

## **WHEN YOU ONLY HAVE TIME FOR ONE VERSE - Part six**

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**Sunday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023 - 5:30 p.m.**

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### **HOW GOD EXPECTS SPIRITUAL PEOPLE TO RESPOND TO THE SINS OF OTHERS**

**Psalm 119:136 - “My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.”**

I can't think of a time in the church when we have more people openly professing their love and zeal for the Lord in word and song than today. There are whole industries devoted to equipping the church with songs of devotion and worship. The average church-goer will probably tell the Lord he or she loves Him, or worships Him, between twenty and thirty times this Sunday alone.

How can we tell if that profession of love is genuine? Do ***you*** love the Lord more than anything else, or anyone else today? If the answer is “yes,” then the next important question is, ***“How do you know you love Him?”***

Our text today from the Psalms is a foolproof test of the devotion we so frequently and fervently profess. Here is a man who takes, in this Psalm alone, 176 verses to tell us how incomparably wonderful God's Law is in his estimation. Image piles upon image, picture upon picture. He can't find enough words to capture his devotion to God and His ways.

He lives his whole life fixated on God's law. It's always in his sight - like walking around downtown Toronto and always being able to see the CN Tower from any location. God's law **dominated the horizon** of the Psalmist's life. He never left it out of the picture for a moment.

And here's the important point: Because the beauty of the law of God was constantly sparkling before his eyes, the Psalmist was constantly kept **painfully sensitive** to the ugliness of sin and ungodliness. All sin should find an **exposed nerve** in the heart devoted passionately to God.

This is the way it must be. To savor the beauty of **Godliness** is to be broken by the shocking horror of **ungodliness**. It simply cannot be otherwise.

Go to a concert. Those who have perfect pitch are the ones most bothered by an instrument that's sharp or flat. This is a law of life. Those most alert to the beautiful are most stunned by the ugly.

True love never loves **everything**. Opposites must always **exclude each other** if true love is to have any meaning. If I love my wife, I hate those who would harm her. If I love my children I hate those who would kidnap or abuse them. To love anything **truly** is to hate its **opposite**.

On the other hand, if I just **say** I love something, but don't truly, deeply love it, then I will be much less zealous in my defense and protection of it. If I really don't care that deeply about the environment, I won't be that concerned about pollution. If I really don't care about the **glory of God**, I won't be that upset by those who **ignore and profane God's ways**.

So that is the **theme** of this whole teaching. The Christian life must contain **more** than just the joy of the Lord. If my **faith** is genuine, and if my **worship** is true, here's what will happen: As my **worship deepens**, and as my **devotion to God matures**, so will my **weeping over all that is against God** in this present world.

Let me try to unfold this idea for a few moments:

1) **THE SCRIPTURES OFFER THIS CONSISTENT PATTERN -  
GODLY PEOPLE WEEP OVER SIN IN OTHERS**

Let me hurry over just a few examples of this principle: **Psalm 119:139** - **"My zeal consumes me, because my foes forget your words."**

Notice, David's biggest heartache is **not** that his enemies are against **him**. It's that they are against **God**. And that **"consumes"** David. It actually eats him up inside.

**Psalm 119:158 - "I look at the faithless with disgust, because they do not keep your commands."**

Strong words! Again, you can't love and accept everything. There are treacherous people who work against God's Word. David feels no affinity with them. Is God affirming hatred for others here? No, that's not it. But when **compared** with David's devotion to pleasing God, the wicked hold absolutely no attraction in David's heart.

**Exodus 32:17-20 - "When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp." [18] But he said, "It is not the sound of shouting for victory, or the sound of the cry of defeat, but the sound of singing that I hear." [19] And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. [20] He took the calf that they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it on the water and made the people of Israel drink it."**

What is easily forgotten when we read those dramatic words is that Moses is also described in the Bible as the **"meekest man in all the earth"** (Numbers 12:3). Moses never responded harshly to anyone who wronged **him**. But look at him here! His heart is broken and inflamed because the people are breaking the **law of God**.

The next time you wonder why God chose Moses to lead Israel, even with his poor, defective speech, look no further. Moses couldn't stand to see people grieve and disobey God.

