

Forms Vs. Spirituality (Part 2)

The Price of Sin

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In the previous sermon we began to see that not all things pertaining to law, to sin, and to righteousness and holiness are equal. There are sins that do not bring on the death penalty. We saw that not all virtues or qualities of character and personality are equal, that love is clearly shown to be the greatest of all the attributes of God, and the one above all things that we are to seek. As Paul points out in I Corinthians 13, it is greater than eloquence, greater than understanding prophecy, greater than having great intelligence and having all knowledge, greater than sacrifice, greater than hope, and greater than faith.

We also saw that all unrighteousness is sin, but not all sin is equal, and that the Ten Commandments stand above all other law. In other words, they are on a level all their own, and that the true worship—our response to God—is manifested in the keeping of them. This does not eliminate all other laws, because specific guidance and regulation is needed in specific areas.

Now why is it that if a minister talks about love that some will begin to act as though laws are done away? Just because a law is less important, it is not done away with anymore than a change in the death penalty in man's law is going to make a change or wipe away or do away with illegally parking.

Remember Jesus said, "Think not that I came to destroy the law and the prophets; but to fulfill," and yet the idea is that He said "*Think not that I came not to destroy, but to destroy,*" as though somehow laws were done away despite the fact that He Himself said that He was not going to destroy the law, meaning the first five books where the Old Covenant is, and all those civil laws, and all those other laws—the food laws, and the Holy Day regulations. All of that stuff is contained within the law, and He said He was not doing away with any of it. Our own Savior said that.

So what I am speaking about does not do away with the food laws. It does not do away with getting the leaven out, or not eating leaven during the Days of Unleavened Bread—not eating bread, buns, crackers, meal, or muffins during the Days of Unleavened Bread. That is still a requirement of God's people. They are simply less critical to God's spiritual purpose. Sometimes we ought to get thinking about this, that if we cannot follow these simple instructions, maybe we have not even yet gotten out of the first grade in regard to being submissive to God.

We saw that scrupulously tithing to God is less important than justice, mercy, and fidelity in our relationships with men. Now if justice, mercy, and fidelity are missing in our relationships with men, scrupulous tithing does not make up for their lack in dealing with others anymore than a gift to the Temple made up for a lack of caring for one's parents (Mark 7 and Matthew 15). Jesus said they were rejecting the commandments of God if they did not take care of their parents. They gave the justification they could not do it because they gave a gift to the altar—to the Temple. They had things backward as to which was more important and greater in God's eyes.

While we are on this theme, I want to remind us of one of the most common assumptions of the Christian world, and that is that the Old Covenant is done away. Some people subconsciously think or assign the Old Covenant as being somewhat evil. The Bible does truly say that the New Covenant is better. You see, it divides the one from the other, and they are not equal. The New Covenant is better, but the Old Covenant is not evil.

Everything God does is good. Every good and perfect gift comes from Him. Romans 8:3 says that the problem was not with the covenant. The problem was with the people. There is nothing wrong with it. The problem was in the people, in their not keeping it.

So the New Covenant is better. The Bible also tells us why it is better, and that is because it has better promises. God openly promised the forgiveness of sin under the New Covenant. He clearly promised His Spirit. He clearly promised eternal life. He clearly promised access to Him through Jesus

Christ in the New Covenant. Those promises are missing in the Old Covenant, so that makes the New Covenant better, but it does not say anything in the New Covenant about Old Covenant laws being done away.

Not only is the Old Covenant not done away, but neither are any of the covenants that God made with mankind along the way done away. God made a covenant with mankind through Noah. It appears in Genesis 9 and it is called by men the Noachian Covenant. Believe it or not, Protestant commentators make a direct connection between Genesis 9 and Acts 15, that one is almost parallel of the other. You know what happened in Acts 15? I assume you know the Bible there well enough. It almost seems as though when the apostles made the decision in Acts 15 they garnered their evidence primarily from Genesis 9.

Now I ask you, is the rainbow still in the sky? You had better believe it is. That is the sign from God that that covenant is still in force and in effect. See, one of the promises of that covenant is that He would never destroy the earth again by water. No brethren, that covenant is not done away.

Let me ask you something. Is the covenant that God made with Abraham in Genesis 12, and then signed, sealed, and delivered in Genesis 17, done away? Hardly. We look in Galatians 3 and we find Paul uses that covenant as the proof for what he is teaching there, that if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise—the promise given in the covenant made with Abraham that we are to be inheritors of the earth. So you see, it is going right on through. God is keeping that promise made in that covenant He made with Abraham in Genesis 12. It is not done away.

