

**The Means of God's Salvation:
The Word of God and the Spirit of God**

Let us begin by reading Isaiah 59 in its entirety so that we may better understand the context and the message as a whole.

¹Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save,
or His ear dull, that it cannot hear;

²but your iniquities have made a separation
between you and your God,
and your sins have hidden His face from you
so that He does not hear.

³For your hands are defiled with blood
and your fingers with iniquity;
your lips have spoken lies;
your tongue mutters wickedness.

⁴No one enters suit justly;
no one goes to law honestly;
they rely on empty pleas, they speak lies,
they conceive mischief and give birth to iniquity.

⁵They hatch adders' eggs;
they weave the spider's web;
he who eats their eggs dies,
and from one that is crushed a viper is hatched.

⁶Their webs will not serve as clothing;
men will not cover themselves with what they make.
Their works are works of iniquity,
and deeds of violence are in their hands.

⁷Their feet run to evil,
and they are swift to shed innocent blood;
their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity;
desolation and destruction are in their highways.

⁸The way of peace they do not know,
and there is no justice in their paths;
they have made their roads crooked;
no one who treads on them knows peace.

⁹Therefore justice is far from us,
and righteousness does not overtake us;
we hope for light, and behold, darkness,
and for brightness, but we walk in gloom.

¹⁰We grope for the wall like the blind;
we grope like those who have no eyes;
we stumble at noon as in the twilight,
among those in full vigor we are like dead men.

¹¹We all growl like bears;
we moan and moan like doves;
we hope for justice, but there is none;

for salvation, but it is far from us.

¹²For our transgressions are multiplied before You,
and our sins testify against us;
for our transgressions are with us,
and we know our iniquities:

¹³transgressing, and denying the LORD,
and turning back from following our God,
speaking oppression and revolt,
conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words.

¹⁴Justice is turned back,
and righteousness stands far away;
for truth has stumbled in the public squares,
and uprightness cannot enter.

¹⁵Truth is lacking,
and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey.

The LORD saw it, and it displeased Him
that there was no justice.

¹⁶He saw that there was no man,
and wondered that there was no one to intercede;
then His own arm brought Him salvation,
and His righteousness upheld Him.

¹⁷He put on righteousness as a breastplate,
and a helmet of salvation on His head;
He put on garments of vengeance for clothing,
and wrapped Himself in zeal as a cloak.

¹⁸According to their deeds, so will He repay,
wrath to His adversaries, repayment to His enemies;
to the coastlands He will render repayment.

¹⁹So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west,
and His glory from the rising of the sun;
for He will come like a rushing stream,
which the wind of the LORD drives.

²⁰“And a Redeemer will come to Zion,
to those in Jacob who turn from transgression,” declares the LORD.

²¹“And as for Me, this is My covenant with them,” says the LORD: “My Spirit that is upon you, and My words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children’s offspring,” says the LORD, “from this time forth and forevermore.”

We have been considering God’s indictment against His people, Israel, for its defection from Him and its persistence in sin. The guilt of this people was compounded in that their sinful condition characterized them after the Babylonian exile, after God had shown them mercy in restoring them to their land. In spite of the great favor that God had shown them, they had persisted in their sin, compounding their guilt before God, aggravating His wrath toward them. But they would not own their sin. They would find fault with God before they would acknowledge fault with themselves.

When people sin greatly before God, and they begin to experience God's justice in punishing them for their sins, they forfeit His blessing, His working on their behalf. But rather than acknowledging their own guilt as the cause of forfeiting God's blessing and incurring His judgment, they look for some reason in God why He has not come to them in their need. They will commonly assume either God as inordinately severe in His dealings with them or they will accuse God as being unable to come to their aid. Here are **John Calvin's** comments on the opening words of this chapter:

This discourse closely resembles the preceding one (Isaiah 58); for, after having torn off the mask from hypocrites, who vainly boasted of themselves, and after having shown that the punishment inflicted on them was just, He now replies to other objections. Hypocrites are wont to accuse God either of weakness or of excessive severity. He shows, therefore, that He does not want either power or will to save His people, but that He is prevented by their wickedness from exercising His kindness towards them; and therefore that they do wrong in blaming God, and in uttering those slanders against Him, when they ought, on the contrary, to accuse themselves.¹

I. God is cleared of the false charge of inability to save His people (59:1, 2)

In the first verse of the chapter, the prophet shows that the calamity they were encountering was not due to inability of God to intervene.

