

Isaiah 5:20 ESV (Pg. 329) Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! **21** Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight! **22** Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink, **23** who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right! **24** Therefore, as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom go up like dust; for they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

- I. Last week we talked about the parameters of how a Christian should make assessments of others. Another way to say this is “how are Christians to judge?”
 - A. Many in the church and in the world tell us that we aren’t to judge each other at all, since Christ said, **Matthew 7:1 ESV** “Judge not, that you be not judged.”
 1. But we discovered a few verses later that Christ’s point was we shouldn’t judge using ourselves as the model of perfection; making our goal just to be better than the next guy or girl.
 2. Elsewhere in the gospels Jesus actually tells us **John 7:24 ESV** “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”
 - B. So to judge with right judgement, what is the standard to use when necessary to judge? Only the Word of God is objective enough to be the standard. Everything else changes, or is subject to our preferences or traditions.
 1. **Isaiah 40:6b ESV** All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. **7** The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it; surely the people are grass. **8** The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. (flesh = human or worldly).
 2. We also discussed how, sadly, people with an agenda-driven preferences can take a scripture out of context, and weaponize it against brothers and sisters with whom they might disagree about finer points.
 - a) Paul talked about people who disagreed disagreeably about the issue of eating meat offered to idols, or on which day to worship. In our day the problematic issue might be worship styles, the use of the spiritual gifts, the mode of baptism, or a particular style of church government.
 - b) But Paul taught when it comes to issues not specifically or clearly taught in scripture, there is liberty for individual believers, and that we should allow those in such circumstances to be subject to their own consciences.
 - C. This morning, we’re going to tackle the other side of this equation. What do we do when a clear biblical directive is ignored or defied. We’ll do that by looking at Isaiah’s words in chapter 5 of his prophecy. This side is called “discernment”.
- II. The first 5 chapters of Isaiah constitute an indictment of the people of Israel. Their biggest issue was their inability to make a clear distinction, which resulted in moral confusion, separation from God, and a promise of coming judgement and wrath.
 - A. “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!” They are a people who have lost all sense of reality. They confuse good and evil, light and darkness, bitter and sweet. But does this still happen today?

1. For example, biology teaches that there is an obvious, natural compatibility between the male and the female. But culture says the same compatibility exists between male and male, or female and female.
 - a) Because culture has re-invented biological reality, the church is under pressure to deny God's clear command for human sexual flourishing, and the obvious scientific realities of nature.
 - b) So men legally marry men, women marry women; and we talk of love and equality, which, in reality does not apply. I can try saw a board with my hammer, but I'll never accomplish the task, and will be left disappointed.
 2. What God creates, designs, and commands is for the best of the human race, and never it's disadvantage. At every stage of creation we're told God saw what he created and called it "good". For any of us to second guess his creation, designs and commands are to "call evil good, and good evil".
- B. We must properly judge between good and evil, light and darkness, bitter and sweet. We're not arbitrary judges of these things, we've been given scripture, the Holy Spirit, and the fellowship of the church to help us rightly judge.
1. The word "woe" is a word of impending doom in the Bible. It means "the bill is about to come due"; judgement is not far away for those who either subvert or pervert the truth he has revealed in the Bible.
 - a) To subvert truth means you may study it, know it, memorize it, quote it or preach it; but your life is a constant contradiction of it; failing to practice what is preached. One who subverts truth is a text book hypocrite.
 - b) To pervert truth is to flatly deny what God has said. The serpent said to Eve, "You shall not surely die", contrary to God's Word. It is also to twist God's Word to say something is doesn't; like when prosperity preachers select passages to say the Gospel is all about you experiencing health and wealth, yet denying its promises of suffering for all Christians.
 2. We must properly handle the Word of God as a sword, not dulling its edge when making judgements of ourselves, of others and of the world around us.
- C. God warns us not to call good evil and evil good in our moral judgements by celebrating what God has condemned, or tearing down what He has elevated. Like when believers are silent about the immorality and dishonesty of our preferred politicians; or when we justify theft of office supplies or time from work because we're not being paid enough in our opinion; or when we slander others or gossip because we feel wronged by them, and they deserve it.
1. All these things are prohibited by God, but we often (easily) pretend that we have some pass from God because "he knows our heart". But instead, God wants to change our hearts to reflect the goodness that we see in him.
Galatians 5:22 ESV But the fruit of the Spirit is...goodness.
 2. If we have no true concept of God's goodness, we can't live a life of goodness, and we become unable to show others the goodness of God for their own lives. A vital part of Christianity is "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). It's hard to be an effective teacher if your life scoffs at the truth of what you claim to be teaching others.
- D. Next, God tells us not to confound light and darkness. Paul rhetorically asked the Corinthians, "what fellowship has light with darkness?" **Matthew 6:22 ESV**

“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, **23** but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

