

The Bitterness of Sin
Key Verse: Luke 13:5
Tim Becker – March 24, 2019

1. Introduction

Your repentance is a part of obeying and trusting Jesus for salvation. Are you surprised to hear this? Do you think you can get to heaven without repenting of your sins? If you could look at a script of your day to day thoughts and prayers, would you see enough evidence to call you a repentor?

In Luke 13:5, Jesus said, "... unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." And in Luke 5:32, he said, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Some years ago, I heard a statement that really rang true to me. "Till sin is bitter, Christ will not be sweet." This statement has really helped my fight of faith. I believe that we don't repent like we ought because our sin isn't bitter to us. And because our sin isn't bitter, we don't find Christ sweet, even if we have asked him to be our Savior and Lord.

Much is at stake with how you see your sin and how you see Christ. If you minimize the wickedness of your sin, you will not enter the kingdom of God. If you minimize the prize that Christ is for sinners, you will spend your eternity in utter darkness and misery.

In this message, we will examine the bitterness of sin. Then next week, we will look at the sweetness of Christ. You will never find Christ savingly sweet until you find your sin bitter.

Please pray with me.

* Pray

2. God is holy and just

We will never see our sin rightly until we see God rightly. How so? Imagine that you and your pals were mocking an older gentleman seated across the room at McDonald's. Let's say you thought he was dressed funny and so you wanted to get some laughs at his expense. How bad do you see your sin? No big deal; just having a little fun, you're thinking. Now imagine that you are headed to college next year and really need help paying for it. You won't be able to go unless you get more funds. You applied for scholarships at the high school and were awarded a big \$5,000/year from an organization you never heard of. Let's say that this older gentleman was the donor of that scholarship. You just mocked a man who owes you nothing and yet is gifting you \$20,000. Now, you feel pretty bad about mocking him. You wish you hadn't done it. Nobody wants to be that kind of ungrateful person. You actually want to apologize.

Friends, you will never see your sins against God as bitter unless you see God rightly. So, let's talk about God first. What about God should we know if we are to rightly understand our sinning against him? Many things, but we're going to look at just two.

First, God is holy, which means that he is perfect in every way. And his perfections are unique to him. He is perfect far above all else. He is in a class all by himself. God's holiness isn't just one attribute among many, but his holiness touches, it describes, all his attributes. He is not merely just, good, true, loving, and holy. He is holy just, holy good, holy true, holy loving. God is perfect in all those ways.

If you are fortunate enough to be with God someday, you will find him to be pleasing beyond your imagination. This is why the book of Revelation describes God like this: Rev 4:2-3 : "At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald." Jasper and carnelian are precious gems. It is not that God is wearing precious gems to make himself more beautiful. The point of the description is that God is beautiful, like precious gems. And don't think beauty on the outside, think beauty in all his character and all his ways, maybe like the grandma or grandpa you so admire, but many times more.

The creatures in heaven that are nearest to God call to one another saying, (Isaiah 6:3) "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" This isn't just their day job. They don't do this for money. They do it because they can't help it. It is what their hearts long to do, to worship God. If you are fortunate enough to be with God someday, you too will worship him just because you want to, because you can't help it. Like the kid who spends 10 minutes chatting with his favorite sports hero. No one pays the kid to smile the whole time and then to talk about his hero to all his friends. He just wants to. He can't help it. God draws worship from creatures in the same way.

God is holy, perfect in every way. One of the ways he is perfect is in righteousness and justice. This means that God always does what is right and that he always judges according to what is right. God created our world all good. But our own sin marred this all-good world. Our world now has abuse, cheating, stealing, lying, and other forms of

evil. This makes life here and now difficult and discouraging. But imagine if the creator of the universe was the source of this evil. Imagine if the one who rules all things liked and encouraged physical and sexual abuse and lying and murder and theft. God does not.

In the book of Job, Elihu spoke the truth when he said,
(Job 34:10–12) : ¹⁰ “Therefore, hear me, you men of understanding: far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should do wrong. ¹¹ For according to the work of a man he will repay him, and according to his ways he will make it befall him. ¹² Of a truth, God will not do wickedly, and the Almighty will not pervert justice.”

We see in this text 3 truths about the justice of God. First, God never does wickedness or wrong. In all that you see of God’s works in the world, never think they are wicked. “Far be it from God that he should do wickedness.”

The second truth is that God judges the works of men. He judges us fairly, not based on hearsay or false witnesses or suspicions. God judges all men according to what they have actually done. And when he judges, he repays men according to what they have done. When a person works wickedness, God will repay them for their evil. This is a sobering fact.

The third thing we see about God’s justice is that he will not pervert it. This means his justice will stay pure; God’s justice won’t be corrupted. He accepts no bribes, shows no favoritism, has not a twisted view of morality. With God in charge, wrong will not be rewarded as right.

Imagine that you are living in Germany in 1938. Imagine that you are a good German citizen. You and your parents were born in Germany. But your ethnicity is Jewish. On two nights in November 1938, Nazis in Germany torched synagogues and vandalized Jewish homes, schools, and businesses. They killed around 100 Jews. This night is called the Night of Broken Glass. In the days to follow, 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to Nazi concentration camps. Can you imagine living under a government where such injustice is called good and right?

