

Persistent Spiritual Ignorance

Let us turn to our Bibles to Hosea chapter 6. Hosea chapter 6, verses 4 to 11. We're finishing up the chapter. Let us listen attentively to the word of God.

Hosea chapter 6, verses 4 and following. I have seen horrible things in the house of Israel. There is the harlotry of Ephraim.

Israel is defiled. Also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed for you when I return the captivities of my people. Let us pray.

Lord God, as we read here, the rhetorical question, you cry out to the people of old, O Ephraim, O Judah, what shall I do with you? Describing there in human terms how bad their situation is, how much wickedness and transgression they had embarked upon, Lord, and as a man, you seem to speak, what am I supposed to do with you? It's so bad. But we know, God Almighty, you're not confused, you're not confounded, but rather you are urging them through such strong rhetoric to repent and flee to you, to embrace you, God, to have a heart of contrition, to walk back down the path of righteousness and holiness. May we learn the lesson as well.

If we are struggling, God, to be encouraged and strengthened to be with us, Lord God Almighty, that we would not live in ignorance as they seem to have perpetuated in their life, God, but to live in faithfulness, according to your word, by the power of the Spirit within us, we pray, amen. So our next section here of verses includes some well-known sayings, such as, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. The word knowledge is used here again, elsewhere we read of the ignorance or the lack of knowledge of God's will for the people, and here the theme is coming upon us again, and hence the title here, persistent, we see that because of these problems going on and on, spiritual ignorance.

But the sentence here does not stand on its own, of course, rather it's part of the ongoing concern of God through the prophet Hosea. The Old Testament church's sins are many and varied. We covered some of those earlier.

Besides the overt violations of the law, the hearts were far from the Lord. They were superficial in their religion, that is what's being highlighted here in verse 6. I desire mercy and not sacrifice. Knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

What has made it all the more worse was their persistence in such spiritual rebellion and ignorance, even after being called out for it again and again, and that's why God cries out through the mouth of the prophet, O Ephraim, O Judah, what am I going to do with you people? We know that language, we've done it ourselves at times, or perhaps it's happened to us when we were kids, and our parents were like, what am I going to do with you?

Uniformed and Unstable Faith

Uninformed and unstable faith, verses 4-5, a description here of what's going on. First, of course, you already have the idea of the rhetorical questions here, what they're driving at. The questioner, of course, already knows the answer.

Hosea does, God does, He knows exactly what He's going to do with them. But again, it's like a father or mother to a child. What am I going to do with you, kid? You're so bad, you're just in trouble all the time.

And I've done this, and I've done that, and I've warned you, and I've disciplined you, I've sent you to the room, I've taken things away from you. Seems like I'm running out of options is what that sentence means, doesn't it? What am I going to do with you? So the Lord is expressing in human terms the significance of the violations of His holy will, the persistence of their sin, and spiritual ignorance, and things they should know better. Ephraim.

Why Ephraim? Because among the New Testament tribes, he apparently is the most wicked of the tribes. Hosea 12.8, for example, we read, And Ephraim said, Surely I have become rich, I have found wealth for myself, and all my labors they shall find in me no iniquity that is sin. Everything I do is just fine.

I'm rich, I'm healthy, and whatever I touch is gold, and even morally speaking, my own labors and the like, I'm not in sin. You don't know what you're talking about, Hosea. I'm comfortable with what I have.

It was also the center, especially, of center of false worship there in Bethel, of Baal, and Astaroth, and the like, and thus the leader of spiritual harlotry, that is, with respect to the worship of God Almighty, and mixing it with the pagan approaches to things, which unfortunately still happens today. But here we also read of Judah. O Judah, what shall I do with you? And then Judah comes up again at the end in verse 11.

Also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed for you when I return the captivities of my people. Sounds like some good news there at the end. The reason why Judah is brought up here, because it's mentioned before, and it's going to be more explicit later.

The judgment upon the northern tribes, recall the fight they had with Syria, about 732 B.C., was a warning to the southern tribe Judah. Pay attention. Look what's going on up north.

You keep what you're going to do. You keep it up. It's going to happen to you as well.

And that's why God gives this warning as well as with Ephraim, although the emphasis is upon Ephraim, and Bethel, and the like, as we saw in the earlier parts, chapter 5, for example. And so the southern tribes, that is Judah and Benjamin, are supposed to be aware and to wake up, and so Hosea speaks to them at times that the northern tribes are a lesson and a warning for them. The description of their faith, especially of Ephraim, for your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, and like the early dew, it goes away.

