true and consistent with the written word of God then repent from all else and camp-out there so you can hear God speak. God says, "I the LORD will answer him by myself."

**TO CUT THEM OFF**

God answers the idolater according to the multitude of his idols by cutting him off from his people, “And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people.” (Eze 14: 8)

When God sets his face against a man, he will make that man to be “a sign”, showing the man to be a reprobate. God will make that man “a proverb” or a reproach. And God says “I will cut him off from the midst of my people.”

After almost 30 years in the faith, I have seen a number of folks come and go. Some who departed had sat under the gospel for a long time and appeared to delight in it. But this is what I have observed. Those who are cut off almost always find fault with the message being preached then begin to nit-pick and accuse God’s people. They almost always claim they are departing in defense of God’s glory. But eventually, most join with false preachers under a false gospel.

The latter is because God answers men according to the multitude of their idols by sending them a deceived preacher with a false message so that they all might believe a lie and be damned, “And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity: the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh *unto him*.” (Eze 14: 9-10)

Why would God deceive a prophet or preacher and send them to those he has cut off from his church? The reason is “because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” (2 Thess 2: 10-12)

## **TO SAVE HIS TRUE PEOPLE**

God does all this to the rebel to save his true, elect remnant, “And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD....That the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, neither be polluted any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be my people, and I may be their God, saith the Lord GOD.” (Eze 14: 8, 11)

True believers whom God has quickened together with Christ, who are given true repentance and faith in Christ, may temporally go astray and become polluted with the transgressions of false brethren. The Galatians were being led astray by men who they thought were true brethren but who were false.

Usually false brethren have never sacrificed anything so as to commit to Christ and his church. And because their conscience burns, to keep from having to sacrifice and commit themselves to Christ, they begin to whisper to believers about problems they have with the message being preached. In Galatia, the believer would have never found fault with the message had the false brethren not pointed out things which they exaggerated or took out of context. Through their divisive whispers, believers who would have plucked out their eyes for Paul began to question if Paul was even a true preacher of God. The false brethren created all sorts of division in the church at Galatia. God promises that such sowers of discord shall “bear the punishment of their iniquity.” But for his people, Christ bore “the punishment of their iniquity.” By his blood, all his people are justified by God in Christ. They must be reclaimed; they must be brought to repentance.

Sometimes the means God uses to restore his own people, to bring them back to himself, is the punishment God inflicts upon the hypocrite. Here, God made the false prophets, and those that followed them, as examples, warning his true people to watch so that they would not fall into the same sins. God say through the apostle Paul, “For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.” (1Co 11:19)

By restoring his people, God also comforts his preacher and makes us to behold the good that God worked in the midst of so much division and evil. God said to Ezekiel, “Yet, behold, therein shall be left a remnant that shall be brought forth, *both* sons and daughters: behold, they shall come forth unto you, and ye shall see their way and their doings: and ye shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, *even* concerning all that I have brought upon it. And they shall comfort you, when ye see their ways and their doings: and ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, saith the Lord GOD.” (Eze 14:22-23)

Brethren, the only reason God’s people are saved, while the others separate themselves forever is the grace of God our Father, the blood and righteousness of Christ our Redeemer and the power of God the Holy Spirit.

I pray there might be someone here who truly has the grace and love of God working in his heart so that this message from God will be used of God to give him repentance from his vain way to Christ. May God by his grace cause him to return to Christ and the place where Christ has established his gospel.

Christ says that all his sheep shall do so for “he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers...My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father’s hand.” (Joh 10: 3-5; 27-29)

**Amen!**