

# Sinning Against the Light

by Vance Havner

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*Vance Havner's sermon emphasizes the severe consequences of rejecting the light of Christ and the urgent need for repentance in both individuals and society.*

**Duration:** 28:30

**Scripture:** Matthew 24:37

**Topics:** "Sin"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of reading and studying the word of God. He highlights that neglecting the Bible is a sin against the light and goes against the accumulated testimony of the saints throughout history. The preacher also criticizes the lack of interest in the gospel in America, where people are more focused on worldly distractions. He warns that judgment will be harsh for those who reject the message of God's love and salvation. The sermon concludes with a reminder that with the privilege of having access to the gospel comes great responsibility to repent and live according to God's will.

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## Transcript

I read from Matthew, the eleventh chapter, beginning with verse twenty. Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in power and silence, they would have repented long ago.

In sackcloth and ashes. And I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell.

For if the mighty works which had been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. And I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee. At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent who hath revealed them unto babe.

Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father, and no man knoweth the Son but the Father. Neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son.

For I say unto you, come unto me, O ye that labour and are heavy laden, that I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me. For I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. In this great chapter our Lord pronounced judgment on three cities, Corazion, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. Capernaum had been the center of his activity during a large part of his public ministry.

He was born in Bethlehem, he grew up in Nazareth, but he lived in Capernaum. We read in the fourth chapter of Matthew, and leaving Nazareth he came and dwelt in Capernaum. It was the home of Jesus Christ.

Nearby he called the fishermen, and Matthew, it was the scene of most of his mighty work. There he healed the centurion's servant and the nobleman's son, Peter's mother-in-law and the paralytic. There he cast out the demon, and in the synagogue he gave the great discourse on the bread of life.

But for all that they did not accept him, they repented not. So he pronounced judgment. Any traveler to Palestine knows that Capernaum is ruined to this day.

Why? Because they repented not. They did not violently oppose him and cast him out of the city, they did that at Nazareth. They didn't crucify him, they did that at Jerusalem.

They simply refused to repent. Jerusalem is still standing, and so is Nazareth, but Capernaum don't. There is more hope for outright opposition to God than for polite indifference.

I'm sure you've read that poem that somebody over in England wrote, Birmingham, England. When Jesus came to Golgotha, they nailed him to the tree. They drove great nails through feet and hands and called it Calvary.

They crowned him with a crown of thorns, red were his wounds and deep, for those were accrued in cruel times, and human life was cheap. When Jesus came to Birmingham, they simply passed him by. They never heard a hair of him, they only let him die.

For men had grown more tender, they would not cause him pain. They only passed on down the street and left him in the rain. Jesus prayed, forgive them for they know not what they do, and still it rained the winter rain that chilled him through and through.

The night grew dark, the streets were still, and there was none to see, as Jesus leaned against the wall and cried for Calvary. Why was the judgment so severe? Why did Jesus say it will be more tolerable for Sodom of all places in the day of judgment than for Capernaum? Sodom was by far a more wicked city. The very word is the synonym for moral corruption.

Sodomy is another word for homosexuality, one of the vilest forms of depravity, which in spite of all modern efforts to dress it up and make it respectable, comes under the severest condemnation of God. And yet it will be more tolerable for Sodom in the day of judgment. And if you don't remember anything else I say tonight, I want you to carry this thought home with you and mull it over.

Judgment in the last analysis, and in the light of this text, is not in proportion to the number of sins we have committed, it is in proportion to the amount of life we have rejected. Don't misunderstand me. We are punished by our sins and for them.

There are those who say today that we, of course, are punished by our sins, but there's no judgment, no final judgment. We're not punished for them. We're punished both by and for them.

If a man dies of a disease because he didn't take the treatment, you say he died because he didn't take the remedy, and he did, but he also died of the disease. Capernaum will fare worse in the day of judgment than Sodom, because Capernaum had more life. I didn't read all of the verses in Matthew 4 in that connection a while ago.

And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, and what? That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah, saying, the people which sat in darkness saw great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up. The light of the world had visited Capernaum. Light brings responsibility, and Capernaum had reneged on its responsibility.

Everybody knows John 3.16, but we ought to be better acquainted with John 3.19. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. Jesus Christ is the test by which men are judged. The word condemnation here in the original language of the New Testament is the word crisis, just spelled with a K. Jesus precipitated a crisis when he came to this world, because men had to accept him or refuse him.

And so men are judged by their response to the light. And why do they reject it? Because their deeds are evil. You find that in the next verse.

For everyone that does evil hates the light, neither comes to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God. I had a little country church a long time ago, and I remember that on Sunday nights a godly little woman would come to the services.

