

1. The LORD Brings Three Categories of Evidence Against His People

a. Exhibit A: Relational Depravity

i. There is no:

1. faithfulness - loyalty, covenantal promise-keeping
2. kindness - chesed, faithful-loyal love
3. knowledge of the LORD - you don't know me
 - a. They still knew *of* God, but they refused to accept Him *as He had revealed Himself to be* so as to live in accordance with Him and His truth
 - b. They were still religious (note that the priests were multiplying) but they did not know God nor give to Him loyalty (6:6)
 - c. This lack of knowledge is the ultimate and foundational problem, i.e. sin of the Lord's people (mentioned numerous times in this context as a lack of knowledge, not knowing the LORD, having no understanding, etc.)
4. These are all rooted in idolatry language and adultery
 - a. Reminds us of Romans 1:18ff
 - i. "although they knew God, they refused to honor Him or give thanks to Him"
 - ii. "exchanging the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles..."
 - b. vv.12-14
 - i. adulteries and temple prostitutes
 - ii. openly at the high places they corrupt themselves with idolatries
 - c. We may not "commit adultery" in the physically sexual sense, but have we committed spiritual adultery by trusting in created things instead of the Lord for our blessing and joy?
5. So, we see that there is "knowledge of God" but that there is no kind of knowledge that leads to faithfulness to Him, or the faithful covenant-keeping love that would exemplify the one who truly knows God. And this is the primary problem with the people of God and God's primary contention: You do not know Me rightly. This lack of knowledge and failure to be faithful in covenant love (truly a failure of the first two commandments) results in a complete breakdown in the following of the final commandments and a moral depravity that "destroys my people"

ii. There is:

1. swearing and lying
 - a. You shall not take the LORD's name emptily (Ex 20:7)
 - b. You shall not bear false witness (Ex 20:16)
2. murder and theft
 - a. You shall not steal (Ex 20:15)
 - b. You shall not murder (Ex 20:13)
3. committing adultery
 - a. You shall not commit adultery (Ex 20:14)
4. breaking through and strike (violence?)
 - a. You shall not covet your neighbor's things
 - b. bloods upon bloods
5. I don't believe I have to strain to see how these apply to our own society, even ourselves within the church

b. Exhibit B: Ecological Destruction

- i. the land mourns (see Rom 8)
- ii. the inhabitants of the land languish
 1. beast of the field

- 2. birds of the sky
 - 3. fish of the sea
 - iii. are dragged away
 - 1. not a rebuke of fishing! ☺
 - 2. The animals have not been managed well and are disappearing from the land as the land mourns due to the sin of God's imagebearers
 - iv. Reminiscent of Creation story, only disordered
 - 1. Gen 1:26-28, creation of man to rule over creation as God's ambassador
 - 2. Mankind has failed to rule well, as God does, so God presents His case as a breach of man to fulfill his created purpose over creation
- c. Exhibit C: Leadership Decay (v4-9)
- i. The priests are held responsible for the people's lack of knowledge
 - 1. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge, *because you have rejected knowledge*"
 - 2. They forgot (again, they did not live according to its promises or its ways) the Law of God
 - 3. Therefore God will "forget" their children
 - ii. The priests abused the honor (glory) that God had given them (being near to Him in His service with their whole lives) by making their position of influence and power into greedy gain for the fatness of the sacrifices
 - 1. "eat up the sins of my people" most likely refers to the sacrifices that were brought in because of sin, some of which was given to the priests to eat.
 - 2. So, the priests, evidentially, were increasing the sins of the people (at least not fighting against these sins for the sake of God's people) so that they could live luxuriously off the people's sins
 - iii. Ultimately, both the people and the priests are responsible and God is bringing judgment upon the nation because of the failure of leadership and the moral depravity of his people

