

Lack of Righteousness Judged

Let us turn to our Bibles to Hosea chapter 4. Hosea chapter 4, verses 1 through 10. Let us listen attentively to the word of God, for listening is an act of worship, listening to God. Hear the word of the Lord, you children of Israel, for the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land.

There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land by swearing and lying, killing and stealing, and committing adultery. They break all restraints with bloodshed upon bloodshed. Therefore the land will mourn, and everyone who dwells there will waste away with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea will be taken away.

Now let no man contend or rebuke another, for your people are like those who contend with the priest. Therefore you shall stumble in the day, the prophet shall also stumble with you in the night, and I will destroy your mother. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge, because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priests for me.

Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children. The more they increase, the more they sin against me, I will change their glory into shame, they eat up the sin of my people, they set their heart on their iniquity, and they shall be like people, like priests. So I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their deeds.

For they shall eat, but not have enough. They shall commit harlotry, but not increase, because they have ceased obeying the Lord. Let us pray.

And so God Almighty, we see again another strong charge and accusation brought by our Heavenly Father against the people of the Old Covenant here, in which you bring an indictment against them, a charge laid against them for the many and sundry ways in which they have violated your holy law, and now we read God here, not just a violation of the first table, but also of the second table of your holy will and law. And so God, may this be a reminder to us to flee such a life, to examine these things, to see if our life is following this path as well, or rather the path of righteousness. To flee a lack of righteousness, which is to embrace wickedness, but rather, Lord, to flee wickedness and to embrace righteousness, we pray and ask.

Amen. Here we read Hosea shifting gears from the first table of the law to the second. He warns them that God's care is not only for their broken relationship with their Heavenly Father, that's that direct worship, but also with their fellow men, that's the second table of the law.

The prophet is warning them about their lack of righteousness and obedience to the Lord's holy law, but paralleling here, because I will delve into verse 6 in the next sermon, the lack of knowledge. My people perish because of this, of both things. So the warning comes in the form of a charge along with a list of violations, and then Hosea explains some of the punishments that will come upon them for their unrepentant ways.

All this reminds us that often gross violations of the first table, of the first four commandments, that there is only God, that you should only worship Him in the way He wants you to worship Him, and you should honor all things related to Him, especially His word and His worship, and that you do it on His day, the Lord's day. Often gross violations, blatant violations of that, those four commandments, are accompanied with violations, gross violations of the second table of the law. And we see that here.

We see that those who are okay with implementing their own forms of worship, to worship false so-called gods, are likely to have overt violations of the second table towards their fellow men. If they think little of God, they will think even less of men. There's another way of looking at that.

Lack of Righteousness

So let's examine more carefully what this looks like. First of all, it's the lack of righteousness, verses one through five. Hear the word of the Lord, you children of Israel.

The Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land, of course the land being God's people, that Canaan, hear or heed a warning, a reminder of how important these things are, that those who love the Lord should listen, should pay attention, but also that God is patient towards them. We read, of course, often here in Hosea and the prophets of them being told and called to hear, to pay attention, to heed to God, that God just hammers them over and over again, it seems like, of their wicked ways. And yet one thing we notice is that God keeps hammering them over and over again because he loves them.

He's calling them to repentance. This is an act of care on his part for their souls. This is why we don't stop warning ourselves, because it is the method of the Spirit of God, both the sinners and the backsliders, both of those outside the covenant and those within the covenant, they need this calling or rebuke, as we heard this morning.

It may be a gentle rebuke, described there in chapter five as an admonition of sorts to older men and younger men, for example, but it's still a warning. It's still, this is not good. Flee this way, embrace our Lord and Savior and his righteous word.

And it's God's word. Right here, what? Listen, heed to what? The word of the covenant-keeping God of the Lord. It's a divine utterance through the mouth of the prophets, words of greater import than mere man's words.

When you hear the pastor preach and you listen, you're supposed to examine it, not in accordance to your own opinion, not in accordance to someone else's word or a greater pastor, but according to the word of God. Can they and are they showing what? Thus saith the Lord. That's in the Bible.

That's what we have here. Hear the word of the Lord God Almighty, what he has for them to do and to submit. So thus far in verse one, the very first part of verse one, we have a twofold emphasis.

Here, pay attention to what? God's word. I have something to say to you, and it's very serious. You children of Israel.

Now that can be and is often a term of endowment, but here it seems, of course, given the context of the indictment of the charge, it's a warning. It's like when we say, listen here, son. Pay attention.