What about the covenant God made with David, that David would never lack for someone to sit on his throne, and that his throne was going to be established forever? God said that as long as the sun and moon are up there, that is how long this covenant is going to last. It is not done away. In fact, Jesus is going to come and He is going to sit on the throne of His father David, which is still actively being sat upon on this earth. Of course we know where it is being sat on. It is in Britain.

Now the Old Covenant is not done away either. Is it shocking to you that the Old Covenant is still in force, still in effect? How can you do away with laws or something that is still in force and effect?

Turn with me to Hebrews 8:13. Many times I have seen this verse being quoted as proof that the Old Covenant is done away. Brethren, the verse does not say that. This is what it says:

Hebrews 8:13 In that he said, A new covenant, he has made the first old.

I think this is the only place in the Bible where that covenant is called the *Old* Covenant. But do you know what? It does not even say that in Greek, although it is not wrong. I do not think it is wrong.

Hebrews 8:13 Now that which decays and waxes old is ready to vanish away.

A more literal translation of that word *old* in verse 13 is *obsolete*. Obsolete does not mean *done away*. I will give you a crystal-clear example—one that I used previously in a sermon on the covenants, and that is that a 1913 automobile is obsolete by comparison to the automobiles we have manufactured in 1997. Obsolete does not mean done away. The cars that we are driving now have been simply upgraded. That 1913 automobile can still get you around, maybe not in the style and comfort that we are accustomed to now, but it is not done away. If you want proof right within the verse, look at what the next phrase says. "Now that which decays...."

It means it is in the process of decaying, not that it is gone. It is in the process of decaying. The word "waxes" is an old King James word that means "grows." It is something that is in progress. It is growing old, and is ready to vanish away. It is not gone yet, but it is ready to vanish away. "Growing obsolete" and "ready to vanish" are different from "completely gone."

We are not the only ones that see this. A man by the name of Paul Ellington (I have no idea who he is) has a commentary on Hebrews, and in reference to

this verse he says, "This refers to the replacement of the Old Cult by the New; not a change in the ethical or civil requirements [laws] of the Torah." I think he was led to say this because in the larger context in which this appears is about the priesthood change from Aaron to the Melchizedek priesthood.

Our requirement is to live by every Word of God. How can one live by every Word of God if a huge chunk of it is no longer of any authority at all? Does that not tacitly say that it never really was authoritative in the first place? All that has occurred, brethren, is that the application has changed from the physical (or we might say from the letter) to the spirit.

Is sacrificing still required today? You bet! It is the sacrifice of our lives as living sacrifices, not the sacrifice of an animal in order to be burned up. We now look at those things in their higher intent.

We had gotten, in the previous sermon, to where I was just beginning to show additional evidence that God does not judge our activities as all being on the same level, that He weighs the attitude in which something was done, and the circumstance in which it was done, and who does the deed. All of these factors matter very much.

Numbers 15:22-24 And if you have erred, and not observed all these commandments, which the LORD has spoken unto Moses, even all that the LORD has commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day that the LORD commanded Moses, and henceforward among your generations; then it shall be, if ought [if anything] be committed by ignorance without the knowledge of the congregation, that all the congregation shall offer one young bullock for as burnt offering.

Numbers 15:31 You shall have one law for him that sins through ignorance, both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourns among them. [It means that whether Gentile or Israelite, the same responsibility applied to either.] But the soul that does ought [or anything] presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproaches the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. [It

means put to death.] Because he has despised the word of the LORD, and has broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him. [It means put to death.]

If we were to read the whole chapter I think we would see this more clearly, but I think that we can see just from the amount we have read that God is serious about His commandments, and because He is serious and we want to be like Him, so should we be. They are not to be treated as trivial. They are not to be treated in a casual manner regardless of what the law is, because *all unrighteousness is sin*. Regardless of how critical the law is to God's purpose, we want to be righteous, and we want to hit the mark. We want to make a bull's-eye every time, if we can.

We can also see from this context that He is gracious, and He has made allowances for the circumstances under which the sin was committed. Ignorance implies that the sin was done without knowledge, or that it was done unintentionally, or that the person merely strayed through error because he made a simple wrong judgment.

On the other hand, "presumptuously" means "with a high hand." The picture is with a hand clenched into a fist and shaking as though the person is looking up at God and is saying, "I know what I am doing, and I am going to do this. Regardless of the consequences, I am going to go ahead and do it." The word indicates *ostentatious*, a sense of bravado.