Now imagine if God, the most powerful being in the universe were not just. Imagine if the one who created and sustains all things and will someday judge all things was the devil, the great deceiver, the one who was a murderer from the beginning. This world, our lives, would be utterly miserable and hopeless.

When we hear of the injustice of the Night of Broken Glass or the sexual abuse of children or the kidnapping and forced marriages of 276 school girls in Nigeria or the kidnapping of the young teen girl from Baron WI, our emotions are stirred up. We don’t just hear it without feeling something about it. We naturally feel empathy for the victims and we also feel anger for those responsible for the wickedness. If we are in a position of

authority, with power to judge the wrong, we would be wicked to not be angry at these injustices.

So, it is with God. He would be wicked if he did not judge all evil in the world. And he would be wicked if his wrath didn't burn toward evil. This is why there is a final judgment day at the end of history. This is why there is a hell reserved for the wicked. And this is as it should be, right and good.

When we are victimized by the sins of others, we can take comfort knowing that God is on the throne and will someday repay every wrong we have received. When we hear of great evils in the world, we can take hope that God will one day make all wrongs right. We can be very glad that God is holy and just.

3. Our gladness has a problem, our sin.

But there is a crack in our gladness. We have a very significant reservation about rejoicing that God is holy and just. This reservation is that all of us are sinners. Not only are all people victims of other's sins, but we all sin against others as well. And the greatest wrong of our sins is that they are rebellious and offensive to our holy and just God. God tells us this in Rom 3:23 when he says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

What does it mean to sin? To sin means to violate the word and the worth of God. What does violate the word of God mean? God says to not lie and we do. God says to love our neighbor (or wife or parents or brother or co-worker or even enemy) and we don't. God says to not be anxious about anything and we are anxious about many things. God says to not be sexually immoral and we are, at least in our thoughts. God says to not love money and we accumulate and spend all we can, not so that we can build God's kingdom with it, but so that we can build our own. We violate God's word by gossiping, by wanting the praise of others, by not hungering for his word like it is more important than bread. If you pray the Lord's Prayer, you say that you want God's kingdom to come and his will to be done. But if you examine the things you pray about, I imagine that most of the time you pray for our kingdom to come and your will to be done. We are sinners who repeatedly and willingly violate the word of God.

When we sin by violating his word, why do we do it? We do so because our hearts and minds fail to honor God as glorious. We violate the word of God because we violate the worth of God. To violate the worth of God is what is meant by "fall short of the glory of God." A few chapters back in Romans, the author puts it like this.

Rom 1:21-23 : "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things."

We sin against God's word because we've already sinned in our hearts. We look at the glory of the immortal God and we desire other things as more valuable than him. God is worthy of all our desires. Truly, in all the universe there is nothing more worthy of our desire than God himself. But when we sin, we refuse to acknowledge his worth, we violate his worth, we declare him unworthy.

Do you see why our being a sinner creates a crack in our gladness that God is holy and just? If we are sinners, then we are part of the evil that deserves his judgment. God's wrath against evil will be turned against people like us. This means that hell is for people like us.

Is your soul awake right now? Are you thinking clearly? Then how should you feel about God's justice and your sins? Terrified! Hell is conscious eternal torment. And it is good and right. And we all deserve this. I'm praying that the Spirit of God will awaken many of you from your slumber right now. Some of you are thinking that nothing is at stake here right now. Please understand that God is just and that you are unjust and that God must punish you for your sins and that his punishment will be far worse and far longer than you can imagine.

4. The Day of Judgment

One reason that you might be uninterested in hearing about God's judgment and our sins is that you don't see any evidence around you that any sort of judgment is coming. Job said something similar in Job 21:7-15:

Job 21:7-15 : ⁷ Why do the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power? ⁸

Their offspring are established in their presence, and their descendants before their eyes. ⁹ Their houses are safe from fear, and no rod of God is upon them. ¹⁰

Their bull breeds without fail; their cow calves and does not miscarry. ¹¹ They send out their little boys like a flock, and their children dance. ¹² They sing to the tambourine and the lyre and rejoice to the sound of the pipe. ¹³ They spend their days in prosperity, and in peace they go down to Sheol [the grave]. ¹⁴ They say to God, 'Depart from us! We do not desire the knowledge of your ways. ¹⁵ What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit do we get if we pray to him?'

Job is saying that when he sees the wicked living and dying without any apparent judgment from God, it looks like they are getting away with their wickedness. It looks like God is not judging and punishing them. The writer of Psalm 73 says something similar. He even goes so far as to say that he was "envious of the arrogant" when he saw how the wicked prospered.

This kind of thinking has been around a long time. Peter writes about it in his second letter. He says that "scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing" (2 Pet 3:3). What do these scoffers say? Peter quotes them. "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of

creation.” Perhaps you too like this argument. Perhaps you too are thinking, “You say that Jesus is coming again to judge the world, but I don’t see it. And civilization has been around a long time and it hasn’t happened yet. The odds are with me ... he isn’t coming, it’s all a fable.”