How long does the early dew last? Only early in the morning. We don't have much of that in this dry land here in Colorado, but once in a while, I've seen it, you go out early enough in the morning, and there's a valley, and you see the dew there on the grass, and it's hard to

drive, unless you can see very well, through the fog, because enough of the dew is coming up above it, but it doesn't last long. It dissipates rather quickly.

That is, they have like a fickle or an unsubstantial faith, is what it's describing here. Now, what's interesting, and part of my wrestling here with the text, is this word, because it's translated differently in different translations, like the KJV, for your faithfulness or mercy is like a morning cloud in some places. That word there, you've heard a few times I mentioned, *chesed*, that is often understood to be covenantal faithfulness, but the word doesn't always have to mean covenantal faithfulness.

Any more than any other word in English, or Hebrew, or Greek, it can have multiple uses, depending on what the context is, right? And so, we have examples of battle in the Old Testament between kings, who clearly weren't in covenant with one another, and the word *chesed* is used in that case with respect to mercy. There's a mercy brought upon them. And so here, although it can be seen, and I'm inclined to think it is, about covenant faithfulness, because covenant is mentioned, like in verse 7, but they, like men, have transgressed the covenant, but it could go more in the background, the idea of mercy and compassion for your fellow men, for I desire mercy and not sacrifice, verse 6, may be the emphasis here.

Because we read, specifically, not just of false worship before God, but of murder, in verse 9, so the company of priests murder on the way to Shechem. That was obviously the opposite of mercy to your fellow men. And so, whether translated mercy, or faithfulness, or something along the lines of good, maybe it was good in the KJV, behind that idea, I think, is certainly the idea of the covenant, which is brought forward again in verse 7. So you can kind of basically say both ideas and emphasize one with the same word.

Again, we do similar things with English. So, mercy, goodness, here, is fine in this translation. Faithfulness, whether of mercy to others, or faithfulness, or faithlessness, towards God and His covenant, in either case, it's like a morning cloud that fades away rather quickly.

Temporary and fickle, it seems. Untrustworthy, not dependable. That's the point.

On the flip side, of course, it ought to be dependable. It ought to be faithful before God Almighty, to love Him more than anybody else. That's the call, and it's rooted in the trust in Jesus Christ, in their case, the Messiah, to come.

And it's certain and true, that kind of a faith, by the mercy of God upon them, blessing us with such a faith. It is a call for us not to follow in this footsteps, not to have a faithfulness, a mercy or goodness of the covenant that is fading away, but ever to persevere in these things by God's strength upon us. There's going to be a certain discipline upon them, in contrast to the faithfulness that's a morning cloud, or an early dew, that evaporates so quickly.

I, however, in my judgment upon them, have a certain judgment that lasts and has effects. I'm going to be faithful to the covenant, here. So this is, I think, an implied contrast, hence the word, therefore.

I have hewn them by the prophets, and I have slain them with the words of my mouth, like a tree he has cut them down. We don't use that word very often, hewn. The hewing of the tree, the hewing of Israel, here, because of how bad they were.

That is, God's judgment and punishment is upon them. Or it could be translated, cut or chiseled. Matthew Henry says it this way.

The Lord hewn, or excuse me, the hearts of sinners, are not only as stone, but as rough stone, which requires a great deal of pain to bring it into shape, or as a knotty timber, that is not square without a great deal of difficulty. Minister's work is to hew them, and God, by the minister, hews. H-E-W-S.

Cuts and chisels into them. God uses the word, as we saw here, and I mentioned it, I think, in the last sermon last week, there, in the Old Testament, that God's word is likened to a hammer, in which he smashes his people, so that their hearts become flesh, instead of hearts of stone. And the same picture is used here, as well.

And the pastors are called, the prophet here, I've slain them with the words of my mouth, and of course, it's not the words from heaven, they're not hearing audible sounds from clouds, but they're hearing the words from the prophet, Hosea, or Isaiah, who was a contemporary, and others. Which is to say, it's the pastor's job, in the New Testament era. Not the most tasteful job.

My job is to hew, is to cut, to chisel, with God's word, as the spirit so lays upon you. And we must pray that God will continue to slay by the word of his mouth. We see that these are two parallel ideas, clearly, here.

I don't have to remind you again, of synonymous parallelism, which is the key mark, the keystone, of Hebraic poetry. I've hewn them by the prophets, I've slain them with my words. Two same ideas, although different verbs and different pictures here.

The slaying, of course, would be ultimately, for those who need to be born again, the slaying of their hearts, so that they are born again. They are dead to sin, dead to the world, and alive to Christ. Or the slaying of ultimate judgment, if they are unregenerate, if they are, well, the reprobate, in which the word of God hardens them in their sin, as much as that may be hard for us to hear at times.