I think you can readily see that there is a great deal of difference in regard to seriousness that God holds a sin to be in a person's attitude and the circumstance of the sin. It is interesting that immediately after what we just read in Numbers 15 that Moses, as his pattern is, gives an illustration of what he means.

Numbers 15:32 And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the Sabbath day.

All you have to do is reflect back to Exodus 35. God specifically pointed out that they were not to go out and gather wood on the Sabbath day. Now again, because of where that appears, they were just beginning to do the

construction on the tabernacle, and so the building of a fire on the Sabbath, or at anytime, was going to be required to smelt the metals in order to make the artifacts that were going to be made to be put into the tabernacle, and so He gave the law, and He said "Do not build a fire." The connection is obvious. "Do not build a fire to do your work, your labor, even on the tabernacle on the Sabbath day." This person went out and gathered sticks on the Sabbath day.

Numbers 15:33-36 And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation, and they put him in ward [Only the second time in the Bible somebody was actually put in prison], because it was not declared what should be done to him. And the LORD said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the LORD commanded Moses.

It was a presumptuous sin, done with knowledge, regardless of what was said. This seems of course to point to something else. Let us go back to Hebrews 10. Verse 25 sets part of the context.

Hebrews 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as you see the day approaching.

What does verse 25 remind you of—"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together"? Does that not remind you of holy convocations of the Sabbath and the Holy Days? They are *commanded* assemblies.

Hebrews 10:26-29 For if we sin **willfully** [This puts it in the same category as we just saw in Numbers 15.] after that we have received the knowledge of the truth [about the Sabbath and God's purpose and what He is working out], there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three

witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment suppose you, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and has done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

I am going to give you a couple of examples of the kind of sins of ignorance, sins of weakness, and show you how God judged them to show you that all sin is not the same.

Genesis 20:2-7 And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister; and Abimelech king of Ferar sent, and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, you are but a dead man, for the woman which you have taken; for she is a man's wife. But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, will you slay also a righteous nation? Said he not unto me, She is my sister? And she, even she herself said, He is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this. And God said unto him in a dream, Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart; for I also withheld you from sinning against me: therefore suffered I you not to touch her. Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for you, and you shall live: and if you restore her not, know thou that you shall surely die, you, and all that are yours.

Now Abimelech did what any Oriental ruler of his time would have done. He saw a beautiful woman and wanted to add her to his harem. He took her in, *but* he did it in innocence, did he not, because a lie occurred. Abraham actually led him into doing what he did. God effected some damage control by giving Abimelech the dream, and He quickly forgave what he did, but also warned him that if he went forward with what he was thinking of doing, it would then become presumptuous, and things would not go well for him or for his nation.

Let us go to another one. This is a well-known one.

Numbers 22:28-34 And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto you, that you have

smitten me these three times? And Balaam said unto the ass, Because you have mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill you. And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I your ass, upon which you have ridden ever since I was yours unto this day? Was I ever wont to do so unto you? And he said, No. Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand; and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face. And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Wherefore have you smitten your ass these three times? Behold, I went out to withstand you, because your way is perverse before me: And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain you, and saved her alive. And Balaam said unto the angel of the LORD, I have sinned; for I knew not [he was in ignorance] that you stood in the way against me; now therefore, if it displease you, I will get me back again.

What Balaam did was quickly forgiven, overlooked. Now what does this teach us? It teaches us that sin does not always occur in a straight-forward manner. As we saw with Abimelech and Abraham, Abimelech was *led* into almost sinning grievously, and he would have sinned had not God intervened. Abraham was the more guilty of the two because he was leading Abimelech into the sin by his lie. But we also know from the context that Abraham too committed a sin of weakness. "Out of fear I was afraid," and so Abraham too did not sin willfully. It was not presumptuous.

Leviticus 24:17 And he that kills any man shall surely be put to death.

Reading that just as it is might give one the impression that the breaking of the sixth commandment was rigidly cut and dry. Not so.

