

GOD'S CONTROVERSY WITH SINNERS

Hosea 4: 1-6

Bernard Clairvaux, an eleventh century French writer penned this aphorism; “**The road to hell is paved with good intentions.**” His assessment that good intentions don't always result in wise decisions with good conclusions is true. “*Old men will dream dreams, young men shall see visions;*” they set lofty goals and go to great extremes against difficult odds to plan and execute their dreams, and sometimes those dreams turn to nightmares. What looks good to some and what they intend for good does not always materialize. God's charge against all by nature in Isaiah 5:20 is, “*they call evil good and good evil.*” If this be the case, (and it must be because God said it), then all our so called good intentions are really evil intentions. No matter the intentions whether good or bad, they cannot thwart the eternal purpose of God. What he wills shall be.

In spiritual matters, intentions have eternal ramifications. We have many such examples of quote “good intentions” in scripture: the rich young barn builder, the proselyting Pharisees who compassed land and sea, a young religious zealot named Saul of Tarsus, who called his “good intentions” dung: King Jereboam, shrine builder.

Read Matthew 7:21-23. 21 “*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.* 22 *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works?* 23 *And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*” These preachers gave their life in ministry of their gospel. They were sincere, dedicated and zealous and their intentions no doubt honorable but listen again to the conclusion of their so called good intentions from him who is judge of the quick and dead. “*Depart from me, ye that work iniquity, I never knew you.*” What a terrible end to an otherwise noble intention.

Nobody intends to experience the end of these sinners. Nobody would knowingly choose, (and it is a choice) an eternity of misery and torment if they could do otherwise and nobody has to do so.

The prophecy of Hosea is written to uncover this dark side of human nature for those with so called good intentions, and warn of the certain end of those paving that broad way that leads to destruction.

He wrote of, in the first three chapters of his prophecy, the redemption of God's people by the Lord Jesus Christ. **Read Hosea 3:2.** “*So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley.*” The significance of this “price paid” typifies a specific amount to redeem the elect of God. Though small in respect to monetary value, and cheapened more by man's lack of value for it, yet it represents the inestimable sum required of

man by a Holy God beyond man's ability to pay. Fifteen shekels of silver and one and one half homers of barley are not much monetarily but to a beggar with nothing it might as well be Fort Knox.

Well, we know Jesus didn't ransom the elect of God with silver and barley so what's the meaning here? We know that the exact price to be perfect satisfaction to God's holy law and justice; rendered only by the God-Man, Jesus Christ the Righteous. With this price he bought his wife to himself. She, like all the elect are "not our own, for we are bought with a price." (1 Corinthians 7:23) **Read 1 Peter 1:18-19.** "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation (dead works religion) received by tradition (not truth) from your fathers; 19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:"

Silver is a precious metal, purified in the refiner's furnace. Possession thereof supplies the beggar's needs. This precious metal is representative of Christ's Person, who he is. **Read Proverbs 25:4.** "Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer." That vessel is one of mercy and grace. That vessel is Christ, sent of the Father to redeem his people. So, when Christ was found guilty of sin and that by imputation only, he was tried and crucified with no dross to be found. Pilate at his trial said, "I find no fault in him." (Luke 22:4) In Psalm 69:4; Jesus said, "They hated me without a cause." There was nothing in his Person or his character and conduct to disqualify him from his office as Surety of his people. He came forth like refined silver, a pure, sinless suitable Substitute and Sacrifice. According to **Hebrews 5:8**, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." He endured and overcame the fire of God's wrath. Blaspheming his name men called him a sinner. Even today some call him the greatest sinner who ever lived but God says he was without spot. He is the impeccable Christ.

Barley, the staple of slaves and beggars is typical of the Bread of Life. In its natural state barley is of no use to the hungry. Until it is crushed by a millstone into flour, the hungry remain hungry. The staple of eternal life for spiritual slaves and beggars is that Bread made from barley crushed by a millstone. **Read John 6:48-51.** 48 "I am that bread of life. 49 Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. 50 This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. 51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." It took the sacrifice of his sinless humanity (the barley) on the altar of his Deity (silver) to satisfy the holiness and justice of God for all those he represented and provide Living Bread (barley) for all who will "come, buy without money and without price, come eat." (Isaiah 55:1) Our participation in the memorial supper following this service is our testimony to his work of grace in us.

Here in Hosea chapter four the tenor of his message changes from one of mercy and grace to one of judgment as he charges the nation Israel with crimes against the God who chose them,

called them out of Egypt and conquered for them the land of Canaan. Their good intentions, though voiced many times found them on that broad way that leads to destruction. In Exodus 19:8, 24:3, 24:7 and Deuteronomy 5:27, *call the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do.*” Paul wrote of them in Romans 10:1-4. Though they had the tabernacle, the priesthood, the altar and the ceremonies which all pointed to Christ, their good intentions found them in the way of destruction: that way, the way of rejecting knowledge. **Hosea 4:6.** *”My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.”*

We can learn from Israel’s mistakes. **Hosea 4** teaches us that:

God’s controversy with Israel teaches us

- a. Destruction is rooted in ignorance.
- b. Pride is the offspring of ignorance.
- c. Pride goes before destruction.

a. Destruction is rooted in ignorance. Hosea 4:6. *”My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”* It was the wise man who said in Proverbs 1:7 that *”the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and instruction.”* The first thing God teaches his people is to fear Him. This is not a legal, mercenary fear, motivated by threats or promises from God, but a reverential respect for his glory in salvation. This fear is achieved in the sinner when God enables him to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, *”who of God is made unto us wisdom, sanctification, righteousness and holiness.”*(1 Corinthians 1:30) This is further substantiated by Christ’s remarks in John 17:3, *”and this is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.”* Salvation is rooted in knowledge of a just God and Savior.

