

Greater Condemnation Luke 20:45-47

These words of our scripture passage for today present us with a very interesting question, a question that might not often be considered by many of us.

I can recall over the many years of my being a Christian having heard several preachers use the expression, "you can't color-code sin! Sin is sin and any form of sin will condemn a person to hell".

And yes, those words are true. Sin is sin, and yes because our God and His kingdom is ever and always holy, no form of sin will ever be permitted to enter into and abide within the Kingdom of God. Every sin must first be removed, completely "washed away" by the cleansing power of the blood of the Lord Jesus, else a person will not be permitted to enter into the Holy and Righteous Kingdom of God.

But with that being said, a question is being presented to us in our scripture passage for today. That while yes, any and every form of sin will keep a person from entering into the Kingdom of God, is every form of sin as bad, or as wrong in God's sight as the next sin? Were those preachers wrong when they declared that God does not "color-code" sin, that no one kind of sin is worse or more "punishable" than another form of sin?

The scriptures that we'll study today seem to say that yes, there are sins and sinful behaviors that will deserve a "greater condemnation" when a person is called to stand before the Lord Jesus on that "great and terrible day of judgment".

Let's pause for a moment and read these few words given to us here in Luke chapter 20 beginning in verse 45 and then let's consider what God might intend for us to know.

⁴⁵ Then, in the hearing of all the people, He (the Lord Jesus) said to His disciples, ⁴⁶ "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, ⁴⁷ who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation." (Luke 20:45-47)

As we study through these truths and all the many other truths given by the Lord Jesus, we find a familiar theme flowing through them all, one of warning, an apt word, both for the ones standing before Him at the time, as were these Scribes, and also for you and me as we read His words today. Warnings that tell each of us to look deeply within our own souls for the sin that lurks within us, and to turn from it as quickly as we can, because surely there will come a time of accounting for our sin.

And as we read in the Book of Ezekiel, while Ezekiel himself was the focus of those words, we know that the Lord Jesus is ever and always the true “Watchman” of our souls. There in Ezekiel 3, we read,

¹⁷ “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. ¹⁸ If I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. ¹⁹ But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul. (Ezekiel 3:17-19)

Jesus was and ever is the faithful “Watchman” for our souls! And that was what He was doing as He spoke those words through the mouth of Ezekiel that day.

There, we find Him giving stern warning, saying to each of these who would listen to Him, that there will surely come a day of “accounting” for deeds done while in our living years, for every behavior and for every intent of the heart.

And today, I would like for you and me to carry the “Watchman's warning” on further, first into our own souls, so that we will not miss out and find ourselves wanting on that great and terrible day of our own accounting. And then, to carry the warning on out further, to anyone and everyone who will be willing to listen.

Note within these words of our passage that Jesus was able to look into the hearts, into the conduct and into the behavior of these religious leaders, the “Scribes”. And He was able to know their inmost thoughts and the attitudes deep within their hearts, able to know them even better than they knew themselves.

And with righteous discernment He delivered a most scathing report about them, concluding with a prophetic pronouncement concerning their sure and certain end when they would stand before Him on that terrible Day of Judgment, a verdict that no person would ever want to hear. Listen again to His words! Verse 45 . . .

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These Scribes were men of great responsibility. They held offices within the highest structures of leadership in the Hebrew community and in the Hebrew religion, men who were regarded as being the "keepers of the laws of God" and the laws of the community.

They were highly educated, schooled in the best of schools, not only for the interpretation of the scriptures, but also for the giving of the law as it applied to ordinary business and family practices.

And because of their position and power, there was a higher expectation of them regarding honesty, purity and holiness. How else would their teachings and interpretations of the law be credible and trustworthy!

But here, Jesus was declaring that many of these men, these trusted religious leaders, had been measured against the righteousness of God and had been found sorely wanting.

And although Jesus was not yet pronouncing a final judgment upon these men, because it was not yet His time to judge, He really did already know their end. And so, He said of them, These will receive "greater condemnation".

Folks, this word "condemnation" is a very special word, a word having most to do with the penalty that is assessed against a person after they have been tried, convicted and found guilty of breaking the law. No more discussion, no more appeals, no more opportunities for mercy. Condemnation is final and irreversible.