Deuteronomy 19:1-6 When the LORD your God has cut off the nations whose land the LORD your God gives you, and you succeed them, and dwell in their cities and in their houses; you shall separate three cities for you in the midst of your land, which the LORD your God gives you to possess it. You shall prepare you a way, and divide the coasts of your land, which the LORD your God gives

you to inherit, into three parts, that every slayer may flee thither. And this is the case of the slayer, which shall flee thither, that he may live: Whoso kills his neighbor ignorantly [Numbers 25], whom he hated not in time past; as when a man goes into the wood with his neighbor to hew wood, and his hand fetches a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slips from the helve, and lights upon his neighbor, that he die; he shall flee unto one of those cities, and live. [A sin not unto death.] Lest the avenger of the blood pursues the slayer while his heart is hot, and overtakes him, because the way is long, and slay him; whereas he was not worthy of death, inasmuch as he hated him not in time past.

The sin was still very serious, but because it happened accidentally, and because the attitude of the person who did the murder, or the killing, was not intent on doing that, and there was no hatred between them, it was a sin *not unto death*. But God enforced the seriousness of it by making the person *flee* for all that he was worth to make sure that he got to the city of refuge. Then in the city of refuge, he was held there in ward for an unspecified number of years until the present high priest died. So a penalty had to be paid. The person lost a great deal of his liberty, but he was still alive. He was able to be visited by his family and was still able to earn some kind of a living. He did not become a ward of a state. Pretty wise, I think.

Exodus 21:28-29 If an ox gore a man or a woman, that they die; then the ox shall be surely stoned, and this flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be quit [acquitted]. But if the ox were wont to push with his horn in time past [In other words, it was known that this ox had a history of doing this] and it has been testified to his owner, and he has not kept him in, but that has killed a man or a woman; the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death.

The owner of the ox was put to death because he should have been more careful than to allow his ox to do what it did. Can you see that circumstances alter cases and determine the seriousness of the sin? And as we clearly saw, some sin is not unto death.

We are going to go to Leviticus 4 and we will add yet another layer to this.

Leviticus 4:3 If the priest that is anointed [This is the high priest.] do sin according to the sin of the people, then let him bring for his sin, which he has sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto the LORD for a sin offering.

What we are going to do here is pay attention to the progression to the offerings required for sin. For the high priest, if he sinned, a bullock is required.

Leviticus 4:13 And if the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done somewhat against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which should not be done, and are guilty.

This is a sin where mob psychology begins to take hold. The person does not control himself, and the whole group of people gets caught up in what is going on and becomes involved in a sin.

Leviticus 4:14 When the sin, which they have sinned against it, is known, then the congregation shall offer a young bullock for the sin, and bring him before the tabernacle of the congregation.

For the high priest a bullock was required. For all the congregation—all of Israel—a bullock was required.

Leviticus 4:22-23 When a ruler [meaning a prince or somebody in governmental office. We will broaden it out so that the principle includes all of those in public service.] has sinned and done somewhat through ignorance against any of the commandments of the LORD his God concerning things which should not be done, and is guilty; or if his sin, wherein he has sinned, come to his knowledge, he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a male without blemish.

Do you see it? The high priest: a bullock. A civil leader: a male goat.

Leviticus 4:27-28 And if any one of the common people sin through ignorance, while he does somewhat against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which ought not to be done, and be guilty, or if his sin, which he has sinned, come to his knowledge; then he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has sinned.

A bullock; a bullock; a male goat; a female goat. Can you see the progression? Which is more serious in the eyes of God? The more serious the sin, or the more responsible the person to the community, the greater the cost to the individual.

Let us go to II Samuel and we will see a couple of very clear examples of this. Perhaps next to the sins of Adam and Eve, the best known sin in all the Bible is that of David. Nathan is speaking to David.

II Samuel 12:14 Howbeit, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto you shall surely die.

God brings special attention to the fact that because of who David was, as king of Israel, his sin had done greater damage to the reputation of God and to the stability of the nation than if a common person had done the same thing. You know that is a true assessment of things from our own recent history. People who are "no-names" can be doing the kind of things that our President Bill Clinton is accused of doing, and it does not even make a ripple. But if the president does it, watch out!

This same principle can apply to your next door neighbor or to some well-known sports or entertainment personality. If your next door neighbor commits something like adultery, or fornication, or takes drugs, it will hardly make a ripple outside of the family. But if the sports or entertainment personality, whose name is well known and who has a reputation maybe all across the country, commits these same things, it becomes first-page news. It makes a difference who commits the sins, and the more responsible position that you have, the worse the sin is because it affects a wider group of people.

II Samuel 24:1-3 And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah. For the king said to Joab the captain of the host, which was with him, Go now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, and number you the people, that I may know the number of the people. And Joab said unto the king, Now the LORD your God add unto the people, how many so ever they be, an hundredfold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it: but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?