I'm talking to you, my child. This is serious stuff. The charge, therefore, is brought for the Lord.

The covenant-keeping God brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land, against the Jews of that day, and the word here often carries the idea of a legal consideration, hence the translation charge, sometimes translated controversy, or a serious concern, and thus it is a, what, a law court picture of one bringing accusations against an offending party. It's about serious matters, reminding us again, the law court idea behind that of the marriage in the prior chapters. Hosea has his marriage, which ends up being a symbol of the relationship between Israel and God and how they broke it in the harlotry, that is their spiritual adultery before his holy will.

These are both legal matters here. The marriage in here, the charge, is simply that you are violating God's holy word and his will, and the judge of the universe is coming down to talk to you. This is a very serious matter.

It is one thing, do not forget, to break God's ten commandments but have no covenant relationship with him in Christ Jesus. That is, they're not in the covenant of grace. Here they are in the covenant of grace, and thus such violations are all the more heinous, and the matter is much more serious and urgent before them.

He lists the sins of this charge against the inhabitants of the land. There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. These opening sentences here, this opening sentence, the end of verse one, is a general description of the various ways in which they have violated God's covenant.

No truth, no mercy, no knowledge. Probably, we have a description here of the second table and the first table, as some describe it. One commentator, Trapp, this is an older commentator in the 15 to 1600s, describes it this way.

For the first table, that there was no sound knowledge of God there, or knowledge of God. That's clearly the first table, third commandment in particular. Consequently, no care of God, either inward or outward worship, for there can neither be faith, nor repentance, nor due obedience yielded to an unknown God.

Thus, it ends up bleeding into the second table, or no truth or mercy towards their neighbor. So, no truth or mercy described in the second table, and knowledge of God described in the first table here. And he goes in some of the particulars here, by swearing and lying, killing and stealing, committing adultery, break all restraints.

It's like he's frustrated to say, you guys are just destroying everything there is about God's holy will. Swearing, perhaps falsely in God's name, or in Baal's name, right? Baal, more against one another. Lying, all kinds of lies, certainly.

But Hosea gives two descriptions here of lies, the same word, of political lies amongst the leaders. Hosea 7.3, for example, we read, they make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies. So here you have political lying going on.

Something along the lines of manipulating the leadership of the land. Hosea 11.12 describes lying as well. Ephraim compasses me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit.

But Judah yet rules with God, and is faithful with the saints. So that seems to be more broadly a social matter, that there are all kinds of liars. In fact, we read, and we're gonna run across this in the morning in Titus.

All Cretans are liars, Paul says. Now, of course, he doesn't mean every single man, woman, and child, but it's such a problem on the island of Crete that he says they're liars, this is a known fact, and you need to, therefore, adjust accordingly. And in this description here, similarly, or what we read in Hosea 11.12 here, he's not saying every man, woman, and child in Ephraim, or in Judah, is holy, and the other hand, and the other is wicked and always lying, but there's so much lying going on, and it's such a quality, and it's so widespread, it's like they're all lying.

It seems that way. But it's a serious enough matter. Killing.

Killing. Murdering. It's emphasized here at the end of verse two with bloodshed upon bloodshed.

It's like they can't stop. Hosea 6.9 also talks about murdering. As bands of robbers lie and wait for a man, so the company of priests murder on the way to Shechem.

Surely they commit lewdness. Now, that could be spiritual murdering, but it's probably physical outright assaulting upon people. Stealing.

He describes here as well. Killing and stealing in there in verse two in the middle. Hosea 7.1 also speaks of this as well.

When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was uncovered, and the wickedness of Samaria, for they have committed fraud. A thief comes in. A band of robbers takes spoil outside.

One of the ongoing problems that Hosea is dealing with amongst Israel. So it wasn't just and only, although this is the most serious infraction, false worship and false gods, and even their own holy days. But it spilled over, or bled over, into the second table of God's law, and they went after each man against his neighbor.

Every hand against every other man, it seems. In so many and sundry ways. He highlights, of course, the swearing, the lying, the killing, the stealing.

Those are pretty serious concerns. And these are all such public matters that he can speak of them and warn the people of God. It has welled up.

It's no longer private sins. One of the, as we know, long-staying arguments of libertarianism is you can do whatever you want in your own household. You're seeing here, well, they had their own groves, and they had their own idols in their houses, but it spilled out into the streets and they end up lying and stealing and going after their neighbors.

