

God Desires Mercy over Sacrifice

We have the sermon text before us, Hosea 6.6. You see Psalm 51 there. We won't go there immediately. I have that here, my intro, and I'll read it in the intro a little bit later.

Hosea 6.6. Let us listen attentively to the word of God. For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. Let us pray.

And here in God Almighty we read in succinct fashion the call of the inner life of all followers of our Lord and Savior, both the Jewish church of old and the Jewish and Gentile church of the New Testament era where we are now mixed together and there is no longer Jew or Gentile when it comes to these redemptive purposes and workings of your Holy Spirit. And so Lord, may this truth be better understood by us, not to be confused on one hand to mean that you don't care about anything about outward activities in worship of your name. Certainly that is not the case.

But Lord, that you desire above all mercy and love of the heart and caring of one another and above all to love you with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to have a sincere heart when we have praise, sacrifice, and worship of your name. That is the true knowledge of God in this matter. To that end we pray that your spirit would be with us to guide us again to renew us in this truth.

Amen. So the prophet Hosea is dealing with various problems as we know in the Old Testament church. The biggest problem here is their mixed worship.

That's a constant thorn in the flesh that they had in the Old Testament here. What we call syncretism. That is this mixing of pagan and godly religion.

But it was not only the borrowing of unbelieving practices that were sinful, it was also the manner of using God's worship that was a problem as well. What do I mean by manner? The text shows that too many Jews apparently were offering sacrifices to the Lord. I desire mercy and not sacrifice.

You guys are doing the sacrifices, but of course they're doing it in the wrong manner as I'm going to explain to you. Their hearts were far from God in the act of worship. They gave many burnt offerings and the like as public displays of religious piety.

And of course God gave us the sacrificial system, gave them the sacrificial system of the Old Testament on us, the equivalent so far as outward ceremonies of baptism, the Lord's Supper, and public attendance upon His word as a public display of piety. That's true. But it's more than that of course.

They made it simply only that way out of pride. The audience of Hosea went further. They patted each other on their back apparently for the great display of piety even as they showed what? No mercy to their fellow Jew.

I desire mercy. Why is he desiring this? Clearly they're not giving mercy to their fellow saints. Even as their knowledge of what the Lord required of them was steeped in culpable ignorance and knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Many Jews of Hosea's time were stealing and cheating and even murdering as we saw in the prior chapters. Meanwhile they would go to worship apparently of God and with a straight face present a whole burnt offering in the name of the Lord. Think about that.

It was like going to worship on Sunday today, giving your tithe and offerings, and then the rest of the week you treat your fellow Christians like dirt. God is not pleased with that. He says I desire mercy and not sacrifice.

You can't use the sacrifice of worship and the tithes and the offerings as a replacement for mercy and love for your fellow believer. That's what was going on. It was like religion.

It's much related to the Pharisaical approach to things. It was like religion was merely an outward show, somehow appeasing God while allowing them to live as they wished. As we saw over and over again, and I repeated it in I think chapter 12 or so, I've mentioned it a few times, where it says very clearly that they were fat, dumb, and happy as we say today.

They were blessed by God. They said God's blessing us so what we're doing is apparently not wrong. That is all the wrong that they're doing was clearly wrong, but they made excuses for it.

But the Lord God was not fooled. Though through the mouth of the prophet he calls them to a right priority. The language of the text, for I desire mercy and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings, may suggest that God does not want sacrifices and burnt offerings, but that's clearly not the case.

The Lord of the Covenant gave them the whole sacrificial system. It came from him and no one else. He's not especially concerned with outward worship is the point here.

God's Internal Religion

That's the emphasis. The Lord God of the Covenant is simply using strong verbal contrast to show the error of their ways. We read something similar in Psalm 51 verse 16.

In verse 16 there of Psalm 51, I referenced this as the accompanying verses here for this Hosea 6.6. For thou desirest not sacrifice. Similar language, isn't it? Ask what I give it, David writes. Thou desirest not to burn offerings.

Here we go again. Sacrifice and burn offerings. Similar sentiments as Hosea.

God is not especially concerned with the outward worship, such as sacrifices and burnt offerings, when they are brought with cold, callous hearts that show no mercy to their fellow saints. And of course, Psalm 51 goes further. The next verse explains more importance of the grand scheme of things.

The sacrifices of God, we are told there in Psalm 51, are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart. O God, thou wilt not despise. You will not turn away the saints with broken and contrite hearts.

