



9 | HOSEA 10

THE TRUE VINE

Connected to Jesus

Outline

1. **DISTRACTED BY IDOLS DISCONNECTED (10:1-10)**

The Perception (10:1)

The Problem (10:2)

The Plattitudes (10:3)

The Pattern of Empty Worship (10:4-8)

1. The Distraction Principle: Idols distract you and crowd your heart.

2. The Demand Principle: Idols Demand!

3. The Destruction Principle: Idols Destroy (10:6-8a)

4. The Damnation Principle: Idols Cannot Save (10:8b)

The Paradox (10:9-11)

A Double Iniquity

A Doting God

2. **CONNECTED TO JESUS AND CONTENT (10:12-15)**

Plow Your Heart...

Plant Righteousness (10:12a)

Reap God's Covenant Love (10:12b)

Break Up Your Hard Heart (10:12c)

The Time of Harvest is Now (10:12d)

The Growth is from God (10:12e)

.... or Pay the Price (10:13-15)

Songs

Is He Worthy?
How Sweet and Awesome is the Place
Turn Your Eyes
Immanuel's Land
Yet Not I But Christ through Me

Call to Worship:

Psalm 36:5-7

Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.

⁶Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;
your judgments are like the great deep;
man and beast you save, O Lord.

⁷How precious is your steadfast love, O God!

The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

Announcements

1. **Welcome** visitors.
2. Don't forget to fill out the volunteer service **questionnaires**. They are available at entrance.
3. Planning meeting: Feb 22
4. I'll be gone **this week** in Tijuana, MX. If you need something, contact Pastor Mike or one of the elders.
5. We will have a brief financial update after the service.

Introduction

Our message today is from Hosea 10 on page 755 of your pew Bible. The title of our message today is "The True Vine".

The heart of man is inexhaustible until we truly know Christ. Until that time, we are searching for something to fill it, and we fill it with idols. When we don't get our idols, we get angry, depressed, confused, messed up! We're not just a mess, but a hot mess!

Only Jesus Christ can fill and satisfy the human heart. Whether you are here saved or unsaved, you need Jesus.

St. Augustine said it well: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

God made food to remind us that Christ is our **living bread** (Jn 6:51).

God made water to remind us that Christ is the **living water** who quenches our thirsty soul (Jn 7:39).

Blaise Pascal famously said:

"There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made know through Jesus Christ."

This is the theological context of Hosea 10. Before we knew Christ, we were all so hungry, so desirous to be filled, and we could not find satisfaction till we met Jesus. He cleanses us, adopts us, empowers us, gives us a future and hope. Praise his name.

What we find in Hosea 10 is a very common theme in Scripture: No amount of riches, fame, pleasure, earthly comfort or even religious activity can ever come close to satisfying the human soul. Ancient Israel had all these things and was still empty. They had so much money and comforts at the time of the prophet Hosea, but they were so lost. All their earthly riches left them horrible enslaved to idols, with empty souls, broken homes. God was there with open arms, ready to cleanse them, forgive them, restore them, and bring them into his glorious Kingdom, but they wanted to fill their souls themselves. They got robbed as a result. Nothing on this earth, no matter how good or legitimate it is, can ever take the place of Jesus.

Can I ask you a question church: Are you in a place in your Christian walk, where you sense the fullness and satisfaction of your Lord and Savior? Are you drinking from the well that never runs dry?

I think all too often we put up with idols in our lives that Christ died for. It ought not so to be. If there is anything keeping you from a full connection with Christ, I want you to be very open to the Holy Spirit. He's got an epiphany for you this morning. He wants to cut into your heart. He wants to pour truth into you and open your eyes. Let the Spirit move deeply in you this morning. Right now, open your heart.

The people of Northern Israel had **hard hearts**. He tells them their great need verse 12.

10:12 | Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.

But the people of Israel were fascinated and thrilled with their earthly riches and worldly comforts. Their hearts were hard and cold, but they were keeping themselves distracted from their emptiness by all the gadgets and comforts of their time. In so many ways, they had the same disease that we in America have: affluenza, defined in the dictionary as:

Affluenza: a psychological malaise supposedly affecting wealthy young people, symptoms of which include a lack of motivation, feelings of guilt, and a sense of isolation.