Adultery, with an A. Adultery, breaking of marriage vows, of course. And then a summary of all this matter, suggesting other sins, it seems to me, and breaking all restraints. It's like they've got to find every commandment they can break.

Perhaps the idea here. It's very bad stuff. And the conclusion and the result, therefore, is this, verse three.

Therefore, because of all this, the land will mourn, and everyone who dwells there will waste away, even to the fish of the sea to be taken away. The consequences of God's judgment upon them will affect the land about them and, of course, they themselves. And the mourning here is not a picture of repentance.

They mourn because they have sinned, but rather they mourn because of the bad fruits. They got their hand caught in the cookie jar, and now it's being slapped, and so they're sad. We've seen our little kids do this all the time.

They have their little puppy dog eyes, and they mourn. What do we call it? Crocodile tears. It's not a real crying.

They just don't like the consequences. That's the description here. Everything's wasting away.

All their prosperity is going out the window. Right? Remember, that's one of the main themes of Hosea, is that they have turned to wickedness because they've been so prosperous, their conclusion was God is still blessing us, so everything we must be doing is good and good enough. We don't have to change.

Continuing with the priest, verse 4. Now, he describes here, let no man contend or rebuke another for your people are like those who contend with the priest. This is an odd verse. I remember reading this many, many years ago.

I'm like, what exactly is the prophet saying here? Why should we not contend or rebuke one another? Didn't we read that this morning in Luke, when Jesus tells his followers you're supposed to rebuke one another when you catch them in sin? This seems like an incomplete sentence. What exactly is he going after? He is saying that the people are so stubborn, so

intransigent, that in their ways of wickedness and rebellion, that it's not worth warning them anymore. Don't bother.

You're wasting your time. You're wasting your breath. Their lack of humility is so bad that they would even contend or argue, it's the same word there for controversy in verse 1, or the charge, against priests who would otherwise have been doing good things for them.

They're going to take on God's leadership. That's the description there for your people are like those. They would even, we will put the word even, even contend with the priest.

That's how difficult they are and how wedded they are to their wickedness and wretchedness against God's holy will. So, in other words, the people as a whole are obstinate. And verse 8 describes it this way.

Jump down to verse 8. They eat up the sin of my people. They delight in it. It's yummy to them.

They set their heart on their iniquity. This is the church of God of the Old Testament in Jewish garment. And that's how God describes them.

And unfortunately, of course, you can see today the Americans being like that, although most Americans aren't members of the church of God anymore. They haven't been that way for a few generations, many of them, sadly. And this could apply to them in that sense.

But more directly, it applies to members of the household of God, people who claim to be Christians, who claim to follow God. And my first thought would be, of course, mainstream liberal churches. That would be closer to this.

Or even, I suppose, in the Evangelical and Reformed churches. If there are people who are playing around with God's word, swearing and killing and destroying families and adultery, I ran across that recently. I heard about an adultery case.

They were asking for advice in a Reformed church. So I'm not saying we're perfect. Of course, we have these problems.

These sermons need to be preached against them as well and against that kind of approach of taking God's word lightly in His will. And they are stubborn, like those who are just going after any kind of authority structure like the priest. Verse 5, stumbling.

A further consequence of this is not only no longer warn or contend against them, which is a horrible thing if you think about it. He says, don't warn them any longer. That's how stubborn they are.

You want warnings, brothers and sisters. You want the Holy Spirit to bring conviction. You want the pastor to warn you.

You want your brothers and sisters to say, this is the terrible path. This is the wrong way. That way leads to death.

And God's judgment is not to have pastors, not to have churches, not to have Christians in society. And what are we seeing today? All that's fading away in the American scene, isn't it, sadly? Because that's a judgment upon the nation. And the other judgment here is, therefore, they shall stumble in the day.

The prophets shall also stumble with you in the night, or the darkness of their ignorance, of their moral ignorance, of their lack of knowledge. So this is the second description here before it explicitly says in verse 1, or knowledge of God, here is the darkness. And then again in verse 6 we'll pick up the idea destroyed for a lack of knowledge.

Their mother, and I will destroy your mother at the very end of verse 5. Given that this is a description of Israel as a whole, of the people on average, of the leadership even, the priest are mentioned here as well, it's probably not anyone's particular mother, because it's not mother as plural, but mother singular. So some commentators think it is Samaria, where you have the source of mixed worship of God. God will come along, and he does.

The fall of Samaria comes soon in the life of Hosea. The 730s, I think it was. And God will indeed judge them as the source of all their woes.

