

God Confronts  
September 6, 2020  
Allen Power

Isaiah 1:10-20

Imagine a married couple very prominent in their community. It's a picture-perfect relationship to everyone looking from the outside. The husband is obviously a good provider – nice home, nice cars, nice clothes. Every Saturday night the husband takes his wife on a very elaborate date night with flowers, gifts, and dinner at a fabulous restaurant. Their friends believe it's the perfect marriage.

What people don't see are the other six days of the week. The husband is paying off with expensive stuff and the image of a perfect marriage, but the other six days of the week he has no relationship with his wife. In fact, while he expects her to love, adore, and be faithful, he is none of those things. He expects her to look the other way. The "perfect" marriage is a sham. It's a business arrangement and a public relations ploy to look good to everyone in town. In the mind of this unfaithful husband he's living up to their "bargain" with resources but there is no relationship.

Sadly, that fictional story is an illustration of how some very devout "religious" people approach the God of the universe. They go "through the motions" and expect Him to bless them. To the watching world they are doing all the right things but there's no relationship with God day to day.

The prophet Isaiah began his written message to us by calling out the leaders of Judah for this very fault. To the watching world (and in their own eyes) they were "doing religion" by the book but living every other day with no relationship, no loyalty, and no obedience to their Creator.

Big Idea: Christ calls us to a covenant relationship not a religious arrangement. It's not about religious rituals; He expects love and obedience. The good news is when our relationship with God grows cold, He is ready to wash away the "stains" of our sin if we will "give up our evil ways" and return to the relationship.

Today we begin our study in the book of Isaiah. In many ways Isaiah is the most prominent Old Testament prophet. We're told he was the prophet most quoted in the New Testament. To learn more about Isaiah's significance in scripture I encourage you to consult the intro to this book in a good study Bible.

In the interest of time I would summarize by saying that Isaiah gave the people of Judah (and at times Israel as a whole) both condemnation and consolation. He told them the bad news of judgment for their sins, but balanced that with the message of hope that God was willing to forgive them. Best of all, Isaiah's prophecy gave us the picture of a coming Messiah who would purchase with His own blood a "new covenant" for His people.

Chapter one is the picture of a courtroom scene. Isaiah is the prosecuting attorney taking the nation and it's leaders to task for violating the covenant God had made with them. They had exchanged relationship for rituals. In verse two of Isaiah chapter one, God the Father is quoted:

*"The children I raised and cared for have rebelled against me. <sup>3</sup> Even an ox knows its owner, and a donkey recognizes its master's care—but Israel doesn't know its master. My people don't recognize my care for them."*

*[Isaiah adds] <sup>4</sup> Oh, what a sinful nation they are— loaded down with a burden of guilt. They are evil people, corrupt children who have rejected the Lord. They have despised the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. <sup>i</sup>*

- To paraphrase, *"Israel, your donkeys and oxen have a better understanding of relationship with their master than you do!"*
- In the course of Isaiah's prophecy God would allow Assyria and Babylon to pounce on Jerusalem as punishment for their sin and rebellion.
- Back in the courtroom, Isaiah spells out the particulars of their sin. Let's read verses 10-15 for the bad news. I promise there's good news too!

Isaiah 1:10–15 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup>Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!

<sup>11</sup>“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.

<sup>12</sup>“When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts?

<sup>13</sup>Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.

<sup>14</sup>Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.

<sup>15</sup>When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

- To get their attention, Isaiah compares them to Sodom and Gomorrah.
- The Lord was disgusted with their attempts to “buy” His favor with sacrifices of animals and the rituals of their festivals.
- We can imagine the leaders of Judah objecting: *“But Lord, we’re bringing you the best sacrifices and we’re doing everything to the letter of the law! We’re just doing church the way Moses told us to do it.”*
- They knew how to “play church” but the Lord said these were “vain offerings.” They had perverted what Moses told them and turned it into an elaborate “show” by adding more and more rituals in place of relationship.
- They were treating the God of the universe like a celestial “vending machine.” *“If we do the right rituals, sacrifice the best animals, and chant the right words, God will be pleased and bless us!”*
- Does that formula sound familiar? That’s the same formula the pagans used to try to earn the favor of their false idols. If you didn’t get the desired result you must not have followed the formula correctly.
- The people of Judah weren’t worshiping God by bringing sacrifices to pay for their sins, they were trying to buy God’s blessing by “doing religion.”