2. The Warnings are Announced

- a. Warning of Empty Dissatisfaction (10-19)
 - i. God will give them the emptiness that accompanies sinful extravagance
 - 1. "They will eat but not be satisfied"
 - 2. "They will whore but not multiply"
 - ii. This judgment is because they have turned away from the Lord to trust in "pieces of wood" and their "walking staff"
 - 1. strong sardonic by God here
 - 2. emphasizing the inadequacy and impotence of their gods
 - iii. God will "give them over" to their lusts (see Romans 1:24) to do things that empty them of happiness and dry up their souls to ruin (v14)
 - iv. They are caught up in a whirlwind that leads them to great shame.
- b. Warning to Flee from Such Sins
 - i. "Leave Ephraim alone in his sin!"
 - ii. Stay away from the empty fruitless wordy religion of Israel
 - 1. "As the LORD lives" upon the mountain of "Beth-Aven" (House of Wickedness) as a renaming of Bethel (House of God)
 - 2. The people were still claiming YHWH's name and His goodness upon them but were mixing Him in with other gods and the flagrant disregard for His Word and His desires
 - a. Isn't this what we fall into?
 - b. "As the LORD lives" is rather, "I love Jesus", but our lives look no different than the world

- i. Divorce rates in the church are similar to the greater society: 1 out of 2
- ii. Sexual immorality and cohabitation
- iii. Addiction to pornography, food, alcohol, gambling, etc.
- iv. Little concern for the poor, the needy, the hungry, the enemy
- v. Self-centeredness in all things rather than God-centeredness
 - 1. This is the major problem that indicates a lack of knowledge of God
 - 2. Humble self-forgetfulness is the initiative mark of the Spirit of God that exalts Christ and honors one's neighbor

3. What Are We to Do?

- a. Recognize His Case as True
 - i. God's case is airtight against us
 - ii. We *have* sinned by trusting in other things, even while claiming His name
 - iii. Don't make up things, but recognize what is there
 - 1. Your sins may not be as blatant as adultery on a hilltop, but Jesus applies the Law to the heart
 - 2. How is your love for your enemy? Is there bitterness or anger in my heart? Lust for power or control over my own life? Unbelief that God will provide, so a pursuit of wealth or success or man's love of me that has enslaved me?
 - 3. Have I made sacrifices that I believe make God owe me a good life?
- b. Repent of Trusting in Lesser gods (including ourselves)
 - i. Turn away from trusting in these things and turn again to the LORD for joy and for blessing
 - ii. The sorrow of betrayal, which is what idolatry is, over not just a sin against an impersonal law, but a personal betrayal of the God who loves you and has been extraordinarily kind to you.
 - iii. Let this sorrow lead you to repentance and a salvation without regret, for God accepts repentant sinners, not self-righteous law-keepers (2 Cor 7:10)
- c. Remember and Rejoice in the Grace of God in Christ
 - i. God loves you more than you can even imagine!
 - 1. Though He may wound your spirit and your body when you stray from Him, it is only because He desires you to know Him
 - 2. He wants you to return to Him, "Return to Me!"
 - ii. The betrayals that we have committed against God are covered by the blood of Jesus Christ
 - iii. 1 Corinthians 4:3-4
 - iv. Galatians 3

The apostles found the secret: The trial is over for them. They are out of the courtroom, the ultimate verdict is in: innocent in Christ. Only the opinion of the Lord counts. How is this possible? We are out of the courtroom because Jesus Christ went into the courtroom. He became the Lamb, the sacrifice, the substitute in our place and accepted the verdict of guilty and gave us His evidence for innocence. He bore the verdict of destruction that we deserved and gave us His verdict of righteous. So now, for the believer in Jesus Christ, His verdict applies to us and it comes before our performance (Romans 8:1). So, we perform knowing the verdict is in already. We now honor God who saves us graciously and work good joyfully. You see, it is only the Gospel of sheer grace that brings true humility and true obedient faithfulness. It is the Gospel that sets us free from our distrusting idolatrous hearts and gives us peace with God and with each other and with Creation. Now when God looks at you he sees one who is infinitely valuable and lovely, just as He sees Jesus. How can you worry about having enough? How can you worry about how you appear before others? Where is the power of fear? It is gone. It has been cast out by perfect love, His perfect love.