So he's running across, David is, a similar problem as Hosea. People were thinking about the outward activity, the burnt offerings, the incense and whatever else went on in the Old Testament, slaughtering of the animals. Say, here you go God.

God's like, I want your heart. I want your heart. A contrite heart, a humble heart.

The kind of humility that has mercy towards their fellow saints. It comes down to a conflict between outward piety, as in going to the temple and offering a bull, and having a humble heart. The humble heart, of course, wins every time in the Psalms.

And similarly here. But God, as we read at the end of Psalm 51, wants both. Then thou shalt be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings.

Then they shall offer bullocks upon thy altar. Come to me with the heart that loves me, that submits to me, that is contrite and broken, when giving your sacrifices. This is the Old Testament picture, figures, of course.

But New Testament uses that language as well, right? The sacrifices of praise, the sacrifices of good works, should be done with a humble heart. God wants both. But there can be a conflict, of course, if people run around thinking, well, I'm going to go to church today, I'm not going to help my neighbor whose house is on fire.

I've got to worship God. He doesn't want that either. We're going to talk a little bit about that in the remaining of the sermon.

God wants both the heart and the hands, the inward and the outward, but of course the heart always comes first and foremost if there's a conflict. Similarly in Hosea, the Lord is chiding the listeners. You get hung up on the sacrifices, the altar and the outward worship, but neglect mercy and the knowledge of God's will in this matter.

These things I desire above the rest. But in saying that the Lord is not calling Hosea and his audience to throw away the priesthood and the temple, of course, that's not what he's saying, any more than Psalm 51. Rather, in a strong language, to show how much they neglected the weightier matters of their law, justice and mercy.

You can see how much we see this in the New Testament with Christ and the Pharisees. Jesus just said this to the children of the Jews in Hosea's time. Nothing new under the sun.

So let's examine more carefully both the background of the moral principles involved and how to follow Jesus in light of these truths. And so to get a better understanding, I want to go over the groundwork, the understanding that Christianity is, of course, a religion of the heart or an internal religion. I could have had a religion of the hearts and a religion of the hands.

Here I have God's internal religion. It arises from the nature of Christianity because the nature of Christianity is rooted in what? In God Almighty. What is the nature of God? He is a spirit.

What did Jesus say? Because he's a spirit, he must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Ergo, ergo, he's drawing logical conclusions from that premise. God is not material.

Even the pagans acknowledge this amongst their best thinkers. We read some of this this morning in Acts 17. Paul on Mars Hill, for in him we live and move and have our being, as certain also of your own poets have said.

Even the pagans understand this. That is the best of them. Bollinger was quite interesting if you recall in Sunday School class.

We went through the decades of Bollinger. And he spent some time on the first commandment giving proof that Plato amongst others and other philosophers actually believed in one true God, although they twisted it. But they believed something greater than the pagan gods was his point.

Something immaterial that made all things. It's quite fascinating. And of course Paul calls them to the truth of this matter in Acts 17.

And Paul stood in the midst and he told them. And he walked by the unknown God in whom he ignorantly worshipped. Him I declare unto you.

He made the world and all the things therein seeing that he is the Lord of heaven and earth and dwells not in temple made with hands. He's not material is the point. Neither is he worshipped with men's hands as though he needed anything because he's what? The source of all life and breath and all things.

Ours is a religion of the heart by definition because ours is based upon God Almighty who is immaterial and is not really concerned about the material world. We are. We need it.

We need the food. We need the rest. We need the air.

We need the fellowship. God doesn't but he gives it to us because what? He's a Father who loves and cares for us and understands our weakness. So it's not him.

It's us. It's our weakness. That's why we have the Old Testament sacramental system which is all what? Tangible.

You can see it, smell it, taste it. The New Testament is similar as well. We have the sacraments that are tangible because we are physical and material.

But God, he's like don't get stuck on that stuff. That's not me. Worship me in spirit and in truth at the end of the day because these two as we know in heaven will go away.

So that's the connection to our text. He's immaterial and God wants what? Our immaterial heart. It's spirit.

Our heart is a spirit. Since the dawn of time God has always wanted the hearts of his people, of his creation dedicated to him. And this is why the outward forms have changed over time.

They first were given the old law sacrifice which means the whole burnt offering, the whole thing is devoured by fire on the altar. You don't eat of it. It's not given to the priest or anything like that.

You'll see it consistently. It's called the old law, old law, old law, whole burnt offering all the way up to the time of Moses. And then the time of Moses you have more sacrifices.