- Verse 13: “I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.” In other words, it doesn’t matter how well you do ritual if you go out and sin as if have no relationship with God. Back to our illustration, it doesn’t matter how great “date night” is if you’re unfaithful the other six days of the week.
- God wasn’t revoking the system of sacrifices yet (that would come when Jesus had died on the cross.) “Instead, He was calling for sincere faith and devotion. The leaders were carefully making the traditional sacrifices and offerings at holy celebrations, but they were still unfaithful to God in their hearts.”<sup>ii</sup>
- Verse 15: God said, “When you lift up your hands in prayer, I will not look. Though you offer many prayers, I will not listen, for your hands are covered with the blood of innocent victims.”<sup>iii</sup>
- It’s possible that the blood on their hands referred to actual violence or perhaps it was a symbol of their sin in general. Either way, God said they had “blood on their hands.”
- That’s the bad news but I promised good news. The good news is that God is offering to “settle out of court” for this violation of His covenant.

Isaiah 1:16–20 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup>Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, [Confess, repent, change – 1 John 1:9]

<sup>17</sup>learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause. [That sounds like Jesus!]

Jesus’ half brother James spoke to this in James 1:27 (ESV)

<sup>27</sup>Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

<sup>18</sup>“Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. [Psalm 51:7 – Purge me...whiter than snow.]

- Scarlet or red dye was deep, dark, and left a permanent stain on cloth. We may think our hearts are too sinful to be cleaned but there is no stain so deep that God cannot wash it away and make us “white as snow.”
- In verses 16 & 17 God called them to REPENT and REPLACE.
- Repent of their sinful behavior and replace it with the two greatest commandments:

The words of Jesus in Matthew 22:37–40 (ESV)

<sup>37</sup>And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup>This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup>And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup>On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

- Again, this isn’t about religion, it’s about a love relationship with God that is manifested in love for those around us.
- Verses 19 & 20 tell us there are really only two choices in relating to God: obedience or rebellion.

<sup>19</sup>If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land;  
<sup>20</sup>but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

- Blessing from God doesn’t come from doing religion; it comes from loving obedience to His word.
- Conversely, rebellion to God will result in punishment. It’s that simple.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- What about you and me? Do we have religion or a relationship with God?
- Christ calls us to a covenant relationship not a religious arrangement. It’s not about religious rituals; He expects love and obedience. He won’t bless a “sham marriage” that is all for show. He demands a real relationship.
- Of course, we are only in that relationship if we have trusted Christ as Savior and Lord. That decision is what begins our relationship with Him.

Micah 6:7–8 (ESV) calls us to relationship instead of religion:

<sup>7</sup>Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" <sup>8</sup>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?

- It would be easy for us to shake our heads and think this passage is only for people who treat church like a “country club” and treat God like a “celestial vending machine.”
- Can followers of Christ fall into this trap of being religious but neglecting our relationship? Of course we can. We’re still human and can tend to focus more on the religion than the relationship.
- The good news is when our relationship with God grows cold, He is ready to wash away the “stains” of our sin if we will “give up our evil ways” and return to the relationship.
- Our relationship with God shouldn’t just be a great “date night” on Sunday, but a loving, obedient relationship every day of the week.

---

<sup>i</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Is 1:2–4). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>ii</sup> Tyndale. Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size) (Kindle Locations 151216-151219). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

<sup>iii</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Is 1:15). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.