

“Blasphemy!”

“You shall not covet,” declares the Lord. Do not desire that which I have given to your neighbor, and scheme to find a way to get it “in a way which only appears right.” So it is that the high priest and the rest of the religious authorities covet what belongs to Jesus. They want the adoration of the crowds. They are afraid that if this keeps up, they will lose their place, their standing. And so they scheme – they look for a way to get rid of Jesus – “in a way which only appears right.”

You know how it is when you desire to do something that is sinful. You know the end goal – you’ve made up your mind – now you just have to find a way to carry it out. In order to escape shame, you scheme to do it “in a way which only appears right.”

You hide, carrying out your evil deed under the cover of darkness. You lie, and you look for others to corroborate your lies and further your goal. You deny God’s truth and craft your own “situational truth.” You even use God’s Word in such a way that, in the end, you are convinced that even God would commend you for what you are about to do.

You desire to watch porn – so you hide – you tell yourself that God has created you a sexual being with these desires – and then convince yourself that no one was hurt.

You desire to get drunk – and whether you hide, or not, you use the pain in your life as an excuse to do what God has clearly forbidden. Or you may have a reason to celebrate and are convinced that God would celebrate with you (and even overlook it if you have too much) – and so you begin, satisfied that your drunkenness is not a sin.

You desire to be divorced. The decision has been made and there’s no turning back – the only thing left to do is to find a way to make it God-pleasing. Yes, God hates divorce – but in my case, He understands, He makes an exception, He says it’s okay.

“The chief priests and the whole council were seeking evidence that might make the case for a death sentence” against Jesus. They know what they want – now, how to get it done? Begin with witnesses, “false witnesses.” It doesn’t matter that their testimony doesn’t agree – they know what they want!

God says, “Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established” (Deut. 19:15). So, they meet the minimal requirement and bring forth two witnesses. Their words conflict with one another – they’ve perverted the words that Jesus did speak – it doesn’t matter, they just want their proceedings to appear right.

“Don’t you have anything to say about this evidence and these charges, Jesus?” “But He was silent and gave no answer.” What!?! You’d scream to the highest heavens! “They’re lying! This is a sham! Injustice!” But Jesus just sits there and takes it – all for you.

This is getting nowhere, so the high priest takes matters into his own hands. He knows what Jesus has publicly taught, so he forces the issue. “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God” (Matt. 26:63). Swear to God! In other words, if God Himself were standing here, what would He say?

Jesus knows what is happening, because He knows what the Old Testament says about the Messiah. Like Jeremiah, they will try to kill Him with the tongue – that false witnesses will rise up against Him – that they will flog Him, pull out His beard, and spit on Him. (Jer. 18:18; Ps. 27:12; Is. 50:6). He knows their end game.

Jesus, who remained silent when falsely accused – now speaks, honoring the authorities, unfaithful though they are. “I AM,” He says (Mk. 14:62). I AM the Christ, the Son of God. I AM the Lord who spoke to Moses from the burning bush. I AM the “Son of Man” spoken of by Daniel and the psalmist (Dan. 7, Ps. 110) – and one day you will see that I AM the One who rules and reigns over all things.

Like Tom Cruise and Kevin Bacon in “A Few Good Men” – they can’t believe Jesus said that. He’s sealed His fate. Their scheming and conniving have worked. The high priest tears his garments and declares, “Blasphemy!” This man Jesus is guilty of blaspheming God. He deserves to die!

What a sham! The religious authorities know what God requires of them. “If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days. The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.” (Deut. 19:16-19)

But none of that matters. It doesn't serve their purposes, so they overlook this Word of the Lord – no diligent inquiry – they're not searching for the truth, just scheming to kill Jesus. They know better, but are not ashamed. They mock and spit and whip and punch Jesus. How can they do such dastardly things to God! How?

They've deceived themselves with their own lies. They are blinded by their own pious, legal show. They have been misled by their own false belief. Having justified their evil deeds – they proceed, thinking they are performing the highest service to God.

Now it's time to tie a bow on it. Gather the entire council, during the day, to make things legal – but do it “early in the morning” before the light has a chance to reveal our deeds of darkness. Don't put it off any longer than necessary, do it quickly (like we do when we desire to sin).

The whole council agreed – but even if the whole world agrees – that doesn't make it true. The arrest, trial, witnesses, the sentence of blasphemy – they are all a lie – and God is true. God does not deserve to die, we do but God dies.

The truth be told, we have blasphemed God! As John Gerhard (a Lutheran church father) says – we blaspheme by “trying to take from God His glory, omniscience, righteousness and truth ... as if He does not see our sins, or as if He will not punish them, or as if His threats are not sincere.” (G, 144)

We make excuses for our sin, declaring ourselves “not guilty.” We think we get to determine what is truth – and that God should have in mind the things of men, that He should think the way I think about things.

Jesus was “stricken, smitten and afflicted” for our sins. To deny our sins is to confess that Jesus endured all this for nothing – that He didn’t have to do that for me. If I have any sin, I’ll take care of it. I’ll be my own Savior. That’s blasphemy!!!

Hearing of the Passion of our Lord we are cut to the heart, ashamed, even tempted to blame God – saying that all of this is unfair, just plain wrong, a grave injustice. But Jesus would repeat His words spoken to John when he didn’t want to baptize Jesus. “Let it be so now, for it is necessary in order to fulfill all righteousness.”

Let us not blaspheme the name of the Lord our God – but confess that it was necessary that Jesus, God’s own Son, endure such Passion in order to make us right with God. It was necessary that Jesus die for the blasphemy of the high priest, the elders and the scribes – the drunks and porn addicts – that He be “stricken, smitten, and afflicted” for me.

Dearly beloved, this same Jesus, your Savior, has poured out His blood – paying your debt in full, cleansing you from all sin, cancelling your guilt and shame. No need to hide from God or man. No need to live in denial. No need to keep trying to tie up the loose ends so that everything will not come unraveled. Jesus has fulfilled all righteousness for you.

God’s end goal is that you would be saved, and so He sent His Son for you – to endure all that you have deserved – so that you may receive what He desires for you. Dearly beloved, the Passion of Our Lord is your salvation. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.