And here, the Lord Jesus, the soon coming "Judge" over all the earth is pronouncing that for some people and for their behaviors while they are in this life, they will receive a "greater" condemnation than some other people.

And again, that is a strange thought for me. And probably for many other students of these scriptures. Because again, for me, as I have considered what might take place with a person once they die and are condemned to hell, I have assumed that everyone suffers the same.

But perhaps not so, especially as we would consider this pronouncement given here by the Lord Jesus about a "greater condemnation", a clear indication that just as there will be varying degrees of rewards for those who go into heaven, there is also the possibility of varying degrees of punishment for those who go into hell.

And with that in mind, if we ever thought that nothing could be worse than spending an eternity in hell, here Jesus is clearly telling us that, YES, YES, even within hell there will be even greater punishments.

May I quickly say that we should not assume from these few words that some portions of hell might be easier to bear than others! No, I am sure that every part of hell is unimaginably awful. But with that being said, these words do suggest that some parts of hell will be even more unimaginably awful than others, suffering beyond anything we could ever conceive of.

So then, what does the "Watchman", the Lord Jesus, intend for you and me to gain from these words? It is simply this, that there will surely come a Day and a time of accounting for each one of us and for everything that we will ever do while in this life.

No matter how much we might want to believe otherwise or to avoid the subject altogether, as many want to do, "accountability" is a sure and certain thing!

So then, may we spend the remainder of our time today considering this special principle of "accountability", so that we can know for sure how we should conduct ourselves during the remaining days of this life!

And we need to be as simplistic as we can be in our thoughts, because the terms of accountability are really quite simple, as simple as the scripture verse that tells us, "Whatsoever you sow, that you shall also reap".

Folks, those words are unmistakably easy to understand, but so that we might not at all be confused by them, the Lord goes on to tell us in Galatians chapter 6,

⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:7-8)

Those really are simple words aren't they, and easy to understand!

And may we also be sure of another thing. As these words clearly tell us, while a "final accounting" for our life's behaviors will take place at the final judgment, God has also built in a system of "natural consequences" that preside over every conduct, every behavior, every deed that takes place while we are still yet alive in this flesh.

As we are told in these words, "the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."

All we have to do is look around us at the corruption that's rampant among us today. And even more personally, we can look at many of the results of our own behavior and see how corruption and heartbreak have been the recompense for our own sinful behavior.

May I emphasize these words by saying that this principle of accountability, "Whatsoever we sow, we shall also reap", is a divine, sure and certain law of God! It will surely always come to pass. "Whatsoever you and I sow, we shall surely also reap".

And let me emphasize this again. That while yes, we should be far more concerned with the future consequences and with the future accountability that will be meted out in our final judgment, we must also accept that the same "principle" is present and effectual while we are still in this life. And it will surely bring about consequences and rewards within most all of the activities of our

daily life, in our relationships, in our families, in our workplaces and in most all the “secular” involvements of daily life.

And our knowing that this principle of accountability is “really real” causes many of us great discomfort. For most of us, even the thought of being held accountable brings an ominous sense of dread to our souls, to some, even an immediate sense of wanting to flee.

For most people though, it seems that the more common response is to simply ignore its inevitability. Perhaps not consciously so, or deliberately so, and not in a sense that they, or we, would intentionally choose to become irresponsible, but rather, we just try not to think about it and simply hope for the best.

And again, that is so, whether we are applying the principles of accountability to our home life, our work life, or all the many secular contexts of daily living, or as here in these scriptures, to that day of “final judgment” that we will all be called to face.

But unfortunately folks, that manner of dealing with accountability is not very effective. Ignoring it, trying to flee from it, pretending it isn’t there, will not thwart the power and the plans and the laws of God. “Whatsoever we sow, we shall surely reap”, both in this life and in the final judgment to come.

The only helpful remedy for our wrong behavior while in this life is “repentance”, “repentance”. While temporal consequences will often still take place, “repentance” and turning our hearts to the Lord will surely help our wayward circumstances, and especially the final outcome on our day of final judgment before the Lord.

And also, please do know that the “natural consequences” for our behaviors in this life are not really God’s full and complete punishment for our sins. The real punishment for our sins will still take place in eternity.