In other words, Joab was arguing with David, and saying "Do not do this. It is a sin."

II Samuel 24:4 Notwithstanding the king's word prevailed against Joab, and against the captains of the host. . .

This statement makes me understand that more than Joab saw the folly in this. They saw it was sin. David, despite all the counsel against what he was doing, in effect said, "I am the king. I am going to do what I want to do." We are coming closer and closer to this thing being presumptuous.

II Samuel 24:4 . . . And Joab and the captains of the host went out from the presence of the king, to number the people of Israel.

We all know from sermons past and from our own reading that what David did was wrong. Now what was wrong? I think that there are two possibilities, but we have to look at these two possibilities first understanding that it was not wrong for David to take a census. Israel had been doing it right along, and God never complained in the past.

Earlier in Israel's history, six hundred thousand were numbered who were men above the age of twenty. Maybe there was even more than that. Maybe that was just the six hundred thousand who were fighting men, but Moses knew—*We have six hundred thousand men that we can use to fight here.*

How about all of the numbers that appear in the book of Numbers? Censuses were taken in other places of the Bible, and so there is nothing wrong with a ruler of a nation taking a census.

Now since a census is involved here, I think the next step is to understand that there was very possibly something wrong with David's motivation for taking the census. Joab felt so strongly about this that he argued against David to not do it. When he went out with his captains to take the census, he did not finish the job. There were at least two or three of the tribes of Israel that he did not complete a census for, and he thus gave David false figures.

The first possibility is that David's motivation might have been that he was seeking to make war on nations and thus push the boundaries of the land God allotted to Israel beyond what God's promise was. Remember, God told Abraham, "From here to here you can have. It is yours." But if David, who had already secured all the land that came in the promise, wanted to push it beyond and expand Israel into empire status, then he was getting greedy, getting lustful.

There was a second reason that might be even more serious, and that is that David was beginning, embarking, getting into sin that was somewhat like the sin Moses sinned that kept God from allowing him to go into the Promised Land. I think David was showing God that he was walking by sight and trusting in his armies rather than trusting in God's faithfulness to defend them. Moses' faith broke down when he struck the rock, and that was Moses' sin.

But now we have David here, a ruler, and therefore held to a higher standard. Not only that, David was a *converted* man—a spiritually-minded man—in addition to being a ruler. This sin was judged so strongly by God that it brought on the greatest plague recorded in the Bible to be leveled against Israel. Seventy thousand people died in one day. Compare that to the fifteen thousand who died in Korah's rebellion, or the twenty-three thousand who died when all of Israel committed fornication with Moab following Balaam's visit.

Do you think that God's response would have been as harsh if an ordinary citizen had lived by sight? *Who* commits the sin makes a big difference in God's eyes. You compare this then with Leviticus 4. God viewed the most serious sins of *all* to be those committed by the high priest, and then the ruler because the ruler had the greatest influence on the most people. They also profaned, blasphemed God's name to the greatest degree. It makes a difference who sins.

James 3:1 My brethren, be not many masters [teachers], knowing that we [meaning the ministry] shall receive the greater condemnation [or stricter judgment].

Now why? Because of the seriousness of the responsibility, and because of the gifts given to carry out that responsibility. What we have here then is a warning to any who would enter into this vocation, the ministry. They should have their eyes wide open to the seriousness of the responsibility involved. It is weighty, believe me. I am going to be judged exceedingly stricter than you, and I had better not sin. Teachers are dealing with the most precious thing in the world: human personality. Any misdirecting of it is of great concern to God. Does this not fit in perfectly with Leviticus 4? That is why Leviticus 4 is in the Bible. God does not judge everything and every person equally, but He does judge everything and all fairly. There is no respect of persons with God.

Turn to Acts 20:26 because I want you to see an example of a faithful minister.

Acts 20:26-27 Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

There is a good example.

Now turn back to Mark and here we have the other side of the coin.

Mark 12:38-40 And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.

Again, stricter judgment. Notice carefully the wording. The scribes usually worked to set themselves up as teachers in a synagogue, but these insincere and rapacious men, whose character did not match their teaching, received greater, stricter judgment, and they were going to bear it.

Now let us go to Luke 12 and we will nail this down pretty strongly here.

Luke 12:47-48 And that servant, which knew his lord's will [There is knowledge.] and prepared not himself, [Did not take advantage of the time nor of the instruction] neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not [was ignorant—Leviticus 4] and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. . . .

Remember, God does not judge everybody equally, but He does judge everybody fairly.

