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A Survey of the Book of Hosea, Part 5

Hosea 2:1-13, Say to your brothers, “You are my people,” and to your sisters, “You have received mercy.” 2 “Plead with your mother, plead— for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband— that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts; lest I strip her naked and make her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and make her like a parched land, and kill her with thirst. 4 Upon her children also I will have no mercy, because they are children of whoredom. 5 For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.’ 6 Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths. 7 She shall pursue her lovers but not overtake them, and she shall seek them but shall not find them. Then she shall say, ‘I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now.’ 8 And she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished on her silver and gold, which they

used for Baal. 9 Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season, and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness. 10 Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand. 11 And I will put an end to all her mirth, her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths, and all her appointed feasts. 12 And I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees, of which she said, 'These are my wages, which my lovers have given me.' I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall devour them. 13 And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals when she burned offerings to them and adorned herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers and forgot me, declares the LORD.

The Love of God

In 1 John 3 we read this:

1 John 3:1, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God..."

We love this verse! In fact, it has been the inspiration for many hymns and songs in Christianity. Yet have you ever stopped to think of the implications? If God loves us and calls us "sons," what ought we to expect when it comes to our relationship with Him? We could answer this in many positive ways. However, there is a facet that is rather heavy.

Hebrews 12:7b-8, "God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons."

It is sort of like pastoral care in the context of a local church. We love knowing that there is a group of men who are praying for us, watching over us, and so caring for us. Yet this also means that if we rebel, they are coming after us. And so it is with God! Love on His part means that in this state of sin and misery there is going to be trial and difficulty NOT because the Lord somehow has become angry with us BUT because He will not allow us to self-destruct in our sin.

We see it in Hosea 2. Toward the end of the reign of Jeroboam II, Israel began wholesale to reject God and so serve the false gods of the Canaanites. Because God loved His people, He would not allow such a declension. And so He hedged up the way of sin with thorns that they might return to Him- a hedging He continues to utilize this day! Charles H. Spurgeon wrote¹ this about the text:

Beloved brethren and sisters, the apostacy [sic] of the children of Israel has been recorded for our learning; for, as they were prone to wander, so are we: and the methods by which God brought them back of old are precisely those which he uses with his erring children at the present day. Instead of wondering at Israel's wickedness, let us examine ourselves, and repent for our own sins; and while we see the hand of God upon *them*, let us learn to admire those methods of unerring wisdom by which divine love preserves the ransomed ones from going down into the pit. (Spurgeon, 1864, pp. V 10, Sermon 590, 290-291)

The Essence of Apostasy

From Hosea 2:2 and 13, and in fact the entire book of Hosea, God deigned to speak of His people's apostasy in terms of Harlotry, Adultery, Following other Lovers, and Forgetting God. From this we noted that while the term *apostasy* literally means "to fall away" the main idea is "falling away from one's love relationship with or one's devotion to Christ." Apostasy is any defect in our love for the Lord which is why Christ's words to the apostatizing church in Ephesus was this:

Revelation 2:4, "But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love."

We must see that while this has an emotional element to it, it does not at first reference how we feel. Love is sacrifice, service, and devotion. Accordingly to leave one's love for Christ is to replace being moved by Christ and His glory with something else.

Now, this is an amazing truth. Every one of us, whether we are married, single, divorced- thinking of marriage could not imagine being unfaithful. How wretched! Yet in your relationship with Christ any time you sin you are guilty of infidelity, of following other lovers! This no doubt is why there are so many warnings in Scripture.

Proverbs 4:24a, 26a, "Watch over your heart with all diligence... Watch the path of your feet..."

1 Timothy 4:16, "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things..."

Acts 20:28a, "Be on guard for yourselves..."

Now as this is a sin we all struggle with, it might be tempting therefore to think that it is no big deal. Yet you would be wrong.

Apostasy's Danger

Hosea 2:4, "also, I will have no compassion on her children, because they are children of harlotry."

When we looked at this we asked the question: How did Gomer's children become corrupt? Did she disciple them in evil? Did she long for their destruction? The truth be known, Gomer wasn't around very much (cf. Hosea 3). That being the case, her children were corrupt NOT on account of her lecturing, BUT on account of her living!

From this we saw that sin is a most contagious virus. It is leaven which multiplies quickly to permeate everything. And that is why the warning is given throughout the word in reference to sin.

2 Timothy 2:22, "...flee from youthful lusts..."

Galatians 6:1, "...look to yourself, lest you too be tempted."

Jude 23, "...hat[e] even the garment polluted by the flesh."