Right? The guilt offering and the incense burning and everything else and other things and the fellowship. They get to eat, you get to eat and maybe not in different days and what not. These things came and these things went away as well because they were aids for our weak faith.

Something material and physical because that's what our body is. Not because God really needs it or cares about it as such. And so the inward part is emphasized by Jesus.

God is a spirit as I said several times already. And they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. John chapter 4. That means the outward form is not as significant as the inward heart given to God.

That's what Jesus is highlighting here because the discussion was what? Remember? The woman at the well? Wow! She said. I found out about all my husbands. Let's talk about religion.

She just chases on a dime. We say you worship God up in Samaria and the Jews say you worship God in Jerusalem. And Jesus is like you're both wrong.

At the end of the day you worship God wherever you are because wherever you are is where your heart is. It's his heart that he wants. Your mind, your will, your soul, your emotions.

That's true worship. So the outward, right? That's the outward location. If the outward location is not significant neither is the building itself where we meet like here.

Significant religiously in that way. Another perspective of looking at this is the first and second greatest commandments. Which are to love him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, with all the strength.

To love one's neighbor as one's self. Is more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices. Mark 12.33. There we have it explicitly hammered out.

Hosea 6.6 in New Testament language. Love God. Love your neighbor.

Acts of mercy. God desires mercy in that sacrifice. These are more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

They pale in comparison. Although they're called to do it. And of course do it with their hearts.

As an honoring act to God. And so this text contrasts heart and hands. If the hands are hollow with hearts cold to God and neighbor that's a problem.

Contrast is not between heartfelt love of God and heartfelt acts of worship. But heartfelt love of God and heartless acts of worship. That's the implied contrast here.

Because he obviously still wants them to do right sacrifices. That's what he says. Stop sacrificing to Baal.

Stop sacrificing to Estheroth. Sacrifice to me. But more than that, sacrifice with your heart.

Psalm 51. God's external religion. We talked a little bit about that already.

How he pointed out that at the end of the day it's not really for God. It's not for God's sake. Like God's really hungry and needs a burnt offering.

He needs a temple because he's cold or something. That's what the pagan gods had. That's what they needed.

They were made after man's image. God's external religion. The second point.

God's External Religion

It's two fold. Natural religion or natural worship as you recall in Sunday school class. The knowledge of God himself.

It's the knowledge of the first four commandments that all men have in their hearts. Although watered down to some degree. They know there's a God.

They know he ought to be honored. That's Paul's argument there on Mars Hill. And Romans 1 as well.

That anything associated with him, that's the third commandment, ought to be taken care of carefully and not flippantly. His name. And then the fourth commandment is they know they ought to spend some kind of time thinking and meditating and honoring God.

And the Bible gives the specifics of that. That's one day in seven. So that's the natural religion or natural worship that even unbelievers know though they suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

Instituted religion is the knowledge of worship of God found in the Bible. So what do you have? You have natural and supernatural just like I covered in the sermon this morning. Here it's more specifically the law of God.

I mentioned that this morning as well. It's there. But instituted religion.

That there is a Jesus Christ. There is a Trinity. That's the knowledge that we find from the word of God.

That he's supposed to baptize and no longer circumcise. Or even circumcision himself would not have been known in general revelation or natural religion without special revelation. God saying do this.

And of course it assumes a natural approach. That is our heart before God. But there are aids to worship.

The ceremonial acts. The ceremonial places. The ceremonial times.

And he built in of course seven days. He didn't have to do it that way. But you always have to have your heart given to God.

You don't always give sacrifices. The same sacrifices. The same holy days.

Additional holy days were given under Moses time. That's instituted worship. Additional worship to the natural worship.

That you can only find in the word of God and should not be making up on your own. And as such they are there to aid us. To help us think more about God as images.

As pictures. Right? That's why they're called a sign as well as a seal. The sign is the imagery.

What it points to. What it looks like to us. It's food.

What? Food for our soul. Jesus is food for our soul. His blood shed for us.

And of course the water and baptism as a picture as we already do naturally to wash away dirt from our body. It's supposed to be washing of our soul by the power of the Holy Spirit. We need that because we are corporal material beings.

And God knows this. And so he works for our advantage because he loves us. And thus he gives us these ceremonies to assist us in honoring, thinking of him, and of worshipping him.

And it can only be given by God's command of course. King Jeroboam found this out the hard way as we're going over Wednesday night in the Bible study in 1 Kings. Jeroboam comes along and makes up his own priesthood.

Starts grabbing random guys across all stratas of society and makes them priests. He makes up his own holy day. Things what? The text says devised of his own heart.