In **Hosea 4:1** God accuses Israel of ignorance. *”Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.”*

No truth? No mercy? No knowledge? There is no knowledge of truth and mercy. There is no knowledge of him who is truth. There is no knowledge of God’s mercy in Christ. No one knows how God’s truth and mercy are met together. **Psalm 85:10:** *”Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed (embraced) each other.”* But how?

How many people do you know today who can tell you how a holy God can justify the ungodly and remain just? This question precedes the truth that was absent in Israel and in Christendom today. Ignorance of how this act of grace is accomplished is spiritual death. Understanding it is life eternal. **Romans 10:1-4.** *1 Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. 2 For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not*

according to knowledge. 3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

A holy God cannot dispense his love at the cost of justice. He does love but only those who are in Christ by election, predestination, calling, faith and repentance. These all are they who are justified by his blood and clothed in his righteousness based on the satisfaction he made to the law and justice of God. We rest in his doing and dying. This is the truth and mercy of which Israel was ignorant. **Hosea 4:1.** In false religion, I never heard or considered the question; let alone know the answer. You will never hear this subject broached at Bethel or Dan. To them, it is a mystery, still hidden.

Remember Israel's sin. They were idolaters. They forsook the temple in Jerusalem for the pagan shrines at Bethel and Dan. Jereboam, king of Israel (10 northern tribes) forgot the vow God made to Solomon in **2 Chronicles 7:12** *"And the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, (for wisdom to lead) and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice..." 2 Chronicles 7:15-17 15 Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place. 16 For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there forever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually. 17 And as for thee, if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, and do according to all that I have commanded thee, and shalt observe my statutes and my judgments; 2 Chronicles 7:18-20 Then will I establish the throne of thy kingdom, according as I have covenanted with David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel. 19 But if ye turn away, and forsake my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them; 20 Then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them; and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it to be a proverb and a byword among all nations. 2 Chronicles 7:21-22 And this house, which is high, shall be an astonishment to everyone that passeth by it; so that he shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and unto this house? 22 And it shall be answered, Because they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath he brought all this evil upon them."* This is God's controversy with Israel.

Jereboam's reason for building the altars at Bethel and Dan was fear that Israel's heart would be turned back to the temple if they returned there for worship, costing him his kingdom. In this *"he made Israel to sin."*

But worship at Bethel and Dan meant more than just rejecting God's appointed place of worship, the temple in Jerusalem. This was tantamount to forsaking Christ, the only way to God. It's turning thumbs down to God's prescribed place and *öWAYö* of worship. That temple was built to precise specifications because it represented Christ's Person and work in salvation. Forsaking the temple is rejecting Christ. The only place God will meet with sinners is where the Christ is

exalted as a just God and Savior. The idol temples at Bethel and Dan, though established with what Jereboam considered "good intentions" dishonored God and cast shame and reproach on Christ. Today people worship their god in places where the truth is unknown, unsought and untaught and God is not present. They have forsaken God's Temple, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our mercy seat and the one sacrifice we need.

What is our hope of avoiding Israel's end? **Read Hosea 4:2.** We have to look no further than Israel to see why God had a controversy with them.

"By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood." Here God gives us, in detail the sequence of Israel's engagement in false religion.

Swearing. The Hebrew word swear is *al-law'* It means to curse, but also it means to bind by an oath. Context will determine its meaning. In context God is calling Israel's hand on their idolatry.

Men swear oaths to validate their "good intentions." They make vows to authenticate and give credibility to their position and their message. They make vows to entice followers to their cause, and it works.

So, why not swear oaths? **Read Matthew 5:33-37** *"Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:34 But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne:35 Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.36 Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.37 But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."*

Making vows implies one's ability to perform that vow. Men swear to that which they cannot achieve. Our promises to deliver are beyond our control. That's why we swear by something or someone greater than us. (Hebrews 6:16) To "swear to God" is to invoke God's name in the vow. This is to imply God's participation and its sure success. Its man's attempt to engage God in something God calls evil. It's like using his name in vain. It's like the preachers in Matthew 7:25. "In thy name" They invoked God's name to give credibility to their schemes. In **Hosea 4:15** God commands Judah not to invoke God in their oaths: *"Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend; and come ye not unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Bethaven, not swear, the Lord liveth."*

What is Christ's command concerning oaths? **Matthew 5:37.** *37 But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."* God has already determined and declared what will be. His word is clear and cannot be changed. Truth stands on its own and cannot be altered. It needs no prop to authenticate itself. Men swear, to give

authority and authenticity to the Word. Jesus says ðlet the Word stand on its own. Don't add to or take away from the Word. Let your yes be yes and your no be no.