**Ezekiel 9:1-5** - "Then he cried in my ears with a loud voice, saying, "Bring near the executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand." [2] And behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his weapon for slaughter in his hand, and with them was a man clothed in linen, with a writing case at his waist. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar. [3] Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his waist. [4] And the Lord said to him, **"Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it."** [5] And to the others he said in my hearing, "Pass through the city after him, and strike. Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity."

This is a strong prophetic message Ezekiel is commanded to proclaim. Israel is going to reap judgment for her moral carelessness and abandonment of God's ways.

But judgment won't fall on everyone indiscriminately. God will know who are His own. He will spare those who have a heart genuinely inclined to His ways. ***How will God tell the difference?*** Not by the number of sacrifices offered. The wicked can offer sacrifices as often as the Godly. Not by the repetition of prayers or the keeping of fasts. Not by the worship choruses they sing. All alike can do those things when required.

There is a tell-tale sign. God will look for those who ***“sigh and grown”(4) because His ways are ignored.*** He will look for those who are ***deeply troubled*** about the dishonoring of His name. He will look for those who are more troubled by that than they are about anything else.

**2 Peter 2:4-9** - “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; [5] if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; [6] if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; [7] and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked [8] (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); [9] then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment....”

Lot was deeply vexed in his heart, not by Sodom’s **judgement**, but by Sodom’s **wickedness**. I know lots of Christians who are almost **embarrassed** by the severity of God’s judgment on Sodom.

The Biblical perspective is quite different. Here is a man who **witnessed** the total destruction of all those people of Sodom. He saw his **own wife** turned into a pillar of salt. Those are hard things to witness. But they are not what Lot found to be the most **troubling** thing he saw. He saw people spurning God. He saw people rejecting God's ways day after day. And for all his imperfections, **he never got used to it**. He never took their sin casually or lightly.

Look at just a couple more examples with me:

**Philippians 3:17-19 - "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. [18] For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. [19] Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things."**

Paul couldn't even write about people who wickedly rejected Christ without weeping. He traveled and labored extensively, but he never got used to people rebelling against God the Son.

"Well, that's the apostle Paul, Don. Surely you can't expect me to live with that kind of attitude in my own heart!"



And yes, that's exactly what the New Testament seems to expect:  
**1 Corinthians 5:1-2** - "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. [2] **And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn?** Let him who has done this be removed from among you."

I just don't have time to develop this, but please just notice two concepts here:

- a) ***Paul says it is "arrogant" of people to think lightly of sin if they are going to claim to be followers of Jesus Christ.***

That's the actual word Paul uses. The people's calm tolerance of this sin wasn't ***holy***. It was ***"arrogant."*** These people had somehow cooled in their passion for God's glory and holiness.

True, they weren't justifying ***their own*** sin, at least not in this case. But that, in itself, didn't make them righteous. They didn't ***care deeply enough*** about sin in ***someone else***. After all, ***they*** weren't the ones ***committing*** sexual sin. But, even though it wasn't their ***own*** sin, they were still guilty of a ***sin they weren't perceiving***.

In a different way, they were **ignoring** God just as surely as this man sleeping with his father's wife. How could these people **not** be horrified by this sin? And more important, how could they just **live with it?** How could they not do everything in their power to **distance themselves** from such a horrible thing?

So this passage, when given its full weight, says something quite stunning. I don't have to **commit** the act of sin to be **wicked**. There are people who **commit** the sin. And there are people who **ignore** the sin committed. Both break God's heart.

- b) **Paul says Christians should "mourn" over the sins of others.** They should have been unable to sleep. They should have been unable to continue with business as usual. And they should have cared more deeply about this sinner! Maybe they thought it wasn't their place to **judge**. Maybe they didn't want to hurt his feelings. Certainly any kind of confrontation would have been uncomfortable.

But their **love** for this man should have pushed them into action. If you have a friend, or friends, who don't walk in God's ways, you don't love them by being **non-judgmental**. You don't love them if you give them the impression that their wickedness is no big deal. True love will point out their danger and point them to Christ.

I've taken this time to lay out an overview of Scriptures from both Old and New Testaments to show that **Godly people weep over sin in others**.

