

Truths and Scriptures listed on pages 5 & 6.

Why do we judge some sins as worse than others – and does God do the same? Romans 1:16-2:11. Matthew 5:17-28

IN 2006, The film “An Inconvenient Truth” narrated by former Vice President Al Gore attempted to convince us that global warming was largely a crisis of our making and needed our solutions in order to change.

You know how well that message has been received: 5-years later we are still divided over this “inconvenient truth” with some refusing to believe any part of it while others anxiously look out the window.

That being said, how do you like the climate these days?

Today’s message attempting to answer the question “***Why do we judge some sins as worse than others – and does God do the same?***” probably falls along the same lines. It tells us some inconvenient truths, which we will either accept or deny at our own peril.

That being said, how do you like the spiritual climate these days?

But there is no way the answer to “Us, God, & Sin” can be packaged as a slick 15-minute sermon; the lesson would be too easily missed, ignored, or worse misunderstood. So the best I can do today is to share with you an outline, and some scriptures, asking you to go home think about it, and if you agree incorporate it into your life and worldview or bring your questions back to Church.

But the choice is yours. As, in the movie Matrix, Morpheus cautioned Neo, [if] *you take the blue pill [ignore these inconvenient truths] -- the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. [But if] you take the red pill -- you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit-hole goes.*”

So if you’re ready - and willing - let’s jump down this rabbit hole together.

Four inconvenient truths about how we and God judge sin.

#1 Inconvenient Truth: Though we no longer want to believe it, we have always lived in a two-part world in which the spiritual and physical realms are so intermeshed that whatever happens in one also impacts the other. For this reason, our relationships with other humans, indeed with all other parts of the physical realm, are directly influenced by our relationship with God in the spiritual realm.

- That is why the **Ten Commandment** are divided into two parts: first guiding our relationship with God (1-5) then guiding our relationship with each other (6-10)

- That is also why the Commandments in both the God and humanity sections have both an inward requirement and an outward application (Exodus 20:1-17).
 - *Do not worship other gods - do not make idols*
 - *Do not covet - do not steal*
- Thus "**sin**" is first defined as a spiritual condition but also as a physical action: Sin is rebellion against God, sin is the breaking of relationships, and sin is in the transgressing of laws.

In his letter to the Romans, explaining the Good news of God's offered salvation, Paul emphasizes this connection between the spiritual and physical world, so that we might understand our responsibility for having wandered away, and appreciate how God has worked to bring us back. **(Read Romans 1:16 – 2:10 in (The Message))**

#2 Inconvenient Truth: Because we live in this spiritual/physical world, the Ten Commandments have both an inward and an outward dimension (i.e. "do not covet" & "do not steal"). But because, unlike God, we are limited to what we can perceive of the spiritual realm, we must translate all of God's commands into outwardly enforceable laws: *Do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not move boundary markers.* **And we can only guess at each other's inward spiritual condition by watching their outward response to either God's commands or our laws.**

You can no more show me your works apart from your faith than I can show you my faith apart from my works. Faith and works, works and faith, fit together hand in glove. James 2:18

Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? Do you think they just happen? Think again. They come about because you want your own way, and fight for it deep inside yourselves. You lust for what you don't have and are willing to kill to get it. You want what isn't yours and will risk violence to get your hands on it. (James 4: 1-2)

So in order for us humans to live safely in communities, and to correct or control those who transgress our civil laws, we must make judgments regarding the nature and degree of "sin."

So we must rank sins, judging some as worse than others, never for the sake of condemnation but only for the purpose of giving an appropriate correction: Whether dealing with a bad attitude, a prejudice, a white lie, a friendship or business betrayal, adultery, theft, abuse, murder – we cannot treat all these sins as the same. And also realizing that in blindly working from the outside we are seeking to change the inward condition (*thus all our best efforts at correction are like doing surgery blindfolded*)

However, because we only deal with the outside, the trap that we humans often fall into is that of thinking that by obeying all the outward laws we can also assure a quality inward spiritual condition.

So while it may be true that all our civil laws can be fully obeyed by living up to the single positive command of **Loving God and your neighbor with all your being**, the reverse is not true. Even if we keep all the laws we are not necessarily **Loving God and our neighbor with all our being** (Mark 12:28-34).