¹Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or His ear dull, that it cannot hear;

Whenever a person or a nation is under the judgment of God, or is experiencing trouble on a great scale, it is commonly doubted that God is able to effect deliverance. That is never the case. Here the prophet is stating the fact forthrightly. God is not limited in His ability nor is it a question of Him not knowing.

The setting fits the state of the affairs of Israel after the remnant returned from exile in Babylon. They were permitted to return under the decree of Cyrus the Persian King. They returned with great prospects for rebuilding and re-establishing themselves in the Promised Land. Their hope for the future was bright. But soon and thereafter their hopes were unrealized. The people struggled. Things were not re-established as they had hoped. The people suffered due to oppression of others who had occupied the land. In this setting they may have asked themselves why it was that their prayers had not been answered. The conclusion they drew was that it must have been God's fault. We always tend to blame God for we assume there would be no good or just reason He would not bless us. The prophet makes it known that the problem does not lie with God.

The prophet declared, "*The LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save.*" The analogy may be of a person who is drowning. The LORD is thought to be trying to save, but He just cannot do it. His arm is too short to reach to the depths to which the drowning man has sunk.

But this, of course, is not true. There is no sinner that is so great a sinner that God that He could not save, if He purposed to do so,

The second clause gives another analogy: "*Or His ear dull, that it cannot hear.*" The problem is not that they have strayed so far from Him that they are outside of the range of His hearing. The bottom line is that the problem for their continued condition was not due to God's failure.

Though He (God) has many prayers to hear and answer, and though He has been long hearing prayer, yet He is still ready to hear prayer as ever. The prayer of the upright is as much His delight as ever it was, and the promises that are pleaded and put in suit in prayer are still yea and amen, inviolably sure. More is implied than expressed; not only His ear not heavy, but He is quick of hearing.²

¹ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, Vol. 8 (Baker Book House, 1993, reprint), pp. 245f.

² *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 4 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), p. 343.

Verse 2 explains the cause of their problem:

*²but your iniquities have made a separation
between you and your God,
and your sins have hidden His face from you
so that He does not hear.*

Rather than God being the cause of their difficulty, He being at fault for their calamity, they had separated themselves from God through their sin. Sin is the great separator between God and men. Sin separates a person from God and therefore from the life that God alone gives. Sin cuts the sinner off from the life that is in Him. And even though God has been merciful and longsuffering toward people, they sin still. “For all this, they sinned still” (Psa. 78:32).

God is holy. He cannot and will not deal graciously with sinners unless He can be just in doing so. The only way He can be just and yet deal graciously with sinners is if He does so due to Jesus Christ’s sacrifice. Through Jesus Christ God’s justice has been satisfied by its payment for sin on behalf of sinners who have faith in Him.

II. Isaiah details the sins of Israel (59:3-8)

We read in **verse 3** God beginning to detail their sins. This continues through verse 8.

*³For your hands are defiled with blood
and your fingers with iniquity;
your lips have spoken lies;
your tongue mutters wickedness.*

The people were guilty sinners. The sins of the people are attributed to the instrumentality of parts of the body. “Hands”, “fingers”, “lips”, and “tongues” are charged with the guilt of sin. The people were guilty of injustice toward others, devising sinful things, speaking lies and wicked things. The nation was corporately guilty before God and was therefore estranged from God’s blessing.

We read in **verse 4**:

*⁴No one enters suit justly;
no one goes to law honestly;
they rely on empty pleas, they speak lies,
they conceive mischief and give birth to iniquity.*

It would seem that we are escorted into the law court to observe the proceedings. This was where justice was to be administered. But there was no justice. The civil government, which was to insure that righteousness be administered, had become a legal means of injustice against citizens. There was no honesty. They were using the “law” to afflict and oppress, rather than to render justice.

This corrupt justice system characterized Israel before the Babylonian captivity. We read in **Isaiah 1:21-23**:

²¹How the faithful city has become a harlot!

It was full of justice;
Righteousness lodged in it,
But now murderers.

²²Your silver has become dross,
Your wine mixed with water.

²³Your princes are rebellious,
And companions of thieves;
Everyone loves bribes,
And follows after rewards.
They do not defend the fatherless,
Nor does the cause of the widow come before them.

Injustice in the legal arena is also cited in **Isaiah 10:1-3**:

“Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees,
Who write misfortune,
Which they have prescribed
²To rob the needy of justice,
And to take what is right from the poor of My people,
That widows may be their prey,
And that they may rob the fatherless.
³What will you do in the day of punishment,
And in the desolation which will.”