That's what he does. So it's either for judgment, or for repentance. But it seems, unfortunately, in many cases, here in Hosea, for assured judgment.

And then, at the end of verse five, we read, and your judgments, singular, that is, your singular judgments, are like light that goes forth, either of God, or the prophet. In either case, it's his words, which come ultimately from God. And his judgments are light, they illuminate the truth, as opposed to the lie of the faithlessness, or the fickleness of their commitment to God.

Informed and Sure Faith

The second point here, verse six through eleven, for I desire mercy, and not sacrifice. And the knowledge of God, more than burnt offerings. This is the nub of the matter.

The for here makes the connection to judgment that is upon them, because I, to put it in other words, the Lord God of the covenant, desire mercy, and not sacrifice, that is, of ceremonies and offerings, and as such, I prefer the morrow and pith, says commentator Trapp, of the second table, before the ceremony and the surface of the first. Because the ceremonial, the surface is the outward axe, right, in the Old Testament, of killing the animal, of bringing the sacrifice to the temple, coming before the priest, these outward events should not replace taking care of the matters, the pith, as he says, or the heart of the second table, of mercy, instead of what? Killing, as the priest did, your neighbor, verse nine. So apparently we have a picture here, if you can imagine, maybe we can, we have liberal denominations in which they celebrate murdering of babies.

And they are like the priests that come to worship on Sunday and praise God with their hands and outward forms and have these grandiose prayers and maybe even have the Lord's Supper and give this supposed sermon, I've heard some of these, they're awful, homily of some sort, of wretchedness, that they think comes out and rises before God, and yet, meanwhile, they are what? Celebrating, and maybe even themselves, because many more are now female pastors murdering babies. And then you can see and understand this passage, I desire mercy upon those babies, and not this false worship before me. You think that covers what you're doing sufficiently.

I think that is the parallel today. Although we can do similar things even in conservative churches, although I don't think it comes to that level, praise be to God of murder. And so that's exactly what's being described here.

So apparently the Jews were resting in their ceremonial outward activities. What does that sound like in the New Testament era? Who is concerned about the outward form all the time? Yeah, the Pharisees. Look what I've done.

Look at the tithe I've done. Everyone gets to see me. Wow, this guy's great and amazing.

And the baptism of the hands. Look at me, I'm really clean around the Gentiles. It's all outward show.

And yet what? The hearts are full of dead man's bones. That's what the prophet is talking about. The outward act of burning the sacrifices on the altar.

Maybe a loud prayer at the same time. God's not pleased with that. If you're running around killing your neighbor, stealing from them and other such atrocities.

You read in the prior chapter 4 and 5. Instead of being merciful, good, and faithful with respect to the covenant. Same word there, Chesed. Either towards God or the neighbor of the both.

Towards God they're supposed to be faithful in true worship. I desire mercy and not sacrifice. True worship of the heart and even outward in the activities themselves.

They should be going to Jerusalem for worship. Not Bethel. We know this.

In the Old Testament times. Worshipping the name of the Lord and not Baal and other names. Keeping it pure.

But again, especially in the heart God is concerned. Here. It's with respect to and could be both in this case.

Because both kinds of sins are mentioned many times in the book of Hosea. That is violations of the first table and the violations of the second table. Towards fellow Jews, mercy and fulfilling the second table.

Hosea 4.2 is the passage there I was alluding to before. In Hosea 4.2 we read by swearing and lying and killing and stealing and committing adultery they break all restraint with bloodshed upon bloodshed. There is no what? Mercy among their own covenant members.

They feel happy going to worship in the Old Testament sense. Going to Bethel or the high places and bringing the animals and the incense and burning it and praising God loudly so that everyone can hear them. God's like, I don't care about this.

That's not where it's at. If this is what you're going to do on the side throughout the week or whatever the case is here. It's an atrocious list here.

Swearing and lying. Killing and stealing. Committing adultery.

They break all restraint. So he's just giving a little list there. They probably did a lot more.

In the same meanwhile come the Sabbath day, the Saturday, they're all put their best cloak on. Their best clothing. They typically had one nice outfit.

The rest was work outfit throughout the week. And come before God and feel good and holy. That's what's going on here.

He's not saying don't ever sacrifice. Clearly he commands it in the book of the Old Testament. Deuteronomy, Exodus.

He tells them to bring sacrifices. But of course it's supposed to be first and foremost of the heart. And here the contrast with respect to mercy is towards the neighbor it seems more often than not.

Not to kill them. Not to lie against them and the like. But to consider and have compassion and mercy upon them.