Lack of Knowledge

Verse 6-10. Verses 6-10. Lack of knowledge.

My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge because they have rejected knowledge. I will also reject you from being a priest for me. So the first several verses describes the lack of righteousness in terms of gross violations of God's law, of wickedness and sins.

And here we have a lack of knowledge. And we see here it's parallel to forgetting the law. My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge because you have forgotten the law of your God.

It's the same idea. Like children who lack, excuse me, it is not like the pitiable sense. We pity little kids who are ignorant of things in this world, so we want to protect them, right, and preserve them from the dangers around them because they are what? Ignorant.

They have what? A lack of knowledge. And so we pity them. We have compassion upon them.

That's not what this is. This is not little kids that we should pity. These are full-grown adults with what we call culpable ignorance.

Culpable, morally culpable. They are guilty for their ignorance. Like an adult who refuses to learn the laws of the land or the traffic laws of the land so they can conveniently say, I didn't know I was supposed to do that.

What did I know? I got to do whatever I want until I got caught. You know adults do this. Right? Because what's implied behind that is you have the responsibility to know.

You're supposed to get up out of your chair and go and learn the laws of the land, learn the traffic laws or whatever else it needs to be so that you are an upstanding citizen and you can avoid trouble and the like. Here, they are not doing that. The lack of knowledge that God bemoans through the mouth of the prophet Hosea is a purposeful ignorance.

They don't want to know. They don't want to dig into these facts and what the word of God is in their life. They're happy being naive and dumb about these matters.

And so it's a decision on their part to stay ignorant. A stubborn decision because they want to do their own thing. That's what he's talking about here.

And so, God will reject them from being a priest for me. Some think this is about the ignorance of the priests, that God has shifted gears a little bit to talk about the leadership. Excuse me.

Because the priests, of course, are supposed to bring the knowledge of God, not just the sacrifices as well, to the people. And they failed because it says there, my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. The implication being that you, the priests of God, have not taught them that you're supposed to teach them.

But also, others think that it references Exodus 19.6. This is very interesting. I always thought it was very interesting. Exodus 19.6 we read, And you shall be, this is God speaking to Israel, you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests.

This is right before Mount Sinai, right? And a holy nation. These are the words that shall speak unto the children of Israel. God calls them a kingdom of priests.

It wasn't just the priests. The priests are a collection of priests amongst the priests. Do you realize that? That's what's going on in the Old Testament.

When God set aside the Aaronic priesthood, God already called Israel my priests. And of course, Peter picks that up and quotes it. God's people therefore, by rejecting knowledge, throw away their privilege and blessings as being priests of the Most High in their covenantal context.

But the Lord of the covenant will not be mocked because they have forgotten the law of your God. I will also forget your children. That is a terrifying judgment.

That the covenant children throw it all away because the parents threw it all away. More wrath and more sin, verses 7 through 8. The more they increase, that is my people, the more they sinned against me. That is, the more that they were blessed by me and God gave them the increase of their possessions, they sinned all the more against me.

I will change their glory into shame therefore because they set their heart upon their iniquity. There's an old saying, I guess it doesn't exist anymore, so it's an obscure saying, perhaps a better way of saying it. Religion brought forth prosperity and the daughter destroyed the mother.

Cotton Mather, New England Puritan. He saw it in his own lifetime as well. This, of course, is the story of America.

We have been greatly blessed, as we know our early American history, beyond the dreams of our grandparents here in the last several generations in particular, yet we have fallen the furthest and the quickest. When you consider how long England has been around compared to us, we have fallen pretty quick indeed. It's like we're trying to catch up with them.

It's an ongoing temptation that challenges all Americans because we were born and we don't think twice about the prosperity and the blessings, the increase that we have around us in our own lives, generation after generation, but we see that being reformed and confessional in doctrine and in practice is no proof of immunity to this moral disease of falling into more sin because we have more increase. We have more possessions. They become, therefore, what? More temptations for us.

Here, in particular, it seems as we saw in the prior verses that they looked at the increase and the prosperity and said, this is my evidence that I'm doing the right thing. I'm in good standing before God and so I can keep sinning. Christians may fall for that and have that way of thinking in America as well, but I suspect more fall along the traps of I have more increase, I have more possessions, I have more free time, and I have more temptations towards sin.