Just in case you've forgotten, look again at our text: **Psalm 119:136** - **"My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law."** That's the simple, single concept this verse presses. What is my heart's attitude toward those who don't honor God? Am I quite comfortable around them? Do I excuse them? Do they know where I stand? Am I more closely tied to God in terms of visible loyalty than I am to them?

- 2) **WE NEED TO REMEMBER WHY THIS HEARTACHE FOR THE SIN OF OTHERS IS SO IMPORTANT**

It wouldn't be surprising to say that most Christians think of the Christian life as a strictly **personal** matter. Most would think their primary duty is merely to please God as best they can **for themselves**.

Of course, for those who are following the theme of this teaching, I'm saying something entirely different. It is **not** enough that I try to be as Godly as I can be **personally**. I don't live on a deserted island. There are people all around me, many of whom are very wicked, simply like the rest of the world around them - living by the normal, accepted standards of the spirit of this age.

And here's where this all gets a bit shocking in terms of the role of the Christian and the role of the Church in today's culture. I think the dominant view in the evangelical church today is fast becoming one of **tolerance**. We will **reach** this culture to the extent we **identify** with this culture. Anything that smacks of **doctrine** and **distinctness** just puts up one more hurdle for the culture to climb over to get to us. We don't even want to call our churches "**church**" anymore. The anthem has become "**Let's not offend.**"

Yet my Christian walk must **respond** to this world **somehow**. I'm called by the Holy Spirit, not to be **neutral** to this world, but to be **broken** by the way this world grieves the God I love supremely. And this call to tears for the sins of others isn't an **optional** call. It's an **important** part of spiritual life.

Here's why: **Romans 1:28-32** - "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. [29] They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, [30] slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, [31] foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. [32] Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them."

This verses describes the **manner** in which the people of this fallen world operate. And they tell us more than we usually see. We're really not surprised to see the kinds of sins they commit. We expect sinners to sin.

The verse we need to look carefully at right now is verse 32 -  
“**Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.**”

In one way or another, God-rejecters *sustain* themselves in their rebellion by *cheering each other on*. People don't like to sin in isolation. So there is a definite plan of action - a kind of *spiritual terrorism training camp* - against God. The plan is not merely to *commit* sin. The plan is to *make the committing of sin so common that it won't be perceived as wickedness anymore.*

Please never forget this. The plan of the spirit of the age is to make sin so *common* it will be more easily *embraced* by everyone. The plan is to *de-odorize* sin. The plan is to have so many people sinning so often that righteous people are seen as legalistic, intolerant, and narrow-minded.

This plan is orchestrated to bring **maximum damage** to the reputation and glory of God the Father, and Jesus Christ, God the Son. It is effective in **immunizing people** against the love of God in Jesus Christ because, if they don't see the **wickedness** in the sins they commit, they will never see their need to embrace the cross of Jesus Christ. And they **must** hear about the **cross**. Remember, **"What Would Jesus Do?"** won't save anybody. The bracelet we need is **"What Has Jesus Done?"**

And it is precisely at this point that Christians and the church come into the picture. This world can't see Jesus Christ in the flesh. He isn't here physically right now. He will **come again**, but He isn't here **now**. And the people who need the gospel most don't read their Bibles. Many will rarely go to church. So **how will they ever see their sins as horribly wicked?**

The Church is the Body of Christ in this world. We seem to be working hard to make the world think the church is **cool**. We don't want to come across as being too **religious** anymore. If the church continues down the path of tolerance and relativism it's on right now, the world will **never** know about its own sin. It may have inner peace, self-esteem, a sense of purpose, or inner healing. But it will never find **eternal life** apart from confronting its sin.

People all around us need to see the attitude of Jesus toward the sins of others fleshed out right before their eyes: **Luke 19:41-44** - **“And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, [42] saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. [43] For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side [44] and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”**

Before Jesus ***shed His blood***, He ***shed His tears***. God, in these last days, is going to issue a fresh call to His church not only to be ***holy***, but to be ***broken and passionately disturbed*** by the sin all around them - **Psalms 119:136** - **“My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.”** God’s looking for Christians, not only with ***pure hearts***, but ***red eyes***.