Christ quotes this verse twice in the New Testament. That's how significant it is. Even for us today.

So in Matthew 9.13 we read in Matthew 9.13 But go and learn what this means. I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

They were finding their righteousness in the public outward display and acts of worship. Formal public worship. So today it would be the same as coming to worship on Sunday and saying that makes me a good Christian.

And throughout the rest of the week, why? You live like a pagan. That's the classic one we warn one another about and that's exactly what was going on here. That Jesus is reprimanding them in Matthew 9. Matthew 12.7 Matthew 12.7 we read But if you had known what this means I desire mercy and not sacrifice you would not have condemned the guiltless.

And so there they are being unmerciful towards others and looking down upon them and condemned them when they should not be. They're not exercising mercy. However they seem to think they are with their sacrifice still holy before God.

And God's like, no the holiness is both tables of the law. And when you pit the outward form, it's Trapp's point there the outward action of going to worship, having the Lord's supper or baptism but again throughout the week you violate the second table of the law, left and right hating your neighbor, undermining them, committing adultery. That's not going to make a difference.

God's angry with that. That doesn't make you holy. That seems kind of weird because we weren't raised that way.

I don't think most of us are raised that way. But you still kind of have that with respect to I suppose a socialized or social form of Christianity as one of our members mentioned during prayer time. They seem to be Christians in a social sense.

They just kind of identify with it, maybe go to church on Sunday but it doesn't seem to make a difference throughout the rest of their lives. Clearly in most cases here that Jesus applies Matthew Hosea here, Matthew 9.13 and Matthew 12.7 that he's not emphasizing the covenant part as much as the mercy part although it is with respect to the covenant community, the Jews. So that's I don't think forgotten here.

The emphasis of course is compassion and doing good that Jesus is using this passage with us here. And yet it's a persistent unfaithfulness of course in ignorance for the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. So here you have I desire mercy, not sacrifices, and the knowledge of God more or not than burnt offerings.

I hope you see again the parallelisms. They're saying the same thing twice with different words. Lack of mercy, or in this case I desire mercy because you're obviously by implication missing that mercy and I desire knowledge of God understanding of what mercy is.

Understanding the right proportion between the outward acts of the first table of the law with respect to the substance of the second table of loving your neighbor. That you have to do both of them of course but you're not. You're breaking the second one.

So you're doing it without knowledge. It's a persistent ignorance, right? That culpable ignorance of making their sins before God. So verse 7 brings us here to the persistent unfaithfulness that like men they have transgressed the covenant.

They have dealt treacherously with me. If you hear verse 6 is contrasted with the transgressing of the covenant. For I desire mercy but like men they have transgressed the covenant.

They haven't done the mercy. They've stayed willfully ignorant. They have dealt treacherously with me.

So there's this contrast of what he wants here in verse 6 and what they're actually doing in verse 7. The widespread and blatant breaking of the covenant described as we know earlier in chapter 1 and 2 as violating a marriage vow. That's the picture there. That's why he married Gomer.

And again combines the imagery of a traitor there as well. Hosea 5.7 would read, they have dealt treacherously with the Lord for they have begotten pagan children. That idea of traitorous, traitorousness is there again.

Jeremiah 3.20 Surely as a wife treacherously departs from her husband so have he dealt treacherously with me O house of Israel. One of these sub themes as it were not as emphasized as others but it's there through the prophets. This is terrible stuff when you violate God's law this way and in this manner.

The violation again of the second table verses 8 to 9 without mercy. Right? Gilead is a city of evil doers and defiled with blood imitating murder, intimating, excuse me, murder. As bands of robbers line way for a man so the company of priests murder on their way to Shechem.

The murderers there in 8 and 9 tell us much with respect to unfortunately these matters when it comes to their lack of maintaining the covenant and breaking it. So here in verse 7, but like men or man, it's singular. It's Adam.

The word is Adam. And so one translation they like Adam have transgressed the covenant. And there is a very helpful work I haven't read it in a while but I remember reading it and I have it at home.

You can probably find it online by B.B. Morefield. It's an essay where he exegetes this passage and argues for this view that you can hear even in English. They like Adam have transgressed the covenant.

If you have, most Bibles have a little asterisk there and they're going to say that there on the bottom. Because it is. It's in the singular.

There's just no way around it. The other option some people believe they're referring to a city. But that's not as clear in the archaeology.

It's not clear in the archaeology but Morefield argues and I think convincingly that here it's simply Hosea referring to Adam again. You're like Adam all over again Israel. Oh Ephraim, Judah, you're going down the same path.

You're boldly and brazenly breaking the covenant, right? Eve was deceived. Adam sinned. He's the one that walked right off the cliff with eyes wide open.