“Men swear to engage God in their schemes but God has already determined the outcome of all things. Swearing won't change a thing.

James the apostle has a word on this subject.

Read James 4:13-16. 13 *“Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain;* 14 *Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.* 15 *For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.* 16 *But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.”* Men boast in that which God calls evil.

“The best laid schemes of mice and men often go awry.” (Robert Burns, ðTo a mouseö 1786) Man's intentions invariably fail because we intend them for evil but God means them for his good and glory. We cannot undermine God's purpose to glorify himself with our oaths.

Israel was guilty of swearing to authenticate their claims to be of God, from God and for God. Swearing, of itself seeks to exalt the swearer.

Lying. Hosea 4:2. Men who tell the truth don't have to swear. Truth will stand on its own without an oath to prop it up. Men who are ignorant of God and Christ have nothing to offer but lies and they are sure to be believed by those who don't know God. Liars are of *“their father, the devil, who was a liar from the beginning and the father of all lies.”* (John 8) Their so called truth is at best a half truth and therefore a lie. Their mercy made no propitiation for sinners, only a way for sinners to propitiate for themselves. Invoking God in their schemes they convince their followers that they are of God. Their lies deny the extent of the law of God to judge sinners in strict righteousness and the sinner's inability to produce that righteousness. They are sworn to legal and mercenary deeds of law for acceptance with God. They tell lies on God by promising eternal blessings based on the sinner's efforts to keep the law of God.

Killing. Hosea 4:2. Their doctrine is deadly. It is like rat poison: ninety nine one hundred percent inert material. It's the one percent that is deadly. And there are those who preach so close the truth that if possible, they would deceive even the elect. There is a lot of truth preached today. But, mixed with truth is Satan's lie that something other than the imputed righteousness of God is their ticket to eternal life. They murder the souls of sinners with their doctrines of works. Rejecting knowledge, **(the Truth-Christ) (v-6)**, of which all by nature are guilty, both voice and victim **are rejected by God.**

stealing. Hosea 4:2. Such doctrines rob God of his glory and steal their joy in Christ. Those in Christ have always been in Christ and always will be. Ignorance or rejection of this truth is to hold even God's elect in bondage to the law, robbing them of the joy of their salvation.

Committing adultery. This is spiritual adultery. With no foundation in grace to anchor the soul, men prostitute themselves from idol to idol. They are those who are tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. They have prostituted themselves to that great whore of false religion, Babylon. Without the truth that sets men free by the mercies of God they have no propitiation for sin.

They break out. Their sin abounds like an overflowing scourge. Their motivation is legal and mercenary. They are motivated by fear of punishment or promise of rewards and they go about to establish a righteousness of their own. They compass sea and land and they are unrestrained and unashamed in their idolatry.

Blood touches blood. The word "touches" is to strike at. Their bloody sacrifice rivals that of Christ. In Roman's 3:15, Paul describes them as those "*whose feet are swift to shed blood.*"

Jesus said of them in **Matthew 23:23**, "*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*" The works of righteousness which lost sinners perform are of more value to them than Christ's work to establish God's righteousness. They were ignorant of God's righteousness, therefore, their:

God's controversy with Israel teaches us

a. Destruction is rooted in ignorance Hosea 4:6. "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.*"

b. Pride is the offspring of ignorance. Hosea 4:6 "*Because they have rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee.*"

Satan is the father of all lies. Ignorance is the mother of idolatry. Pride is the offspring of their union. Lies and ignorance are inseparable. Liars oppose the truth and pride is the culprit. Pride rejects the truth that sets men free. Israel rejected knowledge. They heard how God is just to justify the ungodly and rejected it. Man by nature will not put away his pride. Ignorance or pride or both keep him in bondage to the father of lies. In **Hosea 4:6** God charges Israel with forgetting the law. "*Because thou hast rejected knowledge I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God.*"

The law was given to be a schoolmaster to Israel. It pointed to, in picture and type the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ in salvation. Sinners who are ignorant of or not submitted to Christ are lost. Their **destruction is rooted in ignorance**, and their enemy, **pride is the offspring of ignorance and**

God's controversy with Israel teaches us

a. Destruction is rooted in ignorance Hosea 4:6. *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.”*

b. Pride is the offspring of ignorance. Hosea 4:6 *“Because they have rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee.”*

c. Pride goeth before destruction. Hosea 4:6b: *“seeing thou hast forgotten me, I will also forget thy children.”*

The history of Israel is just that. Not only did God abandon the children, he cursed the land. **Read Hosea 4:5.** *“Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night, and I will destroy thy mother, the homeland. Pride does go before destruction and a haughty spirit before the fall.”*

Israel rejected Christ and his salvation. They forgot the law of God which daily pointed sinners to Christ for all their salvation. Do your good intentions consider the law satisfied by the obedience and death of Christ? If they don't, God has a controversy with you.

By Winston Pannell