In fact, that actually is not enough. Not only are we to flee from sin, but we are called actively to pursue the kingdom. Paul speaking of the sin of coveting wrote this:

1 Timothy 6:11, "But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance *and* gentleness."

If we are to avoid spiritual declension in our lives, we must doggedly pursue:

- Holy living.
- Sincerity in our love and devotion to Christ.
- A heart of dependence upon Christ.
- Perseverance.
- Meekness.

And yet, we are not alone in our battle against sin. Because of God's love, He has placed no less than nine land mines in the path to sin.

The Cost of Apostasy

1. Covenant Severance

Hosea 2:2b, "contend with your mother, contend for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband."

While the national divorce had yet to take place (that would occur in 722 B.C.), nevertheless God began to withhold many of the privileges of the marriage He had with Israel. In Christ we enjoy....

- His covenant presence which makes the valley of Baca into a spring, Matthew 28:20; Psalm 84:6.
- Protection, Exodus 14:14.
- Oversight, consolation, and comfort of the Spirit, John 14:16, 26.

Yet these things God began to remove from His people as early as 750 B.C. Was it because God was angry with His people and so wanted them to suffer? Absolutely not! It was again, because He loved them and so sought to bring them back through affliction. Ezekiel said this speaking of the people of God:

Ezekiel 33:11, "Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord God, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'"

2. Shame

Hosea 2:3, "lest I strip her naked and expose her as on the day when she was born."

In Hosea, "nakedness" is a metaphor for open shame, ridicule, and so judgment and violence. Ezekiel describes nakedness:

Ezekiel 23:32-33, "stripping bare the nation of Judah," God said, "You will drink your sister's cup, which is deep and wide. You will be laughed at and held in derision; it contains much. You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, the cup of horror and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria."

All of this and more is what is denoted by the reference to "nakedness" in this text. Now as this references Israel as a nation, at first glance it doesn't appear to apply to us very much. Sure when a preacher who has preached against a specific sin is found to be guilty of that sin, there might be some public ridicule. Yet in a world which loves sinners, more oft-than not, the religious hypocrite is received with open arms.

Yet that is only for a time. Think back to our series on church discipline. When a traitor is sent back to the country of his betrayal, he is not kindly treated. Think of the policeman in prison! How much more so the person who found refuge in the Kingdom of God, labored to extend the Kingdom, and prayed for its success? Yet such is the expectation all of us ought to have if we give ourselves to sin: Satanic attack, misery, and shame!

3. Leanness of Soul

Hosea 2:3b, "I will also make her like a wilderness, make her like desert land, and slay her with thirst."

Throughout this book, Hosea has the wilderness experience in his mind (Hosea 2:14; 9:10; 13:5). God's people began in a wilderness. And it is to a wilderness that their sin was going to bring them. Yet in our lives the wilderness is not literal, but spiritual. Recall the book of Psalms.

Psalm 106:15, "So He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul."

Leanness of soul references that time in the life of the Christian when they get what they want and yet suffer on account of a distancing in their walks with God. Sin always comes dressed in the most alluring packaging, but it always leads to death, either physically, spiritually, morally, emotionally, or eternally.

4. Loss of Kindness

Hosea 2:4, "also, I will have no compassion on her children, because they are children of harlotry."

The compassion of God is that facet of His being which takes into account our true nature, and yet continues to love us!

Psalm 103:13-14, "Just as a father has compassion on *his* children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are *but* dust."

In the case of unrepentant sin, God withdraws this compassion and so allows us to reap in our members a greater portion of the consequences of our sin. See life in this age is lived on credit. Sin exacts a heavy toll, yet God withholds the toll that we might repent (Romans 2:5). Yet a form of discipline is God lifting preserving grace and so allowing us to reap in our person a portion of the wages of our sin (cf. Proverbs 5:22-23).

It is this loss of kindness that God uses to keep the child of God from sin. And yet it is more active- and this brings us to where we left off last time...

5. Sting of Sin

Hosea 2:6-7a, "therefore, behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths. And she will pursue her lovers [lit. she will "hunt them down"- such was the hold of sin on her life. When bereft of it, she hunted it down!], but she will not overtake them; and she will seek them, but will not find *them*."

On the surface it appears that the form of the "hedge" and the "thorns" is not mentioned; yet that is not the case. In Scripture the denotation of "hedge" and "thorn" was that of trial and difficulty (cf. Genesis 3:18; Numbers 33:55; Job 5:5; Proverbs 22:5). And so what would Israel reap as the wages of their rebellion against God? They would reap hardship, bitterness, turmoil, grief, pain, and suffering. Yet these were not the result of a capricious God getting even, but the just recompense for covenant disobedience. Again, recall the confines of the relationship Israel enjoyed with God as a nation.