She sat over to the right. She was married to an ungodly man who always brought her to church, but stayed out in the car, out in the dark, in more ways than one. And I thought of these two verses, and you could change it just a little, and it would go like this.

Every woman that does evil hates the light. That's why he didn't come inside, because he knew the light would be turned on, and he'd squirm and twist and be miserable. But she that does truth comes to the light, that her deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.

If you're walking in the light, you want all the light you can get. And you'll take preaching just as straight as anybody can give it to you. But when you see some man who squirms and winces and looks at his watch and is thoroughly miserable, under the plain preaching of the word of God, he's wincing before the light.

Did you ever walk across the field on a sunny day and you turned over a large stone, and when the sunlight struck underneath all the creeping and crawling, things began hurrying and scurrying for cover? That's what happens to the sinful heart when the light of the world turns on it. When you're down in a dark cellar, you can't see all the lizards and the vermin and the snakes and the toads until the light is turned on. And neither are you aware of the depravity of the deceitfulness of the human heart, its desperate wickedness, until you face up to the light of Jesus Christ.

Men reject Jesus Christ for moral reasons, not philosophical reasons. They're sinners and they don't want to confess and repent and give up their sins. So they invent philosophical excuses to cover up the real reason, but an excuse is just the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie.

A man is not a sinner because he's a skeptic. He's a skeptic because he's a sinner. And skepticism and philosophizing are just the smokescreen behind which he hides his sins.

America has had the greatest gospel opportunity of any nation on earth. We've had more churches and more preaching and more Christian schools and more light, and its judgment is in proportion to light rejected. God have mercy on America.

I'd rather be a pagan in Africa with no light than a tortured American who has sinned against the light. If Capernaum came under greater condemnation than Sodom because greater light had been rejected, think of the privileges your city and mine has had in all these years of open Bibles and open churches and Christian testimony. America feels no need of God because we think we can work out our own salvation.

Our forefathers had a dream of building a nation on spiritual principles, but we got mixed up right at the start. And that vision gave way to the democratic philosophy of Tom Paine and Tom Jefferson with its humanistic belief in the innate goodness of man and his own perfectibility. Some of the ideas came out of the Reformation, and they were mixed with ideas from the Revolution.

And today a lot of our people don't know the difference between the priesthood of believers and the brotherhood of man. And we are trying to create a false millennium and a counterfeit kingdom of heaven superimposed on an unregenerate society that refuses to bow to the lordship of Jesus Christ. This country is not yet 200 years old, and it may be in the terminal stages of moral cancer because we've rejected the light that shines in three ways.

It shines in the Savior. I am the light of the world. It shines in the scriptures.

The entrance of thy words giveth light. And it shines in the saints. You are the light of the world.

Jesus said, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. It's not enough to repent. It's not enough to turn from something.

You have to turn to something. America is not willing to receive the kingdom of heaven. We're trying to build our own.

I don't think the King James is the best translation of this part of this text where Jesus said, Will thou be exalted to heaven? Not really what he's saying to Capraim. So you think you'll be exalted to heaven, you shall be cast down to hell. You remember that human history is wrapped up in the three letters of Genesis.

Let us make man in our own image. And then man said, Let us build us a city and a tower whose top may reach into heaven. And then God said, Let us go down and confound them.

That's history in a nutshell. We've been building our own tower of Babel by technological know-how. We've had three tremendous discoveries in the last few years.

Atomic power. We have begun space travel and then DNA, the basic chemical of life, the material from which the genes of all living things are constructed and genes determined the form that every living being takes. Now, if men of integrity and honor could manage these three wonderful discoveries, a wonderful age might dawn.

But we have entered a realm where fools will not fear to rush in, where angels fear to tread. Arnold Toynbee, one of the greatest of historians, said some time ago that one thing he simply could not

understand, great intellect that he is, he could not understand how a nation as educated, as literate as Germany could let a wild man like Hitler deceive them and lead them to wreck the world. And he finally arrived at this conclusion, and it sounds like a Baptist preacher.

There must be a vein of original sin in human nature everywhere to which Hitlerism made a strong appeal. The moral is that civilization is nowhere and never secure. It is a thin cake of custom overlying a molten mass of wickedness that's always boiling up for an opportunity to burst out.

Civilization cannot ever be taken for granted. It prizes eternal vigilance and countless and ceaseless spiritual effort. Certainly he's right about that.

Men are asking today, will men become God? I picked up one of the last issues of the Saturday Evening Post not long ago. I've been expecting somebody to say a thing like this, but here a prominent English scientist said, human scientists now have it in their power to redesign the face of the earth and to decide what kind of species should survive on it. How they use this terrible potential must depend on moral judgment.

