

God Help Us – Is 59

Is 59 (Intro); If I were to poll a representative group in our church, I'm pretty sure there would be unanimous agreement on the issue of moral decay in our world
And I'm pretty sure the same would be true of *any* historical sampling – from Tertullian and Augustine, to Luther and Calvin; Our compass is off; Has been since The Fall
And as of late, things seem to be going from bad to worse in a *hurry*; There's no getting around it

- But most of the time, as believers, we tend to *separate* ourselves from the problem
Thinking that the issue of sin in our culture is somebody *else's* problem
Or, we think that as long as we live a nice godly life within the confines of our nice godly home, the sin of this world won't really affect us that much
And we most certainly *don't* think, that we're as bad as God's people of old, or that we're susceptible to any sort of judgment; Not us

And nothing could be further from the truth; Shown especially by prophecies like *these*

So I want to work our way through this passage, in hopes of opening our eyes to the *reality* of the situation, and spurring you on to respond appropriately

- [1] *Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; [2] but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.*

I referenced these verses 2 weeks ago in light of ch58, to say that disingenuous acts of devotion hinder our prayers from being heard (58:4b)
And according to v2, so do our iniquities in *general*; The bottom line being, that . . .

Sin isolates us from God (v1-2)

That's the principle here that ought to have us shaking in our boots, and thinking "God help us;" Sin isolates
Hiding God's *face from you so that* you can't find him, and he doesn't listen (2b)
And the more that's true of *individuals* in a culture, the more it's true of the culture

Like it was for the Israelites when they were carried off into the captivity of Babylon
They were separated, or isolated, from God's presence and God's best
Including the faithful remnant to some extent
Sure, their *prayers* were still heard, like Daniel in the lion's den – but they certainly didn't enjoy the *best* of what God had to offer; Like worship in the temple
B/c they were estranged right along with the rest

And that truth ought to find us on our knees, genuinely praying – "God, help us"
B/c the sin of a *culture* isolates, just like the sin of an individual
And as the sin of a culture *grows*, so grows the isolation

- And the worst part is, we often don't even know what we're missing
Who knows what provision we lack due to the rampant sin among us in our country?
Who knows what power is withheld? Who knows what peace is withdrawn?
Who knows what protection is suspended?
All we know is that sin isolates us from God, and it's a problem

As is the fact that . . .

Our culture is just as bad as theirs (v3-8)

Having just told the Israelites that their *iniquities have made a separation between [them] and God* – he tells them why, v3
[3] *For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity;*

Now, if you're anything like me, you read that and think – "Man, they must have been really bad; We're not like that;" You know what I'm saying?
And then I think about the 60 million babies we've killed through abortion in the last 40 years; Far exceeding the number killed in all the *wars* of ancient Israel . . .
Over 2 *millennia*; Which means *our* hands are defiled with blood just as much as theirs
Probably more so

- And then he says, still in v3 – *your lips have spoken lies; your tongue mutters wickedness*. One word – politics
From the deception of Watergate, to the scandal of Clinton-gate, to the broken promises of countless *other* administrations, especially our current one . . .
The lips of our leaders have spoken lies, and their tongues *continue* to mutter wickedness; And that doesn't even *touch* some of the graft and greed of . . .
Various *congressmen* through the years; It's deplorable; It's not everybody, but it's enough; And it makes *our* culture just as bad as theirs

- What's more – *No one enters suit justly* [v4]; *no one goes to law honestly; they rely on empty pleas, they speak lies, they conceive mischief and give birth to iniquity*.
With the travesty of justice that plagues our courts these days, where do I start?
From frivolous lawsuits by those just looking for money, to dishonest defenses by those who are guilty – speaking lies and conceiving mischief is rampant in our court system
And many of the decisions handed down by *judges* do nothing but give birth to even *more* iniquity; Especially in the area of gay marriage
They rely on empty pleas, speak lies, and give birth to iniquity

Or as Isaiah says it in v5 – [5] *They hatch adders' eggs* [as in, they conceive more and more sin, those associated with the courts]; *they weave the spider's web* [they devise snares to catch the unsuspecting];
Like the *Hate Crimes Reporting Act* being considered in Congress right now
It sounds good, but at the core I fear it's an insidious way to suppress the free speech of those who say something contrary to what's politically correct at the time
They weave the spider's web

[5b] [And] *he who eats their eggs dies* [IOW even what *seems* good is harmful], *and from one that is crushed a viper is hatched* [their sin's unstoppable]. [6] *Their webs will not serve as clothing; men will not cover themselves with what they make* [the sinful devices and means of our court system serve no good purpose].