Leviticus 26:14-20 (see the entire passage vv. 14-43), "But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments... I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that shall waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you shall sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies shall eat it up. And I will set My face against you so that you shall be struck down before your enemies; and those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when no one is pursuing you. If also after these things, you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. And I will also break down your pride of power; I will also make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze. And your strength shall be spent uselessly, for your land shall not yield its produce and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit." (cf. also Deuteronomy 28:15).

This passage was given when Israel entered into a relationship with God as a nation. At the time, Israel in fact invited the judgments if they did not obey saying, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient" (Exodus 24:7)! And yet the nation obviously forgot this. The more

difficult their path became, the more they sacrificed to the Baals, and the more difficult their path became. Yet and again, it wasn't a blind sense of justice by which God made their path difficult; it was love, "...and I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths..."

Years ago a painter was contracted to paint the ceiling of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. Together with his assistant, he labored tirelessly to get the job done. One evening as he was stepping back on the scaffolding to get a better perspective, he came perilously close to the edge; one more inch and he would be dead. The assistant knew if he called his name, the shout itself could send him over the ledge. So the assistant took a brush, dipped it into the paint, and splattered it all over the painting. He knew that such an event would draw the painter away from the scaffolding in a heartbeat; and it did.

: And so it is with God! On account of His love for us, persistent apostasy brings with it a bitter sting to draw us back from the perilous edge! You who would flirt with sin, understand that the pleasures at best are passing. They quickly evaporate revealing the harsh reality of suffering.

6. Forfeiting the Good Things of the Lord

Hosea 2:9, "therefore, I will take back My grain at harvest time and My new wine in its season. I will also take away My wool and My flax *given* to cover her nakedness."

The language here is rather violent. The expressions used for "take back" and "take away" were used of snatching prey from the mouth of an animal (cf. Amos 3:12). Clearly a not-so-pleasant future awaited God's people if they persisted in their worship of Baal.

Now notice, Canaanite worship revolved around fertility rites. In order to secure a good harvest, sacrifices and rituals were performed in the hopes of placating Baal and so moving the deity unto a bountiful provision. God's people immersed themselves in this religion. Yet had they forgotten the promise made by God in Genesis 1.

Genesis 1:29, "Then God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you.'"

Following the flood when the covenant was renewed God promised this:

Genesis 8:22, "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

Psalms 50:10, "For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills."

Sadly, Israel forgot these promises. In their lust for their sin, they had forsaken God and so enslaved themselves to the Baals. Soon it was to these false gods, these demons, that God's people paid their homage. So what did God do? He withheld these blessings. The more Israel worshipped the Baals, the poorer and sparser their harvest became. Soon famine set in and

suffering increased. But did Israel repent? No! They flocked to the Canaanite shrines and temples where they engaged in rituals and ceremonies which defiled them all the more.

Let us realize that all we possess is owned by God. We are but stewards. Thus the Lord here called the harvest, “My grain... My new wine... My wool and My flax.” Accordingly for God to withhold His gifts from ones who would give glory to false gods and demons only makes sense.

7. Heightened Depravity

Hosea 2:10, “and then I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one will rescue her out of My hand.”

I have referenced this in the past. The Canaanite religion was one of the most sexually deviant and depraved religions of the ancient world. As a fertility cult, many abuses were done in the name of Baal. Well, Israel dove into this religion head first such that the nation became horribly defiled- the word used here is “lewdness” which speaks of the most deviant of sexual practices.

In this context, God promised to expose the nation’s depravity to her lovers (which is believed by most commentators to be the priests of Baal. Now get this, when these priests beheld the immorality of Israel, even they would reject the nation as being too depraved to participate in the religion of Baal any longer- and hence the statement, “...and no one will rescue her out of My hand.” In other words, God would judge His people by taking them from the religion of Baal and the priests would not miss them, but rather say, “Good riddance!”

This was another consequence of Israel’s apostasy. Israel’s love of sinning would bring them to depths of immorality from which even the non-Christian sinner would recoil. Such that when judgment eventually came, the non-Christian would count it a blessing to be rid of them.

Do you see the awful consequence of apostasy? It is a path that leads to an immorality which shocks even non-Christians. And so it is in our world today. Do you know that some of the most heinous acts of wickedness, murder, and rebellion in history have been perpetrated by religious people? It is true. Apostasy is a horrible journey that none ought ever to begin.

8. Cessation of Worship

Hosea 2:11, “I will also put an end to all her gaiety, her feasts, her new moons, her sabbaths, and all her festal assemblies.”

Syncretism continues to be a problem in the church as it was in Hosea’s day. God’s people at the time took the best of the worship of God and mixed it with the worship of Baal such that now the nation enjoyed:

- The Sabbath in the name of Baal.
- Sacrifices in the name of Baal.
- Festivals and new moon celebrations in the name of Baal.