Neither by keeping the laws have we merited God's favor, for as the Bible teaches, *God doesn't accept people simply because they obey the Law. No, indeed! All the Law does is to point out our sin (Romans 3.20 cev)*

Which leads to

#3 Inconvenient Truth: God, who lives in the spiritual realm, who also created and easily moves through our physical realm, has no such perceptual limitations: God not only sees our physical actions, he knows our spiritual reality, for God easily reads the inward causes behind our outward actions

As God told Samuel, when he sent in search of Israel's next king: *"Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, ... for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."* 1 Samuel 16:7

And God's ability to seeing the inward motivations behind our outward actions is also what shaped Jesus' remarks on sin in his sermon on the mount: **(read: Matthew 5:17-24, 27-28)**

Thus God who thoroughly knows both our inward and outward condition, ranks all sin as equal

- Because God sees all our sins at their very inception within our thoughts
- And whether or not such inward sin leads to any outward action it still dramatically impacts our spiritual as well as our physical world (see truth #1)
- That is why God considers
 - anger as equal to murder
 - lust as equal to fornication
 - public displays of righteousness as idolatrous self-worship rather than true worship.

Because to entertain such sins in our mind makes them part of our spiritual reality, affecting our relationship with God and with others.

#4 Inconvenient (but Glorious) Truth:

- And because no form of sin can exist in the presence of God (spiritual rebellion, broken relations, or transgressed laws).

- And because in one way or another all of us have thus sinned
- And because none of us (except God's son Jesus) have lived a completely holy inward and outward life sufficient to merit the label "righteous"

Our only path to righteousness, our only hope of forgiveness and Heaven, is to by faith accept the gift of forgiveness freely and lovingly offered to all of us through the payment made in our behalf by Jesus, God's son.

The truth is that God knows everything about us from our noblest acts to our deepest, darkest, dirtiest secrets, Yet God loves us still and loves us so deeply that he sent his son Jesus into our world on a rescue mission – looking for us! Offering us forgiveness and restoration

So that you and I, everyone who would turn to God in faith asking for forgiveness and a new life *can be found in him, not having a righteousness of [our] own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith* (Philippians 3.9).

This circles us back to the question.

While we humans do and should rank some sins as worse than others (only for the purpose of correction never for condemnation), we all stand equally guilty before God, equally in need of a savior.

For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. (Romans 3:23-25)

amen

4 inconvenient Truths about how we and God rank sin.

#1 Inconvenient Spiritual Truth: Though we no longer want to believe it, we live in a two-part world in which the spiritual and physical realms are so intermeshed that whatever happens in one also impacts the other. For this reason, our relationships with other humans, indeed all other parts of the physical realm, are directly influenced by our relationship with God in the spiritual realm. In his letter to the Romans, Paul emphasizes this connection between the spiritual and physical world, so that we might understand our responsibility for having wandered away, and appreciate how God has worked to bring us back. (Romans 1:16 – 2:10)

#2 Inconvenient Spiritual Truth: Because we live in this spiritual/physical world, the Ten Commandments have both an inward and an outward dimension (i.e. “do not covet” & “do not steal”). But because, unlike God, we are limited to what we can perceive of the spiritual realm, we must translate all of God’s commands into outwardly enforceable laws: *Do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not move boundary markers.* And we can only guess at other’s inward, spiritual, condition by watching their outward response to either God’s commands or our laws. (James 2:18, 4:1-2).

So we humans must rank sins, never for the sake of condemnation but for the purpose of giving an appropriate, restorative correction. A bad attitude, a prejudice, a white lie, a friendship or business betrayal, theft, abuse, murder: these need different responses on our part.

#3 Inconvenient Spiritual Truth: God, who lives in the spiritual realm, but who also created our physical realm, has no such perceptual limitations: God not only sees our physical actions, he knows our spiritual reality and easily reads all the inward causes behind our outward actions (1 Samuel 16:7 & Matthew 5:17-24, and following)

Thus God ranks all sin equally, because God sees all our sins at their very inception within our thoughts and knows how they will affect our spiritual relationships with God and humanity. Whether or not such inward sin leads to any outward action it still dramatically impacts our spiritual as well as our physical world (see truth #1) That is why God considers

- anger as equal to murder
- lust as equal to fornication
- public displays of religiosity as idolatry (self-worship) rather than true worship.

#4 Inconvenient (but glorious) Spiritual Truth: Because in one way or another all of us have thus sinned, in thought or deed, our only path to righteousness, our only hope of forgiveness and Heaven, is to by faith accept the gift of forgiveness freely and lovingly offered to all of us through the payment made in our behalf by Jesus, God’s son.

The truth is that God knows everything about us from our noblest act to our deepest, darkest, dirtiest secret, Yet God loves us still and loves us so deeply that he sent his son Jesus into our world on a rescue mission – looking for us! Offering us forgiveness and restoration ... so that you, I, and everyone who would turn to God in faith asking for a new life *can be found in him, not having a righteousness of [our] own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith* (Philippians 3.9).

