

## **The Justification of Judgement (Part 2) – Habakkuk 2:15-20**

**Main Idea:** God pronounces woe over every counterfeit the human heart trusts in place of him and calls his people to flee shameful pleasures, tear down their idols, and worship him with awe and reverence.

### **I. The Shame of Pleasure | Habakkuk 2:15-17**

Last week ended with the promise that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (v. 14). That promise raises the question Peter asks in 2 Peter 3:11, “if all of this is going to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness?” Habakkuk 2:15-20 answers that question by continuing to express woes over the sins of the inner life, the things that often attempt to hide in complete darkness. These are not sins most church people easily confess or discuss, but they are the sins the Lord exposes and judges. The fourth and fifth woes confront sensual indulgence and idolatry, and verse 20 ends the chapter by commanding reverence and awe before the living God.

The fourth woe describes a man who makes his neighbor drunk in order to gaze on his nakedness (v. 15). This is not two friends celebrating, it is forced humiliation for the pleasure of the one in power. Babylon did not simply take pleasure in their own indulgences, they took pleasure in shaming others. It can be easy to think this is unique to the ancient world, but our culture thrives off finding enjoyment in the humiliation of others. The desire to watch another person be exposed, degraded, or made a fool of is not unique to ancient empires. **The Babylonian standing over his drunken neighbor and the person enjoying another person's humiliation for entertainment are giving in to the same desires of the flesh.** It is a sin of the heart that often tries to excuse itself. The consequence for enjoying the shame of others is twofold (v. 16). The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to them and they will have their fill of shame. Throughout Scripture the cup is a picture of God's wrath (Psalm 75:8), and uncircumcision in the Old Testament exposed those who weren't in right standing with God. While Babylon was enjoying their ability to shame other people, God was storing up wrath against them and preparing for their shame. **The sin produced its own consequence: the shamer became the shamed.**

Modern readers can be quick to dismiss this woe, but our culture is saturated with the very things Babylon was judged for. There are countless ways our culture finds enjoyment in the shame of others. **People tell themselves these things are harmless entertainment, but any pleasure built on another person's shame is sin, no matter how culturally normalized.** Peter encourages believers that the world will be surprised when we refuse to join them, but the day is coming when they will give an account to the God who judges the living and the dead (1 Peter 4:3-5 ). Christians should strive to put to death sins in their lives, even, and sometimes especially, the ones our culture finds normal and enjoyable.

#### **To Ponder:**

1. 1 Peter 4:3-5 encourages believers to resist shameful pleasures the world finds normal and enjoyable. Why do so many Christians still enjoy these things and what excuses do they often use to justify them?
2. What role does the local church play in helping believers put to death the secret pleasures of the flesh that the world treats as harmless? How can you participate in disciplining believers without softening the sin or shaming the sinner?

### **II. The Empty Idols | Habakkuk 2:18-19**

The fifth woe opens differently than the previous four. Instead of declaring the woe and then explaining the sin, God begins with a question, “what profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it?” **God's point is to expose the absurdity of worshipping things made by human hands or worshipping gifts given by God, rather than God himself.** What good is it for a man to cut a tree, carve it, decorate it, set it on a shelf, then fall on his face and say “Save me, you are my God” (Isaiah 44:9-17). The idol

cannot speak, cannot move, cannot breathe, cannot teach, and cannot save. Yet men still trust them and give their devotion to the works of human hands. The problem is that we make idols in our image and we become more like them (Psalm 115:8). **You become more like the very thing that you worship.** Idols are anything we put our trust in to do or give what only God can do or give. John Calvin wrote in his institutes that “The human mind, is so to speak, a perpetual factory of idols”<sup>1</sup> constantly searching for or creating substitutes for God. The flesh is restless and constantly desiring false gods that approve of its desires (Romans 8:5-8). **The idols we make or pursue never tell us no and often reflect our greed, lust, pride, and discontentment.** Every time we go after another idol we are exchanging the truth about God for a lie and it never ends well for us (Romans 1:22-25).

Identifying idols is not about counting hours. **The point is not about what you spend the most time on, but what your heart longs for more than God.** You can watch a football game, work in the yard, or enjoy a hobby without those things being idols. The issue is the heart. Jesus is clear that no one can serve two masters, you will devote yourself to one and hate the other (Matthew 6:24). You cannot serve God and your career, God and your comfort, God and your reputation, God and your children's future. This is why John ends his first letter with a sentence that every believer should be reminded of, “little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).

#### **To Ponder:**

1. How do we practically identify the idols in our life? How do we practically root them out?

### **III. The Living Lord | Habakkuk 2:20**

Habakkuk 2 has been one long list of judgment, five woes pronounced on Babylon. But then God turns the attention to himself, “but the Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him.” God creates a clear contrast between the speechless and worthless idols and himself. **These created things can do nothing, but the one true and holy God perfectly reigns from his throne.** The temple Habakkuk has in mind is not the building in Jerusalem that was about to be destroyed but the throne in heaven itself (Psalm 11:4). God's reign does not depend on any building, and no idol can take his place.

The second half of the verse gives the only proper response, silence. This is the silence of reverence and awe which is demanded in response to God's holiness, sovereignty, and perfection (Zephaniah 1:7). The problem is that we struggle to be silent people. And the noise we engage in helps us justify our idols and rebellion. But God commands the earth to be silent and recognize who he is. **There is a time to sing and proclaim, and there is a time to be silent and in awe.** This whole chapter is essential to the Gospel because Romans 6:23 tells us the wages of sin is death, and the woes pronounced over Babylon are a picture of what every sinner deserves. The good news is that Jesus took those punishment on himself at the cross, so that the free gift of God, eternal life in Christ, would belong to everyone who repents and believes. **The only right response to hearing these five woes is to let the Spirit search your heart and work out conviction, be repentant, and then worship the Lord.**

#### **To Ponder:**

1. Why is it significant that there are times for believers to rejoice before the Lord and times to be silent before the Lord? What does it practically look like to be silent before God?
2. Do you struggle with being silent before the Lord? Why or why not? How can being silent before the Lord grow you as a believer?

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 1.11.8.