And so, just as God did with HIS harvests, new wine, and the like (v. 8), the Lord here promised effectively to close the temple doors, thus banning His people from the true worship of God. Now this didn't mean that God literally kept His people from gathering in holy places in His name and worshipping. Rather, the implication is that He removed His presence from their worship such that their ritual and services became an empty shell! See, though a person in a boat on a lake in the mountains may feel close to the Lord, the truth is that the presence of God is NOT there as it is when God's people gather for worship on Sunday. Truly, the veil that separates this world from the next is never so thin than when we gather for worship.

Well all this can be gone in a moment. Christ can "remove His lampstand" from any church if it endures false teaching or refuses to turn from their sin unto Christ (cf. Revelation 2:5). That is what is behind the verse before us. Israel rejected the objective worship of Christ for the subjective ritual and ordinances of mysticism. The result is that God left the temple, refusing to fellowship with a people who longed to give themselves to Baal. Such is another consequence of apostasy.

9. Forfeiture of Covenant Blessings

Hosea 2:12, "and I will destroy her vines and fig trees [notice the possessiveness with which Israel viewed her harvests; they no longer were given by God, but earned by the Israelite worshipper who sacrificed much in the name of Baal to secure a good harvest], of which she said, 'These are my wages [the word used here was the word used for a prostitute's pay] which my lovers have given me.' And I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field will devour them."

I want you to go back in your memory to the first time Palestine was referenced to the people of God when they were in slavery in Egypt. God called it a "land flowing with milk and honey." (Exodus 3:8, 17, 131:5; 33:3) That which made the Land of Promise stand out was its productivity.

- What the curse did to the world in thwarting its fruitfulness...
- God would partially undo in the Land of Promise where He would bring His people.

As such, Palestine was to the people of God a paradise of fruitfulness and productivity. This little strip of land enabled the entire nation to subsist without foreign aid or dependence. Such was one of the more important Covenant Blessings enjoyed by God's people.

Yet such a fruitfulness would be no longer. Israel's sin would rob them of the plenty God deigned to provide in the Land of Promise. And again, we do not fault God here. That which God provided by grace on account of His promises, Israel came to believe they earned from Baal as the reward for sick oblations. Accordingly, God brought the ban to His own land robbing it of its bounty. This of course ultimately occurred in 722 B.C. when Assyria torched the land, brought into captivity the majority of the population and so devastated the nation. Truly at this time only "the beasts of the field" would feed on that which was intended for the people of God!

This is the final cost associated with apostasy that is referenced here: the robbing of future, covenant blessing. When we give ourselves to sin, we give up much by way of covenant riches

which would have been ours if we had remained faithful.

For example, recall God's word to David following his sin with Bathsheba:

2 Samuel 12:7-8, "Nathan then said to David, 'You are the man! Thus says the Lord God of Israel, "It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if *that had been* too little, I would have added to you many more things like these!"

We see that apostasy is no laughing matter. It brings real harm, involves real pain and misery, and results in want and destruction. How horrible is spiritual defection!

This is a brutal list which we all must keep in mind. Truly there is a cost associated with indulgence in sin! Now you can walk away from this list down-hearted because of the punishments detailed herein. Or you can see this list for what it is: The actions of a God of love!

We look at a passage like this and say, "What awful news... to have God oppose us in this way would be horrible!" Yet we've got it all wrong. What we've read this morning is not the opposition of God, but the love of a God who would not allow Israel free access to her sin!

So how ought we to respond?

Psalm 95:7b-8a, "...today, if you would hear His voice, do not harden your hearts..."

Understandably there is a general distaste for all difficulty and trial in the Christian life. In part, it is because we don't like pain, want, or hardship. Yet there is an element in which we resent difficulty because in it God deprives us of that which we think we deserve. Israel at the time of Hosea had become possessive about their harvests and so their wealth (v. 12). And so it is with us. On account of our labor, we stake many a claim on our...

- Jobs.
- Spouses.
- Children.
- Wealth.
- Well-being.

...little knowing that all of these are but stewardships from God given that we might honor the Lord!

Therefore, when God in His providence deprives us of these things, like Job we cry "Foul!" Christian, what is your will this day? Is it to enter heaven in love with Christ? Or is it to have an easy life filled with pleasure? Each represents contradictory goals, as it is in the crucible that God prepares us for glory; the path that leads to apostasy is laden with nine land mines.

So what is your will this day? Let us all release our feeble hold on this life, cling to Christ, and so pray that God would use whatever means He deigns to get you and your family to glory!

End Notes

¹ *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 1864, Vol. 10, Sermon #590, pp. 520-521.

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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