For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. (Romans 3:23-25)

Romans 1: 16-2:11

16 It's news I'm most proud to proclaim, this extraordinary Message of God's powerful plan to rescue everyone who trusts him, starting with Jews and then right on to everyone else! **17** God's way of putting people right shows up in the acts of faith, confirming what Scripture has said all along: "The person in right standing before God by trusting him really lives." Ignoring God Leads to a Downward Spiral **18** But God's angry displeasure erupts as acts of human mistrust and wrongdoing and lying accumulate, as people try to put a shroud over truth. **19** But the basic reality of God is plain enough. Open your eyes and there it is! **20** By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can't see: eternal power, for instance, and the mystery of his divine being. So nobody has a good excuse. **21** What happened was this: People knew God perfectly well, but when they didn't treat him like God, refusing to worship him, they trivialized themselves into silliness and confusion so that there was neither sense nor direction left in their lives. **22** They pretended to know it all, but were illiterate regarding life. **23** They traded the glory of God who holds the whole world in his hands for cheap figurines you can buy at any roadside stand. **24** So God said, in effect, "If that's what you want, that's what you get." It wasn't long before they were living in a pigpen, smeared with filth, filthy inside and out. **25** And all this because they traded the true God for a fake god, and worshiped the god they made instead of the God who made them - the God we bless, the God who blesses us. Oh, yes! **26** Worse followed. Refusing to know God, they soon didn't know how to be human either - women didn't know how to be women, men didn't know how to be men. **27** Sexually confused, they abused and defiled one another, women with women, men with men - all lust, no love. And then they paid for it, oh, how they paid for it - emptied of God and love, godless and loveless wretches. **28** Since they didn't bother to acknowledge God, God quit bothering them and let them run loose. **29** And then all hell broke loose: rampant evil, grabbing and grasping, vicious backstabbing. They made life hell on earth with their envy, wanton killing, bickering, and cheating. Look at them: mean-spirited, venomous, **30** fork-tongued God-bashers. Bullies, swaggerers, insufferable windbags! They keep inventing new ways of wrecking lives. They ditch their parents when they get in the way. **31** Stupid, slimy, cruel, cold-blooded. **32** And it's not as if they don't know better. They know perfectly well they're spitting in God's face. And they don't care - worse, they hand out prizes to those who do the worst things best! **1** Those people are on a dark spiral downward. But if you think that leaves you on the high ground where you can point your finger at others, think again. Every time you criticize someone, you condemn yourself. It takes one to know one. Judgmental criticism of others is a well-known way of escaping detection in your own crimes and misdemeanors. **2** But God isn't so easily diverted. He sees right through all such smoke screens and holds you to what you've done. **3** You didn't think, did you, that just by pointing your finger at others you would distract God from seeing all your misdoings and from coming down on you hard? **4** Or did you think that because he's such a nice God, he'd let you off the hook? Better think this one through from the beginning. God is kind, but he's not soft. In kindness he takes us firmly by the hand and leads us into a radical life-change. **5** You're not getting by with anything. Every refusal and avoidance of God adds fuel to

the fire. The day is coming when it's going to blaze hot and high, God's fiery and righteous judgment. **6** Make no mistake: In the end you get what's coming to you - **7** Real Life for those who work on God's side, **8** but to those who insist on getting their own way and take the path of least resistance, Fire! **9** If you go against the grain, you get splinters, regardless of which neighborhood you're from, what your parents taught you, what schools you attended. **10** But if you embrace the way God does things, there are wonderful payoffs, again without regard to where you are from or how you were brought up. **11** Being a Jew won't give you an automatic stamp of approval. God pays no attention to what others say (or what you think) about you. He makes up his own mind.

Matthew 5:17-24, 27,28

17 "Don't suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures - either God's Law or the Prophets. I'm not here to demolish but to complete. I am going to put it all together, pull it all together in a vast panorama. **18** God's Law is more real and lasting than the stars in the sky and the ground at your feet. Long after stars burn out and earth wears out, God's Law will be alive and working. **19** "Trivialize even the smallest item in God's Law and you will only have trivialized yourself. But take it seriously, show the way for others, and you will find honor in the kingdom. **20** Unless you do far better than the Pharisees in the matters of right living, you won't know the first thing about entering the kingdom. **21** "You're familiar with the command to the ancients, 'Do not murder.' **22** I'm telling you that anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder. Carelessly call a brother 'idiot!' and you just might find yourself hauled into court. Thoughtlessly yell 'stupid!' at a sister and you are on the brink of hellfire. The simple moral fact is that words kill. **23** "This is how I want you to conduct yourself in these matters. If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, **24** abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God.

27 "You know the next commandment pretty well, too: 'Don't go to bed with another's spouse.' **28** But don't think you've preserved your virtue simply by staying out of bed. Your heart can be corrupted by lust even quicker than your body. Those leering looks you think nobody notices - they also corrupt