For those of us who have received Christ as our Savior, our punishment will have been suffered by Christ in His death on the cross. But for those who do not receive Him as Savior, their punishment will be an everlasting, unimaginable suffering in the never-ending fires of hell.

And no, these scriptures don't tell us exactly what hell will be like. We might envision a great lake that is like that of burning sulfur. And while that might be true, there might also be much, much more.

May I pause for a moment and take a liberty of imagination that is not given in these scriptures, but may still be possible. In much the same way that heaven seems to be an eternity of daily existence involving work and rewards and such things. So also, in my imagination, hell might have a similar, though unbearably painful daily existence, lost souls living together in a form of fiery, painfilled darkness, everyone enemies to everyone else, no love, no compassion, only misery and strife.

And no, I don't necessarily recommend that you join with me in my imaginations. But as I consider such words as those we are reading about within today's passage, about some people receiving a "greater condemnation", it seems logical to me that there will surely be circumstances where that "greater condemnation" can take place.

Returning our thoughts back again to the "natural consequences" that take place during our living years, "natural consequences" are simply God's way of preventing a person from being as bad as they could be, from spreading even more havoc upon innocent people than they otherwise would. For them, those natural consequences being suffering, separation, divorce, broken families, crippling injuries, financial disasters, imprisonment, and on and on.

For those of us who have given our hearts to Christ in salvation, those "natural consequences" that we suffer can often be an actual form of blessing and "Grace" from God, Him reaching His loving hand into our errant circumstances and giving us a "severe stroke of love", a discipline intended to turn us from sin's pathway, back to the "narrow way".

Listen to the way God describes that for us in Hebrews chapter 12. There He tells us,

⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." ⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what

son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:4-11)

Oh dear Christian, these are simple, loving words from God The Father to His beloved sons and daughters, to you and me . . .

These Scribes that Jesus spoke about in today's passage were true sons of Israel, but were refusing to become true sons of God. And their lifestyles proved their nature. They would go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, and for a pretense make long prayers.

In another place, Jesus had said that for each of us, our "fruits" will bear out who we really are. Though these Scribes might have prayed long and very public prayers, their other behaviors showed their true character, their fruits being rotten to the core, devouring helpless widows, cheating them of all their goods and their homes.

Folks, please know that these Scribes had suffered, and would continue to suffer the "natural consequences" for their sinful behaviors, all the days of their lives. But the reality was, their earthly suffering was only the beginning for them. Hell was going to be far, far worse for them. As Jesus said here, they will receive a "greater condemnation"!

And again, you and I have not been given a clear view into those indescribable sufferings of hell. God has generously withheld such knowledge from us. But those sufferings surely will be there in hell, and they are awaiting anyone and everyone who rejects Christ as Savior and Lord.

May I give one last speculation about that "greater condemnation" spoken about here in our scripture passage. I have often read some of those closing words of our scriptures given in Revelation chapter 22 that tell us that,

¹⁴ Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. ¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and

idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. (Revelation 22:14-15)

Dear Christian, are you listening carefully to these words. It would seem from what we read here that those who are condemned to hell, those outside of heaven, might actually be able to see the blessings that are taking place with those of us who are blessed with being able to be inside heaven, that perhaps part of their "greater condemnation" might be to have to, from "outside of heaven", continually look "inside heaven" and observe the blessings they might have received had they have believed in and received the Lord Jesus as their own Savior. But alas, they had not.

Oh dear friends, the Lord Jesus is surely coming soon and He surely is bringing His recompense with Him. And to those who have been more cruel and heartless during this life, they will suffer a "greater condemnation", a "just" and appropriate recompense, matching the suffering with their offense.

That is the intent of that special "law of God" that tells each of us that "whatsoever we sow, we shall also reap". But thanks be to God, for those of us who have received Christ as our Savior and Lord, our end will also be sure and "just". Christ has paid for all our sins. And because of that, we are assured that we will enjoy a pleasant eternity in heaven with Him. That too is one of those sure and certain laws of God.

So then, my counsel to all of us is that we cry out to the Lord each and every day, using words like those of the Psalmist asking the Lord to . . .

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:

²⁴ And see if *there be any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24)

Pray with me, will you . . .