But the corrupt legal system gave way to a corrupt society. Confusion and lack of social order resulted. The outcome of an unjust legal system is a sinful populace. We read of the increasing lawlessness and sinfulness of the population in **verse 5**:

⁵*They hatch adders' eggs;
they weave the spider's web;
he who eats their eggs dies,
and from one that is crushed a viper is hatched.*

The people are described in very negative terms. They are as vipers bearing the “eggs” of adders, a poisonous snake common to the Eastern Mediterranean region. They are as ones who weave spider webs for clothing, garments totally incapable of providing warmth or modesty as clothing should. Wickedness breeds greater degrees of wickedness.

We next read in **verse 6** the further explanation of verse 5:

⁶*Their webs will not serve as clothing;
men will not cover themselves with what they make.
Their works are works of iniquity,
and deeds of violence are in their hands.*

The problem just does not end. One injustice leads to others. Some seek to entrap others with their treachery and deceit. But their treachery will come back upon them. Their lives amount to nothing. They do not produce anything substantial or of value. They are only concerned about increasing gain for themselves at the expense of others. This causes the downfall of a society.

⁷*Their feet run to evil,
and they are swift to shed innocent blood;
their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity;
desolation and destruction are in their highways.*

They are desirous to sin; they run to it. Their thoughts are focused on devising ways to take from others unjustly. The result is destruction and decay for themselves.

And remember, this was their condition after God's dealing with them century after century. God's judgments had not turned them from sin. They pursued it even after God had dealt with them severely.

What sin do we have left after all of God's judgments which have been upon us? Can we show the head of that Goliath lust which is slain? There is so much atheism and hard-heartedness in men, so close adherence of lust to their souls, that they will go on in sin inflexibly till God, by a miraculous power, stops their course, as He did Paul when he was going with letters to Damascus (Acts 9:2). Oh, the vile abstinence of men—they sin still. Though they are sometimes convinced that they are in a bad way, yet their corruptions are stronger than their convictions. If a wicked man could be fetched out of hell and brought back into a capacity of mercy, yet he would in a second life follow his lusts and sin himself into hell once again.³

The injustice and absence of order of society is described in terms of the roads they travel.

*⁸The way of peace they do not know,
and there is no justice in their paths;
they have made their roads crooked;
no one who treads on them knows peace.*

There is no good in them at all. They do not know what is to have security within their society. There is an absence of peace. Whichever way they go, wherever they travel, all roads are crooked and beset with danger for the traveller.

After the prophet detailed the sins of Israel (vs. 3-8), we then read that

III. The people recognized the consequences of their sin (59:9-13)

*⁹Therefore justice is far from us,
and righteousness does not overtake us;
we hope for light, and behold, darkness,
and for brightness, but we walk in gloom.*

With this verse, it changes from 3rd person plural—"they", "their"-- to first person plural—"we", "us." Perhaps the prophet is speaking on behalf of the people.

The people come to see that it was due to their sin that they forfeit the blessing of God in their lives. The justice which they sought from God would not be given to them who show injustice to one another. They can hope all they want. Positive thinking will not assure their success, for only defeat and sorrow awaits them.

This is a very critical step in turning around a person or a people. Until people begin to understand that their misery is the result of their sin causing them to forfeit the blessing of God and to incur the wrath of God, their condition will only worsen. Since this is true, we might ask how likely is it for our own nation to experience once again the grace that He has shed upon us? There is little personal acknowledgement of sin and its consequences of sin before God. There is no communal or national acknowledgment of sin and its consequences before God. Until there is, there will be a downward slide into greater corruption and injustice in our society.

We next read that the people had become aware of their helplessness to amend their ways or to know which way they should direct their efforts. **Verse 10** reads:

*¹⁰We grope for the wall like the blind;
we grope like those who have no eyes;*

³ Thomas Watson, *The Mischief of Sin* (Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1994, orig. 1671), p. 57.

*we stumble at noon as in the twilight,
among those in full vigor we are like dead men.*

I note hence the blindness of every sinner. He does not see that evil in sin which should make him leave it. He sins still. To this day the veil is upon his heart. Sin is the spirit and quintessence of evil, but the unregenerate person is enveloped with ignorance. If he dies in sin, he is damned irrecoverably. But he sports his own damnation—he sins still. Sin has made him not only sick but senseless. Though sin has death and hell following it, yet he is so blind that he sins still.⁴

Things have become so bad they do not know what to do. They are as blind people who do not know which direction to take. **Arthur Pink** wrote about the spiritual blindness of unconverted souls.