There can be no source for these moral judgments except the scientist himself. We are also God now, in other words. So we must now learn to play God in a moral as well as in a creative or in a destructive sense.

We've been saying all the time that since we've come to where we now know and can do what only God's supposed to know and to do, the problem is who is going to furnish us the moral controls for all this knowledge. But now since we master the physical laws of the universe, we are going to try to master the moral laws of the universe. Up to now people have been saying, well, it's okay to make all these advances in science, but the big problem is, will our morals keep step with our machinery? But now the technologist is going to become a theologian as well, and the mechanic is going to devise the morals.

More than that, the scientist now has a right to play God himself, so we think. And doesn't that remind you of the one who's coming one of these days, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped so that he as God sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Unfortunately, some people have the idea that the kingdom of God can be set up on earth by social reform, education, legislation under Christian auspices.

We're farther away from that goal than we ever have been. While even Bruner, even Bruner, if you must read Bruner, even Bruner says, nowhere in the New Testament do we find any expectation that in the course of the centuries, mankind will become Christian. The contrary is true.

The true Christian community will be a minority to the end. The apocalypse visions are unanimous in depicting the end of time, the last phase of human history before the coming of Christ as a time of tension between Christ and the devil. We're living in that tension now.

I said this afternoon when Constantine became a church member, they decided that Satan had already been bound. My good friend Bennett dwelt on that too, and they thought the millennium had come, and now we're trying to set up the kingdom by a sort of sanctified socialism. Norman Thomas ran for president for years and years, never did get it, but practically everything he advocated has now been passed into the laws of the nation anyhow.

Churchill said there are only two places where socialism will work, in heaven where they don't need it and in hell where they already had it. But I'm not worrying, I'm not worrying about man becoming so smart that he will topple the Almighty from his throne. My God is a patient God.

He may allow us to demonstrate in all these three realms that we're not morally capable of handling our scientific discoveries. I shouldered to think what form that demonstration may take. In fact, Dr. Kornberg, who was one of the discoverers in this DNA business, said we're not ready for such power to be put in our hands, we're not prepared for it.

One of these days when we sit in the shambles of the wreckage that we have rolled, when we have cut our own throats, God Almighty is going to step in and say, you boys have had it long enough, I'll take over now. Don't forget we had quite a civilization before the flood and as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the coming of the Son of Man. That world was destroyed by water, this one will be by fire.

We may be storing the fire for that holocaust now. Like Capernaum, we've exalted ourselves to heaven. We may be cast down to hell.

And the reason why men will not repent is also found in this same 11th chapter. I can't understand any preacher who can't find enough in the Bible to preach about it, why there's enough in this 11th chapter to keep you busy for the next year. And my Lord went on to say in this very 11th chapter, Where unto shall I liken this generation? It's like children sitting in the market and calling unto their fellows and saying, We've piped unto you and you've not danced.

We've mourned unto you and you've not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say he has the devil. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold, a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend to publicans and sinners.

But wisdom is justified over children. We're living in a generation that's playing in the marketplace. Life's flawed and pampered and petulant and fussy, children.

They didn't like John the Baptist, they didn't like Jesus. And so today this generation plays at living, plays at religion. Nothing's real.

It's all make-believe. We're just acting. Some of it's religious acting.

But Jesus told the Pharisees, Play actors, hypocrites, a pious masquerade, a facade of godliness without the power thereof. Congregations sit in church on Sunday and listen to the word of God, and their attitude seems to be, I move we accept this as information and be dismissed. We hire church staffs, we hire church staffs to do church work, and then come on Sunday to watch them do it.

All right, preacher, get up and perform. Let's see what you've got. It's not an experience, it's a performance.

I heard Dr. Edmund of Wheaton College say something years ago in Winona Lake. He said, I used to go to the old Bible conferences, and I got under such conviction after the sermon, I didn't want to speak to anybody. I wanted to go home and get alone with God.

Now, he said, you come out, and they say, well, how'd you like him? And I said, well, he's not as good as the one we had last week. Now, you ought to hear the one that's coming next week. Paul Cephas Apollos.

Fussy, petulant children. Babies, Paul calls them, 150 and 200 pound church babies. They keep the preacher busy running around with a milk bottle, and they'll melt it in on beefsteak 25 years in.

No wonder when a new preacher comes, they say, I don't like him, he changed my formula. America is not about to repent, beloved. Some think God may use Russia to use the Assyrian, the rod of his anger as an instrument to bring America to an ease in an hour of disaster.

But if New York City disappeared tonight in an atomic blast, this nation would not turn to God. Revelation tells us that after the fearful judgment were poured out in the sixth seal and the fifth vial, still men repented not of their sins. When London huddled in the bomb shelters during the blitz of World War II, they tossed it out, they joked about it, but they did not repent.