We need to be aware of that, brothers and sisters, because there is much materialism that we are tempted with and we can fall into this obsession with owning things and doing things and having fun or whatever else. Now, by God's grace, such increase in sins against God here as we read in verse 7 that comes upon us and tempts us here in America may not result in lying, killing, and stealing in mass numbers yet anyways, but the spiritual ignorance and laziness, a little bit here, a little bit there, but for a moment, it grows quickly to outright apostasy if we don't squelch it right then and there. Don't let the prosperity be used as an excuse to sin against God Almighty.

Don't let down your guard with respect to the knowledge of God's holy will of the law and gospel and to flee wickedness because it can be a slippery slope for us. Therefore, be aware. Pay attention to your spiritual life.

Examine where you have been and where you are going and what you need to change as a Christian, both in the life of yourself and your family and the church of God. And may these verses be a warning to bring godly fear upon all of us. As we read in verse 9, like people like priests, and it shall be like people like priests, so punish them for their ways, that is, collectively, and reward them for their deeds.

Here is more explicit detail of the punishment God will bring upon them. They are all corrupt and gone astray, both the leadership and the followers, and so the punishment shall also be likewise widespread. Neither the unrepentant Jew nor the commoner nor the priest will get away.

None will be spared. For we read in verses 9 and 10, I will punish them for their ways and reward them for their deeds. Here we have rewarding.

Rewarding, of course, meaning punishment. You are going to get what you have been working so hard to get. And that is not in the best way.

For they shall eat and not have enough. They shall commit holatry but not increase. It is almost a poetic justice of sorts.

The missing satisfaction of sin. They will never eat enough food to be happy and satisfied. They will never implement enough sin to get what they want.

That is God's judgment upon them. They are always give, give, give, more, more, more, and it is never enough. And this is why, unfortunately, we know people in Hollywood and the like, and not just in Hollywood, they go into drugs, they go into drinking, they want more, more, more, it makes them feel better, it gives them excitement, or they are trying to run from something, whatever it is, and they get it all, it is never enough.

The wealth is never enough. Solomon shows this, of course. He has so much prosperity, so much wealth, and it was not enough.

Vanity, vanity, all is vanity outside of our Lord and Savior. That is what he is describing here. This is a form of punishment.

We forget this at times. We kind of, perhaps, think as Christians, well, of course, they are going to be unsatisfied because we find our satisfaction in our Lord and Savior. He is our what? Chief end of our life.

The chief end of man. But it is a form of judgment. It is not natural in the sense of, of course it is going to happen, but it is natural in the sense of it is a natural judgment.

It is a natural consequence of their sins. Because you are supposed to eat and be satisfied, and that should be enough. But if you are a glutton, it is never enough.

And they are gluttons for sin. And unfortunately for punishment that flows from those sins. Their supposed joys of life are rather ashes in their mouth.

Such punishment is appropriate for ignoring the Lord of the law and the law of the Lord brings about bad and terrible consequences. In this case, terrible agony of judgment. They don't get enough to fill their souls and their desires.

In fact, they will have shame. Again, that will change their glory into shame. Verse 7, doesn't know exactly what that looks like, but it is not good.

The agony of judgment is what they will have upon them. And it rises because they have ceased obeying the Lord at the end of verse 10. They have ceased obeying the Lord.

They have given up. These are members of the covenant of faith that many of them apparently apostatized. We are done.

We want nothing to do with our God and Savior. We don't want to obey Him. We like to murder.

We like to steal. We like to commit adultery and break all restraints. That's terrible.

That's heinous. We need to warn people like that around us and beware of it in our own lives as well by God's Spirit within us. Lack of righteousness is a serious charge.

If this describes any here, now is the time to repent. Do not hold off lest you stumble in the dark with the other false prophets and the priests. But rather cling to Jesus and His word, brothers and sisters, and pray for more grace and our time of need in these darkening hours.

Let us pray. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we pray, Lord, for more grace and mercy for we certainly feel our lack of righteousness in many ways. But here we see a gross negligence in which they want nothing to do with your knowledge.

They are happy in their ignorance and continue on swearing and lying and breaking all restraints. Our Lord and Savior, may this never describe us, God, as we continue to fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil. We will fall short.

Indeed, we know. We should always come to You with repentance. Clearly here, these men and women were not repenting.

And so God urged them all the more with this charge and brought against them. Father, we pray that You would help the churches around us, those that we see have fallen away into wickedness and making excuses for abortion and for adultery and idolatry and the like, God, that they would repent and flee back to You and help us, God, to watch ourselves as well that we would not be arrogant in our warnings to them but also warn ourselves and one another, we pray, by Your grace upon us. Amen.