The effects of this darkness are fearful indeed. Its subjects are made incapable of discerning or receiving spiritual things, so that there is total inability with respect to God and the ways pleasing Him. No matter how well endowed intellectually and the unregenerate man may be, what the extent of his education and learning, how skilful in connection with natural things, in spiritual matters he is devoid of intelligence until he is renewed in the spirit of his mind. As a person who has no sight is unaware of the strongest rays of light directed at him, and cannot form any real ideas of the appearance of things, so the natural man, because of the blindness of his mind, is unable to discern the nature of heavenly things. Said Christ to the Jews of His day, “If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now are they *hid* from thy eyes” (Luke 19:42)—concealed from their perception as effectually as things which are purposely hidden from prying eyes. Even though one had the desire to discover them, he would search in vain for all eternity unless God was pleased to reveal them, as He did to Peter (Matt. 16:17).⁵

We next read that they had degraded themselves to be no better than animals. They had begun to long for justice, but it remained elusive to them.

*¹¹We all growl like bears;
we moan and moan like doves;
we hope for justice, but there is none;
for salvation, but it is far from us.*

They would become aware of their lost condition, that they were estranged from everything good in life. It would seem that a state of depression rested upon them. Note that the cause of depression is unrealized hope. When they come to realize that their situation is not going to change, they become depressed.

They finally see and acknowledge that it was their sins against God and His Law that were the root of their problems. **Verse 12** reads,

*¹²For our transgressions are multiplied before You,
and our sins testify against us;
for our transgressions are with us,
and we know our iniquities:
¹³transgressing, and denying the LORD,
and turning back from following our God,
speaking oppression and revolt,
conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words.*

⁴ Ibid, p. 55.

⁵ Arthur Pink, *Gleanings From the Scriptures; Man's Total Depravity* (Moody Press, 1974), pp. 139f.

They were experiencing in history the wrath of God upon them. God was holding them responsible for their sins. Their sins are set forth as witnesses for the prosecution against them. It appears that the people here, or the prophet speaking on behalf of the people, are acknowledging their sinfulness before God. Their defection and transgressions go on and on.

III. The prophet gives his assessment of the people's condition before God (59:14-15)

*¹⁴Justice is turned back,
and righteousness stands far away;
for truth has stumbled in the public squares,
and uprightness cannot enter.*

Societal conditions are again described: there is no justice in society. Injustice is the way of the day. Truth and righteousness cannot get a foot-hold.

*¹⁵Truth is lacking,
and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey.
The LORD saw it, and it displeased Him
that there was no justice.*

If one does try to do differently, to live rightly and to do rightly, to stand rightly, he becomes vulnerable and the object of other's evil intentions. When the Lord sees this within a society, it incurs His displeasure and wrath upon them.

IV. The prophet announces that God will send a Saviour to redeem His people (59:16-21)

The prophet describes God who saw that fallen, sinful man, could not reform himself or break free from sin that dominated him. God determined that He would act on their behalf in order to bring salvation to His people. **Verse 16** reads:

*¹⁶He saw that there was no man,
and wondered that there was no one to intercede;
then His own arm brought Him salvation,
and His righteousness upheld Him.*

No one was willing to do anything to change, to stand against the tide. If a change would take place, God alone would have to do it. God would be true to Himself. He would do for His people what they could not do for themselves. This reveals how sinful the human race is and how dependent on the grace of God fallen man is dependent upon for his salvation.

We then read that God Himself clothes Himself with armour to go forth and defeat the enemies of His people in order to deliver them from their sins and the consequences of their sins.

*¹⁷He put on righteousness as a breastplate,
and a helmet of salvation on His head;
He put on garments of vengeance for clothing,
and wrapped Himself in zeal as a cloak.*

We see God beginning to arm Himself to take action. It is the action of a warrior putting on His armour to go and fight against the unjust.

Now many phrases and verses of this chapter are quoted in the New Testament. Paul used this language to describe the need for Christians to arm themselves for battle against the devil and his assault on them. Paul uses this language to describe the Christian's spiritual armour (Eph. 6). But here, in this context, the armour describes God preparing Himself for battle against sinners.

***¹⁸According to their deeds, so will He repay,
wrath to His adversaries, repayment to His enemies;
to the coastlands He will render repayment.***

He will come and fight against evil ones. He will render punishment according to their deeds, paying them back for what they had "earned."

There is a universality of His judgment which is spoken of here. His battle against sinners will reach even the coastlands, that is, among Gentiles.