Our culture is just as bad as theirs

- And then he goes on in v6b – *Their works* [referring to the people in his culture] *are works of iniquity, and deeds of violence are in their hands*. [7] *Their feet run to evil, and they are swift to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction are in their highways*. [8] *The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths; they have made their roads crooked; no one*

who treads on them knows peace.

Can you say gangs? Drug cartels? Pimps? Mafias? Terrorists? Thugs? B/c it fits
Their works are works of iniquity, and deeds of violence are in their hands. (6b)
In which case, our culture is just as bad as theirs; Maybe even worse

And we *need* to wake up to that fact; The storms are no longer just brewing, they're here
And getting worse by the day

But the worst part, is that it affects every single one of us

Cultural sin affects us all (v9-15a)

And not just in the isolation or estrangement from God
We all suffer some of the *consequences*, and we all bear some of the *responsibility*
Consequences and responsibility; The first of which, suffering of some of the
consequences, is indicated by the shift in pronouns
Instead of using pronouns like *you*, and *your*, and *they*, and *their* like he does in the first
8 verses – he shifts to using *us*, and *we*, and *our*; Look at v9

[9] *Therefore* [b/c their culture and ours is filled with sin] *justice is far from us* [us], *and righteousness does not overtake us* [it doesn't hold the day]; *we hope for light* [we], *and behold, darkness, and for brightness, but we walk in gloom* [we do; all of us]. [10] *We grope for the wall like the blind; we grope like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight, among those in full vigor we are like dead men.* [11] *We all growl like bears; we moan and moan like doves; we hope for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us.*

And the *salvation* he's talking about there in v11 isn't spiritual, but physical
And it's not happening; Instead, we suffer some of the same ill-effects of sin that others
do – whether we're guilty or not

Like the suppression of justice and righteousness among us – v9
And having our hopes dashed; And joy stolen; And frustration lit – v9 and 11
And having our way through *life* concealed; And our energy sapped – v10
Cultural sin affects us all, b/c we all suffer some of the consequences; Not the *ultimate*
ones of condemnation and hell – but the temporal ones; It affects us all
From our pocketbook, to our freedoms, to our struggles

➤ Look at the cost of health care; Who do you think covers the medical expenses for the
gang-banger who gets shot? We do; Those who pay taxes/health insurance premiums
Who do you think pays for the *imprisonment* of criminals? Not the ones who are
incarcerated; We bear the brunt of that
Who do you think pays for the free birth control mandated by law these days, in order to
minimize the ill-effects of rampant promiscuity?
Everybody; Whether you're promiscuous or not
And who do you think suffers from the increased security lines at airports? Not the
terrorists

And the list goes on and on and on and on; B/c cultural sin affects us all
We all suffer some of the *consequences*

➤ And, we all bear some of the *responsibility*; True
I don't like it any more than you do with my individualistic, island-unto-myself,
American mindset – but look at the verbiage; V12

Salvation is far from us Isaiah just got through saying . . .

[12] *For our transgressions are multiplied before you* [he's addressing God on behalf
of his entire culture], *and our sins testify against us* [us; b/c we're in this together, and
we all bear some of the responsibility]; *for our transgressions are with us, and we know
our iniquities:*

And then he summarizes them from v3-8

[13] *transgressing, and denying the LORD, and turning back from following our God,
speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words.*
[14] *Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled
in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter.* [15] *Truth is lacking, and he who
departs from evil makes himself a prey.*

➤ It's so bad Isaiah says, that those who don't indulge in the sin of their culture, bear the
scorn, hatred, and sometimes persecution of those who do
Like those in our day who dare oppose all things homosexual or transgender
They become the *prey* of those in favor, within a vacuum of truth

Take the former CEO of Mozilla, Brendan Eich, who was forced out of his job earlier this
year, for donating \$1000 to Proposition 8 in CA, 6 years ago
Remember that, the initiative to define and limit marriage as the union of one male and
one female? He supported that 6 years ago with a donation, and became a *prey*

And the same thing is happening to Uganda on a nationwide scale – b/c of their laws
prohibiting the *practice* of homosexuality
They've become a prey to the government of our own country, who is pressuring them
to rescind their laws, with threats of withdrawing some of our monetary support
Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. (15)

➤ But the hardest pill to swallow, is that we're all in this together, and we all bear some of
the *responsibility*
Otherwise Isaiah wouldn't have used the all-inclusive language of *our* and *us* when
referring to the sin of *his* culture
*Our transgressions are multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us; for our
transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities*
We all bear some of the responsibility