The people of Hosea's day were connected to so many superficial and meaningless, temporary comforts, that those very comforts left them completely disconnected from God.

1. DISTRACTED BY IDOLS AND DISCONNECTED (10:1-11)

THE PERCEPTION (10:1)

10:1 | Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars.

Our Lord Jesus was of course perfectly familiar with Hosea 10, where Israel is called a “luxuriant vine”. He must have had this and other passages in mind when he said in John 15:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit... ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing (Jn 15:1-2, 5).

Israel's perception was dead wrong. They thought they had everything with their riches, but they actually had nothing of value.

Do you know what all the riches of Israel amounted to? Nothing. They were without God. So all their riches, and their peace treaty with the pagan nations around them meant nothing. They were about to be smashed with the hammer of Assyria. They were about to lose their riches, their family members, their land, their identity, and most importantly, their protection from God.

Jesus said it. You have to be connected to him. “Without me, you can do... nothing” (Jn 15:5).

THE PROBLEM (10:2)

What's the big problem?

10:2 | Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt. The Lord will break down their altars and destroy their pillars.

Hosea addresses the primary problem with God's people: they have a **heart problem**. Outwardly, they are prosperous, but inwardly, their heart is “false” and **divided**. He later tells them to “**break up the heard ground**” of their hearts (10:12). Jesus says, “**No one can serve two masters**” (Mt 6:24). In order to serve Jesus, the true vine, we have to cut down all other allegiances that interfere with him. God promises to break down those false altars. That's a blessing.

The northern kingdom was so prosperous during this time, like a growing and spreading vine. They think they are ok, but God is going to destroy their golden calf Baal statues and break down their altars.

THE PLATTITUDES (10:3)

There is a pattern of excuse making for those who are not connected to Christ. You may even fall back in some ways to your old life for a time even as a Christian, if you do not maintain your walk with Christ. Dear child of God, please listen to these warnings! In ancient Israel, one of the reason they were not connected to God was a pattern of pious platitudes and excuse making.

When Yahweh confronts Israel's divided heart, they basically say: “We are too far gone for repentance – we have no king because we did not fear the Lord.” The king of Israel had no legitimate power. Everyone was living in the lap of luxury even though they

10:3 | For now they will say: “We have no king, for we do not fear the Lord; and a king—what could he do for us?”

The monarchy of Israel is so far gone, but this is just an excuse. We do the same. We say, *"We can't live holy lives – look at our culture. Look at all the hypocrites in the churches Christian men are addicted to porn. Look at the women who constantly gossip. Once godly men are committing adultery. Godly pastors have been disqualified for their finances. If this is the case, then how can you expect my worship to be fervent?"* All that is just excuse making. Change your heart. Repent. Soften your heart to God. Come with true, fervent worship! He is worthy.

Who will stand up for Christ and live a holy life and stop making excuses? If you truly know God, you will worship and serve him no matter how perverse the culture is or how hypocritical the churches are. We worship God because he is worthy, not because his people are. Cut down all your excuse making and be grateful for the love of God even if you must stand alone.

What are your excuses for not growing and changing in Christ? Why are you not a joy-filled Christian? What is taking away your peace? You might have some excuses.

COMMON EXCUSES

You know If I had more money, I'd give more sacrificially.

If I had better health, I'd serve Jesus more.

The reason I'm not growing in Jesus is because of...

- My health problems.
- My background and upbringing was really hard.
- I have abuse in my past.

Hosea 10 says, the reason we don't serve Jesus and grow in him is because you have a heart problem. Until you recognize your sin and idolatry of putting your gaze on yourself and your circumstance instead of completely on Jesus, you are just making excuses.

You know without Christ you can do... **nothing!**

- Here's an excuse (**anger**): "I'm bitter because so and so hurt me." That's an excuse. God commands you to truly *love, do good, and speak blessings to the one who wronged you*. If you can't, then you are not maintaining your walk with Christ. Something is wrong. Get help. Without Christ we can do... **nothing!**
- Another excuse (**depression**): "I'm so depressed, I'll just watch unfiltered movie and media. I deserve a break." Listen if that's you, something is wrong. You need help. Without Christ we can do... **nothing!**
- Here's one (**smokescreens**): "I can't get to church service or prayer meeting. Or I can't get to this Bible study or connect with this person at church. I'm just too busy." Are you? Are you too busy, or is it just an excuse? You need the church. You need fellowship. Are you just using your busyness to hide? Come on out dear child of God. He loves you. Let God's people love on you. You need help. Without Christ we can do... **nothing!**

If you've fallen into a pattern of empty words and excuses, repent, get help, get right; get refocused on Christ! Get renewed.