Peter makes 3 responses to the scoffers. First, he says that they deliberately overlook the flood of Noah’s time. Things have not actually continued as they were from the very beginning. God once judged evil mankind. He meant this as a warning to us that he will one day come again to judge men. Be warned.

Peter’s second response is that you misunderstand the delay. You are right; God’s judgment hasn’t come yet, but God has his reasons for delaying. He’s slow to bring his judgment because he wants to give time for sinners like us to repent. On the day of judgment, it will be too late to repent of our sins. We must do so while we are alive in this body and while the judgment is still yet to come. Don’t misunderstand the delay of the judgment thinking it means it will never come. It means that God is being patient with sinners, giving them time to repent.

Peter’s third response is that when the day of judgment comes, it will come like a thief, that is, swift and surprising. We are in the last days and have been since Jesus death and resurrection. When the judgment comes, you won’t have any additional warning. The warning is given now.

5. Don’t be discouraged

At this point you might be thinking, “Pastor, I’m here to find hope today. Why are you talking about such discouraging things like sin and judgment?” Allow me to tell you why.

I’ve been to Niagara Falls a few times in my life—I used to live close to there. One of the things I enjoy when I’m there is walking through the part of the park that is upstream from the falls. This enormous volume of water, 800’ across, speeds along toward the falls. If you are looking out over the river a half mile away from the falls, the water is moving fast, but otherwise gives no hint that it is about to free fall 190’. If it wasn’t for the falls, it would be really exciting to kayak through that part of the river.

So, imagine that I was kayaking through there and I didn’t know what was ahead. Imagine that you shouted out to me, “You are going the wrong way. You must stop. A great falls is up ahead. You will surely die. Change your course. Get out while you can.”

How might I respond? “Stop ruining my day. I’m having the best time of my life out here in this kayak. Why are you speaking such discouraging words to me?”

Tell me, by saying those words would you be trying to discourage me or give me hope? Hope, right? What would it take for me to see that your words were for my good and to

give me hope? I'd have to be convinced that the falls were up ahead and that I will surely die if I go over them. Once I see that, then I'll be eager and grateful to hear your advice. Once my perspective is enlightened with reality, with the truth, I'll hear your words as life giving. Right?

I'm speaking to you today about sin and judgment because sin is the equivalent of your being in the kayak and judgment is the equivalent of the falls up ahead. My aim is to give you hope by encouraging you to be eager and grateful to hear words of life. Seeing your sins as bitter is an essential part of the words of life.

6. Application

So, where are we? God is holy and just. This is a good thing, good for everyone on the planet. But there is a problem for everyone on the planet and that is that we are all sinners against God. This means that God's justice must judge people like us.

In light of these truths, what should we do? Three things. First, be more aware of your sinning as it happens. I think that we mostly don't recognize our sins as we do them. Our mom asks for some help around the house and we grumble and complain. But we see this as a justified response, a right response, not a sinful one. Let's be more aware of our sinning as it happens so that we taste the bitterness of them.

Second, feel the weight of your guilt when you sin. When we do recognize that what we just did was sinful, we don't see it as all that bad. What's a sign of this? When someone calls us on our sin, we respond defensively with something like, "Yea, it was wrong, but it's not like I'm a murderer or something!" Instead, let's be more like the tax collector in Jesus' parable who beat his breast and said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

The third application is to be eager to repent. Take the time to consider what you've done and to respond to it. Get to a place in your heart and mind where you honestly wish you had never done that sin and wish that you won't ever do it again. You'll never take the time to consider your sins unless you build it into your day or week. Christians over the centuries have often taken time at the end of their day to do this. Turn off your screens and sit before God thinking about your activities over the past day. Ask God to show you the sins you need to repent of and then as he shows you, repent of them. This is a practical doable step for each us.

Three applications: One, be more aware of your sinning as it happens. Two, feel the weight of your guilt when you sin. Three, be eager to repent. All three of these are beyond you and me to do. They are not natural. We need supernatural help to do them. So, pray regularly for God's help. Something like, "God, open my eyes to be more aware of my sinning as I do it. Don't let me be blind to my sins. Help me to take my sins as seriously as you do. Help me to feel the true wickedness of them. And then please move my heart to want to repent, to feel godly remorse and godly conviction to turn away from

what I did.” Add something like this to your prayer list. If you don’t have a prayer list, start one.

7. Conclusion

Repentance to God is a fitting response to our sins. In Luke 13:5, Jesus said, “... unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” And in Luke 5:32, he said, “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

My hope is that your sins are tasting bitter to you. When your sins taste bitter, you will repent of them. If they don’t, your repentance will be lacking and you will perish.

Friends, repentance alone does not save you from God’s punishment for your sins. But if you fail to repent, you will never be saved.

This message was focused on the bitterness of sin. Next week, we will look at the sweetness of Christ, which is the companion truth necessary for salvation.