I think that's what he's alluding to here. Especially when he says it dealt treacherously. That's strong language.

Traitors are very serious matter as we know. My daughter has read some of Dante's Inferno is it? For English lit. And it's the nine circles of hell is it? I have a chart and I kept the chart because the deepest part of hell that he describes.

We don't know exactly how you break up hell. I don't want to go down that path. But what he puts down there that's quite interesting is traitors.

Way down to the top of the list or the bottom of the list of hell. Traitors! People against their own people. Their own nations.

Their own family. Their own covenants. The treacherous kind.

At least I can handle an enemy because I know what to expect from him. But if you have a fellow friend as Christ mentions in the Psalms there. You were a friend of mine.

We were like brothers. But you betrayed me. You stabbed me in the back.

Those are the worst kinds. They're the most dangerous. I think that's what he's driving home here in verse 7. Adam betrayed God.

Breaking the covenant. His persistent unfaithfulness. Verses 7-11.

Gilead a city of evil doers. Back over here in my notes. Verses 8 and 9. The murderers of Gilead.

Maybe referring to Amath Gilead. So shorthand for it. One of the three cities of refuge on the other side of Jordan.

It's a Levite city. And that would fit the context here. Because it mentions a company of priests.

Murderer on the way to Shechem. A Levitical city that's described as a wicked city. It's showing all the more as we read in chapter 4 that even the priests are full of ignorance before God.

Which is a shame and a terror upon the land. Even the leaders themselves murder. They do horrible things.

Verse 10. I have seen horrible things in the house of Israel. There is harlotry of Ephraim.

And as we see, the harlotry is often spiritual harlotry but does not seem to preclude actual physical harlotry either. It's like both. They're doing both.

Remember they had priestess. They had temple harlots basically. They did both.

It's terrible. I read this. You're probably reading a tune.

You're just dumbfounded. What is going on with Israel? Brothers and sisters it happens in American churches to a lesser degree. But again I point to the statistics where evangelicals are fornicating and committing adultery at higher rates than they ought to be.

Double digits, 30-40%. It's terrible. Now it's not out in the open.

This was out in the open. Nobody can hide it. This is all kind of hidden behind the churches because many churches don't practice church discipline unfortunately.

That's how those numbers still exist. It's not good. It's a horrible thing.

I've seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel. We see it today in those numbers which is sad. Pray brothers and sisters.

Pray for repentance. Read pre-verse 11. Also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed for you when I return the captives of my people.

He all of a sudden turns on a dime it seems like and gives good news. He warns Judah at the beginning. What shall I do with you? Especially if you go down the path of Ephraim because Ephraim gets punished first in 722 B.C. with the fall of Samaria.

That happens before the southern tribe falls. The reprieve here is good news in this section. A hint of better things to come because clearly a harvest is almost always a good thing.

The prophets. A good thing is going to happen. A blessing is appointed for you when I return the captives of my people.

Returning from captivity is a good thing again. This is a blessing upon them. A short reminder that God will fulfill his covenant and bring a blessing upon his people.

If they are returning, they are returning because they have repented. They have cried out to God for mercy. That must always be there.

The good news here in other words is for those who are repentant of heart. Repentance is always behind the prophet's words here. That there is an opportunity to change.

That is why he is speaking to them. If there was no opportunity, he would stop speaking to them and fire would come from the heavens above or the earth would open up and swallow them as it did in the desert. But neither there and the prophet being there is already a sign of God's long suffering for his difficult, persistently evil and ignorant people.

The same is true today, brothers and sisters. There is always hope when God is here speaking and preaching and giving his, in this case, pastors to be across the land and to preach the truth to them. To call them out for mercy and repentance.

If they would repent and flee from their wickedness, if any today would repent and flee from their wickedness, any man, woman or child hate their sin and abhor evil and trust in God in Christ to forgive them of their sins. They can be saved and delivered. They can now return to the land of promise as captives under Satan, but now under Christ, delivered from eternal punishment that we all deserve.

Let us pray. Our Lord and Savior God Almighty, may your spirit move among us and move among your churches, Lord, for any who are living in such persistent ignorance of God, thinking that bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices is sufficient to appease you while they live an unmerciful life of hatred towards their fellow Christian. Our God and Savior, that is clearly a serious matter indeed.

And whatever other matters there may be that are different from this that we struggle with, Lord, may we repent of these as well and know that you have mercy upon us, God, if we would flee from our sins. Help us, God, humble our hearts and bring revival upon your church, we pray in America. By the blood of Christ, Amen.

Let us stand.