BRING YOUR EXCUSES TO THE CROSS

Bring your excuses and leave them at the foot of the cross. Whatever the wall you've hit, can't Jesus tear it down?

“Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?” (Jer 32:27).

Without Jesus, you can do nothing, but with him, you can do anything he wants you to do.

“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Mt 19:26).

THE PATTERN OF EMPTY WORSHIP (10:4-8)

One of the greatest reasons a Christian might have any strongholds of sin in their life is simply because of empty worship. Worship of Christ, both privately and publicly should be so enriching that you don't need the idols of the world.

Is the Spirit enriching you in personal, private worship of Christ? That's the core of your problem if you're not growing, or you are caught in some kind of a sin cycle or apathy about God or your marriage, or you church. Are you **stuck in a “I don't care” mood**? The diagnosis is always a hard heart that comes from empty worship!

1. *The Diminishing Principle: Idols Distract and Crowd Your Heart*

Ancient Israel departed from worshipping the living God when they hoisted up a golden calf on their altar. It sure looked like a good thing, since the Golden Calf temples in Dan and Bethel were identical to the Solomonic Temple in Jerusalem. It looks like a good thing, but it's not a good thing. It's a *horrible thing*.

They cry and fuss when it's taken away from them. That's how you know it's an idol. Something has displaced Christ on the throne of your heart. **Let me give you a couple principles about idol worship.**

The **Diminishing** Principle: Idols crowd your heart so much, they choke real worship, make your heart small so that you our glorious God is boring to you.

10:4 | They utter mere words; with empty oaths they make covenants; so judgment springs up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field.

People put on words and even religious practices like a new set of clothes. They wear it long enough to suit themselves or draw attention, but it is only superficial. Israel fell into this trap.

John Bunyan said, “When you pray, rather let your heart be without words than your words without heart.”

Hosea says heartless prayers are **like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field**.

A true born-again saint of God will delight in God's love in his inner person. Idols are like a **poisonous weed** that crowds out the heart. In the parable of the soils we read:

“The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful” (Mt 13:22).

Is your heart filled with **weeds of worry** or **briars of bitterness**? Are you crying out to God with your burdens in hope, or are you stewing on them with bitterness? Are you worrying about them? Root them up and give them to God.

FELLOWSHIP VS. VENDING MACHINE

Do you see God as a Santa Claus, or vending machine? Or do you see him as your loving heavenly Father that wants to have a relationship with you.

The first and most important thing in praying is not petition or supplication, but fellowship. Prayer is not just about getting good things. It's about getting the best thing: fellowship with God is your reward.

“Be still and know that I am God” (Psa 46:10).

“I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward” (Gen 15:1).

“The LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex 33:11).

We have something so much greater than Moses. Prayer is more than petition and supplication: it's communion. That's why Paul says:

“Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17).

Is your worship life filled and overflowing? If not, you are missing out. There is nothing stopping you from full and sweet fellowship with the Lord except any remaining sin in you. Anything you put above the Lord is an idol.

Let me just awaken you when it comes to idolatry. An idol is anything that takes the place of God in your life.

Most of the idols in our life are actually desires for good things that we simply want too much. They are inordinate desires. We get fooled because they are good things. Let me show you an example.

What you need is not idols. You need the all sufficient Christ.

“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him [Jesus] who called us to his own glory and excellence” (2 Pet 1:3).

2. *The Demand Principle: Idols Demand!*

The **Demand** Principle: When a good desire becomes a demand, it's become an idol. It's taken the place of God. It tears Christ off the throne of your heart.

10:5 | The inhabitants of Samaria tremble for the calf of Beth-aven. Its people mourn for it, and so do its idolatrous priests— those who rejoiced over it and over its glory— for it has departed from them.