That's why we can't turn a blind eye to so-called "private" sins; Or think we're insulated
from them within the confines of our white picket fences and godly lives; We're not
The ill-effects of closed-door sins don't stop at your doorstep
Like cheating on taxes; Or sexual immorality – homosexual or heterosexual; Or sex
changes; Or bribery; Or greed; Or pornography
You can't keep them *out*, and you can't keep them *in*; Not completely
Their ripple effect spreads outward and onward like the waves of a tsunami

And b/c we're all in this together, we all bear some of the responsibility

Not the *ultimate* responsibility, but certainly some of the temporal
The pronouns and example are inescapable

➤ As so is the judgment; God help us b/c the sin of our culture affects us all, and . . .

Judgment is coming (v15b-19)

That's the idea of v15-19

[15b] *The LORD saw it [referring to their sin], and it displeased him that there was no justice. [16] He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede [no one to stand in the gap, or even capable of it]; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him [it's a prophecy].*

[17] *He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak [metaphors for battle and judgment and bloodshed]. [18] According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render repayment [nobody will escape]. [19] So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun [the east]; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives [sudden and unstoppable].*

➤ B/c of your sin God says, judgment is coming; Something he reiterates and makes even clearer in Is 63:3-6; God is speaking, and says . . .

[3] *"I have trodden the winepress alone [a metaphor for the shedding of blood; think squeezing the red juice out of grapes with your feet], and from the peoples no one was with me [he's going to do it all himself]; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel. [4] For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come [again, he's speaking of something yet future, as if it's already happened]. [5] I looked, but there was no one to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold; so my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath upheld me [it sustained me in the midst of such judgment]. [6] I trampled down the peoples in my anger; I made them drunk in my wrath [still using the winepress analogy], and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth."*

Pretty strong; And though there's been plenty of bloodshed over the course of human history – some of it the result of fallen people in a fallen world . . .

And some, I can't help but think, the result of *God's* judgment . . .

This judgment, is yet to come; B/c the NT writers use some of the same imagery, to say the same thing

➤ Like the Apostle John in Rev 14, where Jesus begins to judge the earth during The Great Tribulation, and instructs some of his angels to do the same (**Rev 14:19-20**) Saying in v19-20 – *So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. [20] And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia.*

And later on, in Rev 19:15, it says – *He [Jesus] will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.* Same imagery

And then there's **2 Thess 1:7-8** that says – *When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels [8] in flaming fire, [he will inflict] vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*

Which sounds a lot like Is 59:18 – *According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies*

That's judgment; And no matter how you slice it, it's coming*****

And *our* culture's not exempt; If God saw *their* sin, he *certainly* sees ours; And . . .

The only hope is to repent (v20-21)

Just like v20 says – *"And a Redeemer will come to Zion [referring to the first coming of Jesus], to those in Jacob who turn from transgression," declares the LORD.*

That's repentance; When you admit your sin and sinfulness, and turn from it

[21] *"And as for me, this is my covenant with them," says the LORD [my promise, my guarantee to them]: "My Spirit that is upon you [speaking to his people], and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring," says the LORD, "from this time forth and forevermore."*

IOW what you *fail* to do and *can't* do, which is stay true to me – I'll do for you; By giving you my *Spirit*, and a spirit of obedience; My *words*, in you

But the promise only applies to those who repent; God's *Redeemer* only comes to those who *turn* from their transgression; And it's our only hope
Our only hope of protection from the wrath and judgment to come

➤ And it starts with us – the household of God; I mean if we don't, who will?
We need to repent of our *own* sin, we need to express godly sorrow for the sin our *culture*, and we need to bear fruit in keeping with repentance . . .
By doing everything we can to curb it; That's *our* responsibility

Not that it's going to stop it; The roll-tide of cultural sin will go on and on – the Bible is clear; And judgment will follow, both now and when Christ returns
And present that we are, we stand to suffer from its ill-effects, even though we're not the objects

But *some*, will be thwarted – at least for a time; And some *people* will *turn* as a result of our efforts; Some will repent; Some will be saved
Protecting them, just like us – from the wrath to come, and the fear along with it

That's *our* responsibility (**Summary**); So that God doesn't look at *our* culture like he did the Israelites, and say – *there was no man*, and *no one to intercede*; God help us

Prayer – Father, forgive us for our near-sighted complacency; Forgive us for turning a blind eye; Forgive us for our callous disregard; Create within us a clean heart, renew a right spirit, and help us to be a generation that seeks your face and rightly influences our culture; We give now to that end