But there's another message, thank God, in Matthew 11. After pronouncing judgment on the three cities because they repented not, my Lord turns from the city to the citizens and from the institution to the individual and says, whatever the city may do, whatever the country may do, you can come to me and find rest. And I say to you troubled soul in this place tonight, all bothered about where are we going and what are we coming to, whatever your city may do, whatever your nation may do, you yourself can come to Christ and find rest.

Whatever happens to America, you can live in the midst of all this bedlam, having peace with God and the peace of God, whatever the situation may be. Look at the sublimity of this wonderful rest that he offers us. All things have been given to me, said, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, I thank thee.

Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto the babes, for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father. Before he offers us his rest, he offers us his resources.

He says, here's what I've got to offer. Then look at the simplicity of it in verse 28. There isn't any simpler way to say it than that.

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. I dare you to say it in any simpler fashion than that. Then he gives us the secret of it, come and I'll give you rest, and then the very next verse, take my yoke upon you and learn of me and you'll find rest.

I thought he was going to give it to us. Well, it's an obtainment, but it's also an attainment. When you go to college, they give you an education there, but they don't hand it out in a little box with a pink ribbon around it.

You have to learn it, and so Jesus is saying, go to my school and be my disciple and do your homework and don't be a dropout, and you will find the life of rest for the rest of life. It's not bondage, it's liberty. My yoke is easy, my burdens light.

His commandments are not grievous. It's not a burden, it's a way to make the burden light. It's not a load, it's a lift.

It's not weight, it's weighing. So this is the lesson of Capernaum. Because life has come, responsibility has come, responsibility to repent has come.

If they will not repent, retribution will come. But if they will repent, rest will come. That is the message to Capernaum.

Let me say to this crowd of church people here tonight, you can sin against the light. Where much is given, much shall be required. We boast about our greater advantages today.

We preachers boast of our greater benefits in all directions, radio, television, all the mass media, better opportunities for education. When I grew up up here in Catawba County, out there at old Corinth churches, in the horse and buggy days, those old preachers hadn't had much education. They didn't have much of anything else of this world's good.

They wore old blue serge suits that gleamed like shining armor. Their wives never knew what it was to have a good coat. But I know one thing, they knew God.

And I wonder whether we're turning out preachers as good as that. Today we're building bigger church buildings and raising more money. We're not producing better Christians.

They didn't have any of those. They didn't have much communication. How great is our responsibility.

Spurgeon said, I tremble as I think how poverty-stricken my life has been compared to my opportunities. My soul, if Spurgeon could say that. God have mercy on us preachers today with all the opportunities that we've had.

We ought to be better Christians tonight, every one of us in this auditorium, for all the light we've had. And when you refuse to do what you know you ought to do, you sin against the light. To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

When we allow in our lives what the voice of conscience condemns, we sin against the light. When we harbor evil spirit, resentments and grudges and animosities, we sin against the light. When we quench the spirit and grieve the spirit by sins of omission and commission and disposition, we sin against the light.

When we sit in church and hear the word of God and don't do it, we deceive ourselves. We sin against the light. And remember that the light shines not only in the Savior, it shines in the scriptures.

You have a Bible at home. How much have you read it lately? You can pick it up anytime and get a light for your path and a lamp under your feet. And when you ignore it and let dust gather on it, you sin against the light.

And great will be your responsibility in America. And also it shines in the saints. When you reject the accumulated testimony of the saints of all the ages, when you ignore the witness of the church and the Christians of your community, you sin against the light.

Many a man has sinned against the influence of a good old godly mother and the daily example of a Christian wife. I read of some missionaries who'd been over in Korea witnessing. One night after the service, they dismissed the congregation, but the people wouldn't leave.

The missionaries went to bed, but they were awakened. Nobody had gone home. They came out and said, friends, the meeting is over.

You must get your rest. One of them said, we can't rest. Not after what we've heard tonight.

You've told us that God so loved the world, that he sent his son, and that if we trust him, we can live forever. How can anybody sleep after hearing that? Bless your heart, we go to sleep listening to it in America. When I think of the millions of Americans asleep on Sunday morning, buried in a newspaper, out in a boat, worshipping later on at the shrine of Ed Sullivan or Frank Nopsohotra, or turn on the radio or TV, all you've got to do is turn a button and get the gospel.

It'll be more tolerable a thousand times for Sodom in the day of goodness than for us. I want you to carry this home with you. If this verse is to be our stanza, if we are not judged in the last analysis by how many sins we have committed, but by how much life we've rejected, my friend, that puts everything in a different light.

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