

Understanding Revelation Part 25

The Seriousness of Sin

Revelation 16:1-21

Randy, the painter, often thinned his paint to make it go further. So when the local Baptist Church decided to restore its biggest building. Randy put in a low bid and got the job.

He bought the paint, and, yes, thinned it to make it go further. Well, Randy was painting away, the job nearly completed, when suddenly there was a clap of thunder. The sky opened, and the rain poured down. It washed the thinned paint off the church.

Randy fell from the scaffold, landing among the puddles of paint that had run off the building. He was no fool. He knew this was a judgment from the Almighty. Randy raised his voice to the heavens, crying, "Oh, God, forgive me; what should I do?"

And from above, a mighty voice roared: "Repaint! Repaint! And thin no more!"

While we might chuckle at that really bad joke, the fact is that sin and repentance are no laughing matters. This passage reminds us of just how serious of a matter that sin is.

What is not surprising in our culture is the fact that unbelievers underestimate the seriousness of sin.

People openly flaunt behaviors that the Bible clearly identifies as sinful.

They joke that they don't mind going to hell because all of their buddies will be there, too, and they'll have a great time partying together, not realizing that the fate that awaits them will be more horrible than they could ever imagine.

But what is really scary to me is that those of us who identify ourselves as Christians also have a tendency to underestimate the seriousness of sin.

And much of that blame must go to the church itself and to those within the church that have peddled a "cheap grace" that minimizes the seriousness of our sin and the need for genuine repentance.

So there are many so called Christians who just keep on sinning because they figure all they have to do is to ask God and He'll forgive their sin, which He will, at least up to a point.

We will never truly be able to live the kind of life God want us to live until we begin to see our sin from His perspective and realize just how serious it is.

Chapter 16 of Revelation very clearly presents the seriousness of our sin from God's perspective.

1. Sin is serious because its impact is far-reaching (Vs. 1-8)

These first four bowls impact the earth, the seas, the waters and the objects in the heavens.

But there is an increasing intensity to these judgments of God.

While the seals and trumpets only impacted a portion of God's creation, the bowls impact all of it. So why would God pour out judgment on that which He has created, that which He called "good" at the moment of creation?

After all, the creation itself, with the exception of man, doesn't sin.

(Rom 8:19-22) - *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*

Notice here that the creation is described as being "subjected to futility" and in "bondage to corruption".

It has constantly been groaning and looking forward to that day when it will be set free from that bondage.

But how did the creation get into bondage in the first place?

Because man is an integral part of God's creation, when man sins, it not only impacts man, but it also affects the entire creation.

So when God purges the earth of sin at the return of Jesus, He not only has to deal with humans who have sinned, but He also has to cleanse the rest of the physical creation which has been negatively impacted by that sin.

How many times have you heard someone excuse their sin by claiming that it's not hurting anyone else?

But sin never occurs in a vacuum.

It always impacts other people and it even impacts the very creation all around us.

Sin is serious first of all because it is so far reaching.

2. Sin is serious because it plunges us into the dominion of darkness (Vs. 10-16)

Again, you'll note that the pattern of the fifth and sixth bowls mirrors the fifth and sixth seal and trumpet.

The fifth in each series deals not with the physical, but with the spiritual.

The fifth seal pictured the martyrs under the altar praying and the fifth trumpet pictured a demonic host being released from the abyss.

The sixth in each series deals with the preparations for the return of Jesus and the completion of God's judgment.

The sixth seal pictured the chaos in the skies that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24 that would occur immediately before His return.

And the sixth trumpet also dealt with the Euphrates River and the great demonic army that was preparing for a final battle.

Both the fifth and sixth trumpets, in particular, give insight into the dominion of Satan and his agents and to their final demise.

For a period of time Satan and his agents have been granted a degree of dominion over this earth by God.

That is why in Ephesians 2 Satan is called the "prince of the power of the air".

And whenever we sin, we subject ourselves to the authority of that dominion.

Remember that right after Peter acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus began to reveal to His closest followers that He was going to be rejected and killed and rise from the grave three days later?

When Peter tried to rebuke Jesus, Jesus responded with these words: **(Mark 8:33)** - *But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*

Obviously, Jesus was not implying that Peter had actually become Satan.

But when he sinned by seeking the things of men rather than the things of God, he was yielding himself to that dominion of darkness in which Satan rules.