***¹⁹So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west,
and His glory from the rising of the sun;
for He will come like a rushing stream,
which the wind of the LORD drives.***

The result of His judgment is that the Gentiles will come to see and fear God. His coming in judgment is likened to a flash flood that would suddenly appear in desert regions filling the dry wadis in minutes with a torrent, washing down everything which lie in their paths.

***²⁰“And a Redeemer will come to Zion,
to those in Jacob who turn from transgression,” declares the LORD.***

A Redeemer is sent to Zion to save those who turn from transgression and look for salvation from Him. God Himself provides a Redeemer to save His people from His wrath that is upon all evil ones. "Zion" and "Jacob" are terms to describe His covenant people, as indicated in the next verse. This is, of course, a prophecy of God sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem His people from their sin.

Paul quotes this verse in Romans 11:27 to refer to the salvation that God would bring to Jews at the end of this church age. God has sent forth His Son and He will one day send His Son once again.

V. God declared His purpose to save His people from their sin (59:21)

²¹“And as for Me, this is my covenant with them,” says the LORD: “My Spirit that is upon you, and My words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children’s offspring,” says the LORD, “from this time forth and forevermore.”

This concluding word from the Lord is a Word of promise for salvation to His people. It is through His *Spirit* and His *Word* that He promises to be with them and manifest Himself to them from generation to generation. Here the linkage between the Spirit and His Word is shown and should not be put asunder.

God makes mention of His covenant. This is the new covenant that the Redeemer makes with all true believers in Jesus Christ. Here God promises that He will keep His covenant people unto Himself through His Spirit—the Holy Spirit—and His Word—The Holy Bible.

Finally, he foretells that the Lord will never forsake his people, but will always be present with them by "his Spirit" and by "the word." The "Spirit" is joined with the word, because, without the efficacy of the Spirit, the preaching of the gospel would avail nothing, but would remain unfruitful. In like manner, "the word" must not be separated from "the Spirit," as fanatics imagine, who, despising the

word, glory in the name of the Spirit, and swell with vain confidence in their own imaginations. It is the spirit of Satan that is separated from the word, to which the Spirit of God is continually joined. Now, when he quickens outward doctrine, so that it strikes root in our hearts, our condition is happy even amidst many afflictions; and I have no doubt that the Prophet expressly declares that, although God deals kindly with his Church, still its life and salvation shall be laid up in faith. Thus the new people is distinguished from the ancient people; for, as the kingdom of Christ is spiritual, so, since he has risen from the dead, believing souls must be raised up along with him. But now he promises that the Church will never be deprived of this invaluable blessing, but will be guided by the Holy Spirit and sustained by heavenly doctrine; for it would be of little avail that the gospel should once be offered to us, and that the Spirit should be given to us, if he did not dwell with us.

The Prophet shows that God addresses us in such a manner that he chooses to employ the ministry and agency of men. He might indeed speak from heaven or send angels; but he has consulted our advantage the more by addressing and exhorting us through men like ourselves, that, by their voice and word, he may more gently draw us to himself. This order has therefore been established by him in the Church, that it is vain for those who reject his ministers to boast that they are willing to obey God; and therefore he commands us to seek the word and doctrine from the mouth of prophets and teachers, who teach in his name and by his authority, that we may not foolishly hunt after new revelations.

The... Lord will assist his Church, and will take care of it, so as never to allow it to be deprived of doctrine. To this, therefore, we ought always to look, when we are tempted by adversity, and when everything does not succeed according to our wish; for we must be supported and upheld by the word and the Spirit, of which the Lord declares that we shall never be left destitute.⁶

And so here we have a prophecy of the authority and sufficiency of the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, being used by the Holy Spirit, in order to accomplish the salvation of His people. It is through the proclaiming of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that the God brings His salvation to His people through the power of the Holy Spirit using that Word to convict and convert sinners unto Himself. This is the perpetual means that God has appointed to accomplish His work in the world. It is essential to the new covenant by which God relates to His people. Let us today acknowledge the blessing we have received through the Word of God as it is blessed by the Holy Spirit of God. Let us also affirm our dependence and confidence in the Word of God to accomplish His purpose of bringing salvation to the sinners of our world today, as the Blessed Holy Spirit blesses that Word to their conviction and conversion.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
And to present you faultless
Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
To God our Savior,
Who alone is wise,
Be glory and majesty,
Dominion and power,
Both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24)

⁶ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, Vol. 8 (Baker Book House, 1993, reprint), pp. 271f.