

# The Compass

Week 36

OT Readings: Ecclesiastes 4:1 – Isaiah 5:30

NT Readings: 2 Cor. 6:14 – 11:15

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## Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

### Old Testament

- Ecclesiastes concludes, “fear God and keep His commandments.” (12:13)
- For help with the Song of Songs (Solomon), see “How to Read Song of Songs.”
- The historical context for Isaiah 1-39 is Isa. 1:1 listing the kings of Judah to whom Isaiah prophesied. God builds a case against His people: they are religious, proud, idolatrous and their land is filled with the social injustice that unfaithfulness to God has produced.

### New Testament

- 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1 feels a bit like a parenthesis or digression in the argument; read 6:11-13 and then jump to 7:2f. to follow the flow.
- In chapters 8-9 Paul exhorts them to get their offering together to aid their brethren in Jerusalem. What can you learn about giving and generosity?
- In 10-13, Paul returns to a defense of his apostleship over against other itinerates that have come to Corinth, whom he sarcastically calls “super-apostles.” (11:5)<sup>1</sup>

## Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

**Isa 5:1-7.** Often in our self-absorption we miss the heartbeat of God. It is easy enough to read quickly through this passage and miss the depth of God’s pathos, pain and frustration over His indifferent and wayward people. Using a familiar agricultural image of a vineyard, God reveals His heart to Judah, “What else could I do!?” (5:4) His efforts of preparation made the situation ideal for fruitfulness (5:1-2), the outcome should have been radically different. And now having done all within His power to change the situation, He finds Himself left with only one course – to abandon His vineyard altogether.

God is not a rock or stone, impervious to pain and disappointment. He does not relate to us from a distance. He is intimately attached to us, His heart filled with longing for our very best. And so often, too often, He finds Himself in relationship with us like His relationship with this vineyard.

Are you, am I, living in the conscious awareness of how our choices, our thinking, our attitudes, our hearts impact Him?<sup>2</sup> The One who is closer to us than any other person feels intimately and intensely our life (1 Cor. 6:12-20).<sup>3</sup>

Let’s put away our indifference, our passivity, our outright rebellion and repent deeply and thoroughly for what we have done to the heart and life of God.

## Application: “What about me? How does this apply?”

**Isa 1:10-20.** If we were to think about dangers to our faith, we might make a laundry list of various temptations. Yet it is likely that the greatest danger of all would *not* be on our list – *religion*. It is subtle; it “boils the frog” so slowly that once you realize you’ve gotten religious it is difficult to escape. After all, it is so, well, comfortable and comforting.<sup>4</sup> Yet it makes God tired (1:14), perhaps even vomit (Rev. 3:16).

Those to whom Isaiah speaks these words were doing all the “right” things, things even commanded by God; attending services (1:12-14), sacrificing (1:11), praying (1:15). Yet, there was a gap, a disconnect, between these externals and the real reality of their heart and lives (1:16-17). But their religion made them feel good, it soothed the conscience as they hardened their hearts against God’s voice and God. The results would be disastrous (1:19). Yet, God in His patience invites them to come to Him, to “reason together,” to “argue this out.” Mercy was available, repentance was needed.

Here is what we must ask, “Am I satisfied with external conformity, keeping the ritual, keeping the rules or is my heart desperate for God; am I discontent with the status quo and want to encounter Him for real?” If you’re satisfied, you are a prime candidate for religion. Better check the water temp.<sup>5</sup>

### Difficult Question of the Week

#### 2 Cor. 7:9-10. Q. “What is *true* repentance?”

I sense a theme this week! The answer to religion is authentic relationship lived out (Isa. 1:10-20), the road to fruitfulness is to draw close to the heart of God (Isa. 5:1-7); the doorway into both is to live a lifestyle of *repentance*. Repentance is sadly misunderstood. It is sometimes seen as an outdated idea or as only negative (we only want to feel good these days) or something we did one time to get saved. In fact, for the heart in love with God, it is the way to change, the way to walk in the new life God has for us; it is wonderfully positive! Here is the passage in the NAU:

“I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of* repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of* God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us.<sup>10</sup> For the sorrow that is according to *the will of* God produces a repentance without regret, *leading to* salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.”

Paul contrasts what we call “remorse” (“sorrow”) with true repentance. We will be deceived if we believe that real repentance is *only* feeling bad about our sin or situation or thinking differently about sin. It is both, but we have not truly repented until we choose with our will to **act**, thus having the “repentance leading to salvation.”<sup>6</sup> Biblical repentance is an act of will, a choice to think and do differently and **then to actually do it**. You might object, “This feels like works to me.” God leads in the process and His grace is sufficient to empower us to change, but He requires us to do our part.<sup>7</sup> If we fail to act, we have not repented, we are living in disobedience and our lives will never change. The upside is this: if we walk in a lifestyle of repentance, we will experience the joy, freedom and life that come when we conform our lives to God’s!

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<sup>1</sup> The distinct change in direction and in tone has led many scholars to conclude that chapters 10-13 are a separate letter from chapters 1-9.

<sup>2</sup> Ask yourself this practically. How are my actions/activities, things I watch, imaginations I indulge, ways that I use my time/money, attitudes, impacting God? Take a day and ask the Holy Spirit to make you aware in your normal daily routine – what do you see? What will you do?

<sup>3</sup> In 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 Paul is concerned that these believers not succumb to the rampant immorality of the world around them and of which they were once a part. 6:17 shows the closeness of God to us, we are “one spirit with Him.” The implication is clear – we impact Him intimately with our lives.

<sup>4</sup> “Boiling the frog” is an allusion to the idea of putting a frog in a pan of water and slowly increasing the temperature until it is dead; the whole time apparently oblivious to what is happening, “Does it seem warm in here to you?” I don’t know if this is an old wives’ tale or not. Don’t try this at home; email “Myth Busters” if it really bothers you.

<sup>5</sup> If we think somehow we are exempt at Lima Community, we had better think again. Does your weekly faith look like Biblical faith? Are you content to be a Sunday Christian? Or worse, very busy in groups, church activities, etc. but you know in your heart that all is not what it should be with God. Remember that religion is subtle, hence why it is so dangerous.

<sup>6</sup> Paul writes to Christians here – this “salvation” is about living the life and lifestyle of godliness that sets us free. Sin is **always** destructive and leads to death, now and eternally.

<sup>7</sup> Read Phil. 2:12-13; it could not be clearer.