But that dominion is limited. Unlike the dominion of God, it will not last forever.

But while it is in place, it operates by darkness and deception and when we sin, we open ourselves up to the effects of that process.

Sin is serious because it is so far-reaching and it is serious because it plunges us into the dominion of darkness.

3. Sin is serious because it clouds our view of the future (Vs. 17-21)

Let's step back for a moment and look at the larger picture.

Three times in this chapter we see man cursing God.

That is certainly consistent with the response to the sixth seal when men prayed for the mountains to fall on them and kill them so that they will be spared the wrath of God.

And we saw a similar response after the sixth trumpet, where those impacted by the trumpet judgments refuse to repent.

This is really hard for me to understand.

It is clear that these people recognize that these events represent judgment from the hand of God and yet they still refuse to repent and turn to Him.

Instead they choose to curse Him.

It seems that man's judgment has been so clouded by sin that he now believes that he would be better off dead

because death would somehow be a release from the tremendous tribulation occurring on the earth at this time.

And this isn't the first place in the Bible where we've seen that mindset. Remember Mrs. Job? **(Job 2:9)** - *Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die."*

Mrs. Job had the idea that her husband would be better off dead than to go through the physical torment that he was experiencing.

Both Mrs. Job and those who curse God here in Revelation 16 have been deceived into believing that there is nothing more to life than this physical life here on earth.

And there is evidence that the more a person sins, the more he or she is likely to be deceived into believing that.

But the clear record of Scripture is that there is an everlasting component to our lives.

Every person will either experience eternal rest and eternal life in the presence of Jesus, or they will face everlasting torment separated from God.

And that final destiny is determined completely and solely based on whether or not we commit our lives to Jesus.

Sin is serious because it is so far-reaching; it is serious because it plunges us into the dominion of darkness; and it is serious because it clouds our view of the future.

4. Sin is serious because its impact is not limited to unbelievers

Remember we skipped verse 15 a few minutes ago. Let's go back and read it now: (Vs. 15)

At first glance, it is not totally clear whether this verse is intended to be an admonition to believers or whether it is a further warning to unbelievers. But if we go back to the message to the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3, we find some very similar wording:

(Revelation 3:18) - *I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.*

That message, as you'll remember, was clearly directed to Christ-followers and the fact that the wording here in chapter 16 is so similar leads me to believe that this is primarily an admonition to believers.

The picture here probably comes from the practices of the Temple police

When the captain of the temple guards would make his rounds at night, if a member of the temple police was found asleep at his post, his clothes were taken off and burned and he was sent away naked in disgrace.

Garments are used frequently in the Bible as a picture of spiritual preparedness:

(Galatians 3:27) - *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

The verb translated "put on" literally means to "put on a garment".

(Ephesians 4:20-24) - *But that is not the way you learned Christ! - assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Again in verse 24, the verb "put on" is the same verb that literally means to put on a garment.

So the idea here is that as believers we need to make the proper spiritual preparations so that we won't be impacted by sin.

Sin is serious because it is so far-reaching;

it is serious because it plunges us into the dominion of darkness;

it is serious because it clouds our view of the future;

and it is serious because its impact is not limited to unbelievers.

And because sin is so serious, it requires a serious response.

The seriousness of my sin requires a serious response – repentance

We tend to throw the word "repent" around so much that I often worry that we've lost sight of what is required for genuine repentance.

So let's see what we can learn about genuine repentance, and then, even more importantly, see how we can develop a lifestyle of repentance in our own lives.

Let's begin with the word itself.

Normally, I try not to burden you with too much Greek grammar and vocabulary, but this is one of those times where we must understand the underlying word in order to grasp the concept.

The Greek verb "repent" is "metanoeo".

It is a compound word:

"meta" = "after", "with" or "around"

"noeo" = "to direct one's mind to a subject"

When we put these words together, we get the following definition of the word: "to think differently after being informed with the truth"

Metanoeo is much deeper than merely changing one's mind.

It is a complete reversal of one's previous attitudes, beliefs and actions.

Thus it is often pictured, quite accurately, as "making a u-turn".

But while that picture is accurate, as you can see, there is a lot more to repentance than merely making a u-turn.

In Scripture we can identify **five essential elements of genuine repentance:**

1. See my sin from God's perspective

I begin the process of repentance by choosing to see my sin from God's perspective rather than from my own perspective.