The golden **calf** worship was a form of Baal worship. The altar in Dan is still standing to this day. The golden calf altar in Bethel (house of God) is here called **Beth-aven** (house of wickedness). Look at how idols can destroy.

For them, they had good desires to be taken care of, to be provided for. Those are good desires, but when they replace God and when they are demanded, they become idols.



All our desires should be subject to the glory and honor and Lordship of Jesus. Nothing can compare to him.

“Everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ” (Phil 3:8, NLT).



Some criteria to assess if your desire has becoming **inordinate** and **enslaving**:

- When it consumes and rules you
- When you sin to get it
- When you sin if you don't get it

How do I know if something is an idol?

What makes you angry or sad if you don't get it?

What do you punish someone for if they don't give it to you? Must you have your way? That's an idol.

What is now your identity? "I must have this job" or "I must be a parent" or "I must be married" or "I must have "blank" to live a meaningful life." Or "If only "blank" would change in my life, or about my spouse, I would be satisfied or content or joyful." That's a ruling desire. It's taken the place of Christ. Recognize it. Repent of it. Refocus on Christ's Lordship. **You can be content with everything stripped from you as long as you have Christ.**

3. *The Destruction Principle: Idols Destroy (10:6-8a)*

The Destruction Principle: Never put your hope and happiness in something God's not guaranteed.

You should never let anything rule you that can be taken away. Find your contentment in Christ alone. Look at verse 6.

10:6 | The thing itself shall be carried to Assyria as tribute to the great king. Ephraim shall be put to shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his idol.

The final destruction of golden calf worship is prophesied. The golden calf idol would be **carried away** with their whole country **to Assyria**. That idol made the people feel good, but it wrecked their lives.

I'll say it again: **Never put your hope and happiness in something God's not guaranteed.** Your identity is not your job, your single or marriage status, whether you are healthy or handicapped. Your identity and happiness and hope is in Christ. Everything else can and at some time will be stripped away.

THE KING WHO BROUGHT PROSPERITY FALLS

The people of Samaria (the northern kingdom) had such confidence in their king, especially Jeroboam II. He had brought so much wealth and prosperity to the people of northern Israel. But the prophet reveals that he is just a puppet king, and he will perish by the Assyrians.

10:7 | "Samaria's king shall perish like a twig on the face of the waters."

Their point was not that they literally were without anyone on the throne but that the king had no real legitimacy and little power or hope of success. Such a king is like a stick on water in that he can exercise no control over events. Just as their king is powerless, so their worship is powerless as well. The idols of Bethel and other shrines of false worship cannot help them. Hosea prophesies the future: **thorns and thistles shall grow up on their altars**, and that is exactly what happened.

10:8a | The high places of Aven [wickedness], the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed. Thorn and thistle shall grow up on their altars...

The altar of the golden calf in Dan was left desolate for 2700 years as we mentioned until it was rediscovered in 1966 by renowned Israeli archaeologist Avraham Biran who mined the mound of Tel Dan during nearly thirty years of excavation. Truly **thorns and thistles** covered this altar for twenty-seven hundred years.

Hosea's complaint concludes with a promise that Bethel (here called Aven or "wickedness") and its associated shrines would be taken out of use. The designation "**the sin of Israel**" for the Bethel shrine is similar to the constant refrain in Kings that the shrines at Dan and Bethel were the means by which Jeroboam son of Nebat "made Israel sin" (cf 2 Kgs 3:3).¹ It characterizes their lives as mired in the practice of sin and idolatry.

4. *The Damnation Principle: Idols Cannot Save (10:8b)*

The **Damnation** Principle: Idols cannot save you; they can only pacify you till judgment day.

When the Assyrians invaded northern Israel, their idols could not shelter them.

10:8b | ...they shall say to the mountains, "Cover us," and to the hills, "Fall on us."

Their cries are to no avail. "**Cover us**" and "Fall on us" are cries which the New Testament will take up twice: first to predict the still greater horrors awaiting the Jerusalem of ad 70 as the logical outcome of its Good Friday choice, and secondly to portray the terrors of the **Last Judgment**, with men of every rank and nation...