Luke 12:48 . . . But unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more [and God too].

Thus, the most serious sins of all are committed by the ministry. I have made the statement in the past that I have been laughed at, not by any of our people here but by others on the outside, for saying that the most important man in the community is the preacher. They say Ritenbaugh is just blowing his own horn. No, Ritenbaugh is not. That is God's own judgment, because the preacher sets the moral tone, and then right after him come the civil leaders who are in a position to set the public morality through the actions that are seen by the citizenry.

It is very easy to see why the United States is going downhill because the churches are not teaching the law of God. The ministry is not standing in the gap, but they are backing away from preaching God's law, as though God's laws are suggestions. This is going to come down on the head of the ministry in the United States of America. We see a prophecy there in the future when the ministry is going to say, "Who me? A preacher? Not on your life! I was not a preacher". They are going to hide it then because the people are going to be searching them out ostensibly for the idea of putting them to death for what they failed to give them.

So everything is not on the same level. Now, everybody is measured against the same standard—that is, Jesus Christ—but everybody is not held to the same standard. Every law does not have the same critical importance. Every sin is not on the same level. Every punishment is not on the same level. Every act of obedience is not on the same level either, and if I ever get to it, I am going to show you that all holiness is not on the same level either.

John 9:39-41 And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, We see; therefore your sin remains.

Jesus intends that this be taken spiritually. Those *who see not* are those who are truly spiritually blind and ignorant. Christ came that these might see—might know, understand, comprehend, get, grasp. Those which *see* are those who *think* they see—the Pharisees in this context—and that they might be made *blind*.

Now "that they might be made blind" means "they [the Pharisees] who think they see" would be exasperated, frustrated, and hardened by and against the truth. Is that not what happened? That is exactly what happened. If you were blind, it means that you had no opportunity of learning truth, and therefore are truly ignorant. You would not be guilty.

Because the Pharisees said that they had knowledge of God's will, their sin was unpardoned because they were not ignorant, nor were they repenting.

The two have to be tied together. They were not ignorant, nor were they repenting though they said they knew the truth; therefore their sin remains.

Did God in the flesh judge these people differently? Yes He did. They were both held up to the same standard, but the ones that were ignorant went away "scot free," as we might say. The others who said that *they knew* [they understood], their sin was laid on them, and the death penalty was there as well.

We can reach a conclusion here regarding how God is going to judge somebody. One is that it becomes clear that people are not judged for what they cannot do. If they do not know, He does not hold it against them, we are not judged for what we cannot do, and two, that sin is measured by the capacities—intelligence, background, gifts—and the abilities of men and their opportunities of *knowing* truth. The reason people are condemned is because they are not disposed to receive truth. It does make a difference. All things are not the same. To whom much is given, much more is required.

Let us look at another one in Matthew 7:1-5, which is right in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 7:1-5 Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why behold you the mote that is in your brother's eye, but consider not the beam that is in your own eye? Or how will you say to your brother, Let me pull out the mote out of your eye; and, behold, a beam is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of your own eye, and then shall you see clearly to cast out the mote out of your brother's eye.

Notice the illustration. It is quite instructive, showing that all things are not equal. A mote means something very small as compared to a beam, illustrating something very large; or mote meaning something that is less serious, as compared to something that is more serious. Do you see the comparative sense there? More serious, or really important.

I realize that this is just an illustration that Jesus used, and maybe it does not fit every sin or every law, but it is Jesus' instruction, and His illustration would not be good instruction if it were not a true principle that some sins are less important or more important than others. If this is not true that some sins are great and some sins are small, Jesus' teaching would not be valid, so therefore some sins are greater, worse, or more serious than others.

I could go on and on with this because it is all over the Bible. We have been called to be kings and priests, and kings and priests make judgments. A king makes judgments in a civil area, and a priest makes judgments in moral, spiritual, and ethical areas. God's Word clearly shows that judging righteously is a distinct and difficult challenge requiring that one rightly divide the word of truth. This is because sin is not committed in a straightforward manner in every case, that there are twists and turns and angles and perspectives and circumstances and situations which must be considered and weighed if a right judgment is to be reached.

To reach a right judgment may also require knowledge of the person's capacities and their knowledge somewhat of the history of a person's background. It requires knowledge and understanding to produce wisdom, and this is why God has us going through this conversion process. What He is putting us through is designed in part to produce holy righteous spiritual character that is in His image, but with that also bringing us to the place where we are able to judge *righteous* judgment, and it is not always easy. It is not always clear-cut.