The more we get to know God and to view things from His perspective, the more we understand the seriousness of our sin.

The Book of Job is a great example of how this works.

Job begins with the two chapter narrative of the events that occur in Job's life.

And then for the next 35 chapters we read the account of the conversation between Job and his so called "friends".

And there we find Job consistently defending himself and claiming that he is righteous.

But beginning in chapter 38, Job has an encounter with God.

And at the end of that encounter, Job speaks these words:

(Job 42:5-6) - *I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*"

By all accounts, Job was a very moral and religious man.

But once God revealed Himself to Job, Job understood his true nature and the seriousness of his sin.

And as a result he despised himself and he repented.

There is no doubt that Job "thought differently" after being informed with the truth" is there?

If there is one thing that we can learn from the book of Revelation, it is that God views sin very seriously and that one day He is going to bring severe judgment upon those who fail to understand just how serious sin is to Him.

2. Grieve over my sin

There were some who probably recognized how serious their sin was.

But they weren't willing to go any further than that.

In order for there to be genuine repentance, we must move on to the next step, which is to grieve over our sin:

(2 Corinthians 7:10) - *For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.*

There are plenty of people who have worldly grief.

They may be sorry that they got caught or sorry that they are suffering the consequences of their sin, but that is not godly grief.

Godly grief occurs when our hearts are broken over our sin because we realize just how much our sin breaks God's heart.

We see that kind of godly grief demonstrated by the tax collector in Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector:

(Luke 18:13) - *But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'*

Genuine repentance requires that I first see my sin from God's perspective, and that I then grieve over my sin. The third aspect of genuine repentance is that I must...

3. Take appropriate action

Although repentance begins with a change of mind, it is always accompanied by appropriate action. We see this clearly in Paul's address to King Agrippa:

(Acts 26:19-20) - *Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance*

Notice the connection between deeds and repentance.

Genuine repentance always requires some kind of action.

Once I understand my sin and grieve over it I must take the appropriate action to prevent falling back into that same sin over and over again and allowing it to become a lifestyle.

If I'm prone to gossip, then I need to avoid situations where gossip is likely to occur or being with people who tend to gossip.

If I'm an alcoholic, I better avoid hanging out in bars or associating with people who drink all the time.

If I'm addicted to pornography then I better not isolate myself behind closed doors with my computer.

If I'm a glutton, then I probably should avoid the buffet line at Golden Corral.

Genuine repentance requires that I first see my sin from God's perspective, that I then grieve over my sin, that I take appropriate action to avoid a lifestyle of sin. The fourth aspect of genuine repentance is that I...

4. Make repentance a lifestyle

Although there is an aspect of repentance in which we make a onetime decision to turn from sin and commit our lives to Jesus, that should never be the whole extent of our repentance as Christ-followers.

Unfortunately, this aspect of repentance is one that many Christ followers seem to ignore the most.

We tend to think that we can just repent once and were good to go for the rest of our lives.

But if we look carefully at the words of both John the Baptizer and Jesus, we see that this is just not the case.

(Matthew 3:1-2) - *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

(Matthew 4:17) - *From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

The command that both John and Jesus gave to "repent" is a present tense command.

In essence the command is to "keep on repenting".

In other words, repentance is to be a lifestyle for every Christ-follower.

Let's make sure we continuously view our sin from God's perspective and grieve over that sin.

And then every day let's make sure we take the appropriate action to remove the temptations in our lives that might draw us back into sin.

Finally, genuine repentance requires that I...

5. Understand the consequences of not repenting

Those who choose not to repent are condemned, by their own choice, to an everlasting judgment in a horrible place separated from God.

But frankly, they are without excuse, because God has very clearly warned in both the Old and New Testament of the consequences of not repenting:

(Psalm 7:12-13) - *If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow; he has prepared for him his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts*

And then there are these words of Jesus, words that are so important that he repeated them word for word twice within just a couple of verses:

(Luke 13:3-5) - No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

Sin is no laughing matter.

It is a very serious matter to God and therefore we need to take it seriously, too.

And the only way that we can do that is to develop a lifestyle of repentance.

Ask God to help you see your sin from His perspective and to grieve over that sin.

Make a commitment before God to take the appropriate actions to avoid falling into a lifestyle of sin.

Ask God to help you to develop a lifestyle of repentance.