Idols cannot satisfy, and idols cannot save. If idols keep you from trusting in Christ, you will lose your soul. The idols you so needed will damn your soul to an eternity without Christ.

There's coming a day when our friends and neighbors, and even some members of our own family will be...

"...calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev 6:16).

Of course the destruction of northern Israel and later of the Temple are primarily pointing to the Last Judgment when Christ will come to destroy evil and set the world anew and aright. All the judgments of God that precede the Last Day are mercy cries. They are calls for repentance before that last great and terrifying day.

THE PARADOX (10:9-11)

The great paradox of all of this chapter, is that ancient Israel had everything from God. They were chosen by him. They were loved by him. They were given the Word of God and the prophets. They had everything in their favor. But they bypassed the Lord and became blinded.

A Double Iniquity

We are told they are guilty of "double iniquity."

10:9-10 | From the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel; there they have continued. Shall not the war against the unjust overtake them in Gibeah?
¹⁰ When I please, I will discipline them, and nations shall be gathered against them when they are bound up for their **double iniquity**.

¹ Ibid, 212.

Yahweh reveals that Israel has nothing to look forward to but a complete military collapse. God's point in displaying his people's helplessness is for them to be able to see their own sin.

Gibeah? It was in Gibeah that we have the tragic story in Judges 19-20, when everyone did "that which was right in their own eyes". Sad. It was there in Gibeah that they began a civil war that nearly decimated the tribe of Benjamin. That's the result of doing that which is right in your own eyes. As a result, Israel is shameless, guilty of a **double iniquity**.

Double iniquity? In other words, Israel wasn't just like the other nations. They were not sinning in the darkness like pagans. They have the truth. They have the Word of God. Israel is sinning in the light.

A Doting God

Hosea then looks back at the sweetness of God's care for Israel when she was submitted to him. These verses return to the metaphor of Israel as a farm animal.

10:11 | Ephraim was a trained calf that loved to thresh, and I spared her fair neck; but I will put Ephraim to the yoke; Judah must plow; Jacob must harrow [make plow rows] for himself.

At one time, **Ephraim** (northern Israel) was like a young calf who worked hard threshing grain. It had a natural life to her. She was alive like a young trained calf. God blessed her and didn't make her plow with a harness in the field.

But now that Ephraim has lost that life, God puts the harness of affliction on her. Jacob (the name for the old life before he became Israel, prevailer with God). You are no longer worthy to be called Israel. You are Jacob.

What kind of yoke must this fair calf return to? The harness of the pagan nations. The nations will **put Ephraim to the yoke** – harnessed as captives of war with the Assyrians.

It's often true for those who grow up in the light of the Gospel and depart from it, that there is a "double iniquity" and God must bring them back through a harsh yoke of affliction and difficulty. Some of you have that testimony.

For those who are not yet in Christ in this church, don't depart! Come to Christ now. Going after the world would be a "double iniquity". It's not just sinning in the darkness.

2. **CONNECTED TO JESUS AND CONTENT (10:12-15)**

PLOW YOUR HEART...

To illustrate how to connect with the Lord and get rid of all idols, Hosea continues with the farming analogy. He says, you've got to plow up your hard heart.

10:12 | Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.

The Goal: Plant Righteousness (10:12a)

Something new and foreign needs to be planted in the soil of the sinner's heart. Something needs to be planted deep in our hearts: **sow for yourselves righteousness**.

10:12a | Sow for yourselves righteousness...

What is this **righteousness**? Paul tells us there is a righteousness apart from the mosaic law, that does not come from rule keeping, but directly from Christ by faith in Christ (Rom 3:21-26).

The Christian life is always a life of faith looking to the righteousness of Christ. Even the righteousness we do in our lives is a result of God's work in us.

“...Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13).

Sow, i.e. **plant** – cut open the hardened ground of your heart. Put in it the divine standard of righteousness found in Christ that you can never measure up to in yourself. Water it with weeping and mourning and repentance.

Paul made it crystal clear: he wanted to “be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Phil 3:9).

Sow for yourselves. In other words, no one can do it for you. The pastor can't do it for you. Your spouse cannot do it for you. Only God can do it for you as you personally meet with him. You have to go to God yourself.

The call to **sow for yourselves** is simply a call to faith in Christ's righteousness. Sow faith.

“Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn” (Deut 10:16).

The Reward: Reap God's Covenant Love (10:12b)

Plant a righteousness apart from yourself or the law (Phil 3:9), a **righteousness** that comes from abiding in Christ by faith, and you will get a harvest: you will reap *hesed*: God's loyal, unrelenting covenant love.

10:12b | ...reap steadfast love;

You will know the love of God. This divine love in Hebrew is called **חֶסֶד** (*hesed*). It is the merciful covenant faithful love of God.

If you want to get rid of all competing idols or things that rule you, like fear or anger or covetousness, then you need the love of God to possess you.

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love” (1 Jn 4:18).

The Process: Break Up Your Hard Heart (10:12c)

Hosea calls us to repentance. To turn back to God, you need to **break up your fallow ground**.

10:12c | ...break up your fallow ground...

Instead of hardness, you need tenderness. Instead of excuses, you need to take responsibility. Repentance means we let the full conviction of the Holy Spirit come over us and we surrender to it.

What does it look like to break up the hardened ground of your heart? It means to be cut to the heart by the Word, by the double-edged sword of the Spirit. It means you need to totally open your heart so the Lord can work. It means you turn away from your sin with great remorse, with the determination to utterly forsake it. The apostle Paul describes in detail what a true brokenness and repentance looks like.

The Moment: Now! (10:12d)

There is an urgency when it comes to your salvation. Though regeneration is a sovereign act of God on the human heart there is human agency. God never sets aside human responsibility. He places this duty upon every person and says, break up your fallow ground, **for it is time to seek the Lord**.

10:12d | ...for it is the time to seek the Lord...

The Lord says, "All day long I opened my arms to a rebellious people" (Isa 65:2a, NLT). The problem is not God. His arms are open wide to all. He is "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet 3:9). You must determine that the **time** is now. Seek the Lord, and he will be found. "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart" (Jer 29:13).

The Blessing (10:12e)

There is a weather forecast: it's going to **rain**. Drops of God's **righteousness** are about to descend **upon you** (10:12d).

10:12e | ...that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.

The fruit of regeneration is just as St. Paul described it: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" (1 Cor 3:6). Growth is the natural outcome when real life exists. All Christians are to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18).

The glorious way forward is to be taken up in God's love. That's where genuine, meaningful, lasting transformation and growth come from in the Christian life.

.... OR PAY THE PRICE (10:13-15)

If you decide you don't want to soften your heart, then what are the consequences? Jesus said,

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save

it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul?" (Mk 8:34-37).

There are really only two choices: hold on to the world and lose your soul. Hold on to Jesus and gain eternal life.

10:13-15 | You have plowed iniquity; you have reaped injustice; you have eaten the fruit of lies. Because you have trusted in your own way and in the multitude of your warriors, ¹⁴ therefore the tumult of war shall arise among your people, and all your fortresses shall be destroyed, as Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel on the day of battle; mothers were dashed in pieces with their children. ¹⁵ Thus it shall be done to you, O Bethel, because of your great evil. At dawn the king of Israel shall be utterly cut off.

These verses are obviously a prophecy of what is to come for northern Israel. They are the fulfillment of all that God had warned them about from the beginning. There is a tide of consequences from sin that cannot be stopped, but that God will most assuredly work for their good. It was this warning first sounded by Moses in Deuteronomy 28-29 of the blessings and cursings of the law. It was again reconfirmed by Joshua when he "read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law" (Josh 8:34). Israel had planted a harvest of human reasoning that is really rebellion.

At the end of the day, following idols seems right, but it leads to destruction.

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death" (Prov 14:12).

Conclusion

Today so many people are connected. We are more connected than ever, yet more disconnected than ever. Our connections are superficial.

I recently saw a placard that said:

Look at faces not at devices!

It reminds me the most important face to look at: Jesus! Connect to Jesus! He will satisfy you. Idols destroy. Jesus delights! Easy choice. Die to self! Live to Christ!

Christ left his throne to connect with you. He came to take you dead and unplugged, and unite you and plug you into himself.

At the end of the day, Jesus is the true vine. You can't tape fruit to yourself and say you are connected to Jesus.

Jesus said, "I am the true vine... I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:1a, 5).