1. Light and darkness are perceived by the eye. Jesus calls the eye the lamp of the body. He’s saying that what we cast our gaze upon (because we desire it) will determine the level of light vs. darkness inside of us.
 - a) We confuse light and darkness when we cast our eyes to something God has prohibited and call it good. Millions of people do this everyday with pornography. Others do it at the counter of convenience store buying lottery tickets, imagining how much better life would be if they won.
 - b) Jesus says “if your eye is bad” -if your gaze is drawn away to things in which there is no light- your whole body will filled with great darkness.
 2. As believer we must set those things which are full of light in front of us, so our body will be filled with light. We must avoid (and help others to avoid) whatever or whoever draws us away from where God has placed his light.
- E. Lastly, God calls us to determine sweet from bitter. Many time in the Bible, tasting is made synonymous with experiencing God. **Psalm 34:8 ESV Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!**
1. Jesus calls himself the “Bread of life” and promises that all who eat of this bread will never be hungry again. Yet we come time and time again to the world’s table with bibs on, fork and knife in hand, ready to feast.
 - a) But nothing the world sets before us will ultimately satisfy. It’s delicacies are not just empty calories, they are often poison.
 - b) This explains the woman who goes through many relationships, looking for affirmation that is just out of reach. Or in the man who builds a career over the souls of a wife and children who are denied his closeness.
 2. **Luke 1:53 ESV “he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty”**. Only Christ can satisfy the deep craving of your soul.
- III. Why do we confuse good and evil, light and darkness, sweet and bitter? **“Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!”** Isaiah again declare a woe; this time to those self confident in their wisdom and cleverness.
- A. We cannot discern reality simply because we have too much confidence in our own mental and spiritual resources. It is a terrible thing to try to pull yourself up by your bootstraps before God, only to discover that you have no boots!
1. God did not just save you by a decision you made; instead he knew what you really needed was to die to your own lofty opinion of yourself and live to him. This acknowledgement is called Lordship; knowing who’s in charge.
 2. God did not just save you to figure out how to be a better you; he gave you his Word and Spirit to show you the path in which you are to find real life.
 3. God didn’t save you to an afterlife, but into a church because you need other people who will love you and spur you on to love and good deeds.
- B. **Mark 2:17 ESV “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”** God didn’t seek you because of your skill, but because of your sin. Your resume means nothing to him. God is only worth anything to the hungry, needy, helpless and broken.

- C. Furthermore, God pronounces woe on those with wildly misplaced and God-dishonoring priorities. **“Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right!”**
1. The first group claims have a reputation they don’t deserve. Heroes and the valiant aren’t known as such because of their hard drinking, but because they defend the helpless, and work justice for the oppressed. The second group claims to be shrewd because they use their position to line their pockets to the detriment of the poor and needy in the land. But God isn’t fooled.
 2. **Micah 6:8 ESV** He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? The praise of man means acquires nothing with God.
- IV. We must rightly judge or discern our own ways, We must do this constantly, gravely, humbly and prayerfully. But we must also help our brothers and sisters to see when they are straying from God’s best in the same way.
- A. We must do it Constantly. We must never stop helping others to see when they are missing all that Christ has provided for them. We may be hesitant, because we’re so often told by others not to judge, but the Bible says, **James 5:19 ESV** My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, **20** let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.
 - B. We must do it gravely. God told Ezekiel that if he failed to warn the sinful of the consequences of their way, they would die in their sin, but God would require their blood at Ezekiel’s hand, Someone’s eternal destiny is no light matter.
 - C. We must do it humbly. None of us are God’s appointed law enforcement. When we help a brother or sister who is stumbling, we do it only with the knowledge that next time it might be us! These times should never make us feel superior to others, but help us realize how deeply we all need each other in our lives.
 - D. We must do it prayerfully. **James 5:16 ESV** Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Confessing is only half of what we’re commanded to do. We must also pray for each other to be healed.
- V. We must be willing to examine ourselves and to speak up to others because the stakes are so high. There are many who are convinced that they belong to Christ while they make excuse after excuse for all of their unholy behavior. But remember that the only real evidence any of us have that we belong to Jesus is a changed life.
- A. For all others, a fearful judgement awaits. **“Therefore, as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom go up like dust...”** God will not be mocked or fooled by our religious professions or occasional good deeds.
 1. The only way to be saved at last is to put your trust in Jesus’ death for you on the cross, and never in your own goodness. Then we can live in the power of his resurrection and overcome the world as he did.
 2. Our only proof that we have so trusted in Christ is a consistently changing life, One that looks more and more like Jesus’ life. To live any other way is to blatantly reject God, no matter what we say with our lips. **“...for they have**

rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.” This was what Isaiah prophesied about the people who failed to judge or discern themselves rightly.

VI. **1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

VII. Benediction: **Romans 11:33, 36 ESV** Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.