Which is the heart or the root of false worship. Instead of the heart of God. And so just as the text in Hosea here, sacrifices offered and given in holy days and priesthood instead of love and mercy to God and neighbor.

Because if Jeroboam really loved his neighbors, he'd say, okay, God divided the country north and south. You go to Jerusalem because it's more important that you honor God than you honor me. But he had no mercy for them.

What did he do? He led them headlong into a false religion. That's not merciful! Don't forget that. I know we live in a pluralistic culture in America where we're just so comfortable in the sense of we've got to live with all these wacky religions and our leadership follows wacky religions and dangerous religions even.

And so they lead people off the cliff. But that should horrify us. It's not an act of mercy.

It's hatred of a sort. Some examples of this kind of external worship being used and abused by people within the church of God. Mark 7, 1-9 Mark 7, 1-9 where the Pharisees wash their hands as a religious ceremony.

Remember that? They're like, what are your disciples doing, Jesus? Why aren't they washing their hands and washing the couches and watching everything else? Because after they go out into the wicked wide world of paganism that's the way they're thinking. Even walking in the steps, you've heard me say this before, of a Gentile could be considered unceremonial. Makes you dirty.

We don't want to touch those goyim. And so they came along and made up a new ritual that had religious signification. Had nothing to do with being healthy.

Although washing your hands is a good thing. But we mean that in a natural sense. That's what you expect naturally.

I have a lot of dung on my hands. I'm going to clean it off. But once you turn it into something religious or supernatural in purpose and an end, then you're messing around.

Especially with God's worship. And that's what they did here. We're special.

You're not. Why aren't you washing your hands? And so he answered and said unto them, Well, has Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, The people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. That's what's going on here in Isaiah.

God is saying, I desire mercy. Pay attention to the text when God emphasizes a point. Because obviously God also desires love.

He also desires righteousness. But he didn't highlight that. He highlights mercy here.

It's tied to the idea of the covenant. I mentioned that in the last sermon. And so this lack of covenantal mercy for one another in the church, it seems to me.

And he's highlighting that because they're not doing it. And not sacrifice. So this is about a variation of that.

I hope you see. Albeit, he continues, Albeit, in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctors the commandments of men, laying aside the commandments of God. They laid aside the commandment to have their hearts near God and instead their hearts, he said, are far from me.

The people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. You're coming along and making up this new ceremony. Making special oblations, they call it.

Or washings with their hands and the couch and their clothing and everything else. Saying, this is special. This makes me special before God.

Morally pure. Closer to the Lord. And God says, you're obsessed with the external.

Your lips, not just your lips, but your actions, of course, as well seem to talk about God and holiness and everything else, like the Pharisees. But your hearts are far from you. In fact, as we know, Jesus told them elsewhere, you are white sepulchers full of dead men's bones.

You are gravesides and graveyards full of dead bodies in your hearts. They were obsessed with the external religion. They thought it was sufficient.

And Christ says, no, a thousand times, no. They focus on external rights as more pleasing rather than giving or washing their hearts before God Almighty. That's adding to God's worship.

What we call superstitious worship. But there's also a tradition of men by subtracting of God's commandments. And that's verses 9-13 of the same chapter in Mark.

Mark 7. He continues on. All too well you reject the commandments of God, that you may keep your tradition. How? God commanded honor of the parents.

And part of that is don't curse your parents. But the Pharisees and scribes gave a way to dodge the fifth commandment. Remember that? What I could give to you, the text tells us, apparently some kind of gift, some way to help their parents.

I call it Korban. It's a special word. It means gift.

Maverick, adabra, boom. It's no longer yours. It's now God's.

Look how special I am. You see that again? In the name of God, which is here in this text clearly a violation of the third commandment, misusing God's name, I'm going to use what could be good for my family and give it to the temple. And thus they make what? God's word of null effect.

That you may keep your traditions. You reject the commandments of God. But you say, if a man says to his father and mother, the text tells us in verse 11, whatever profit you might have received from me is Korban, a gift of God, or to God, then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother, because now the funds and the monies or the resources, could be anything, could be a plot of land, that you would give to your parents at a time of need.

You say, I'm more holy than they are. I'm going to give it to God. Just hearing that, I hope you see how heinous that is.

How terrible that is. Where's their affection for their own family? But in the name of the Lord God Almighty, they break God's own commandments. Because they're saying, we're going to fulfill the first table, the external rights, and violate the second table.

In the name of the first table. That's exactly what's going on in Mark 7. They're taking away from God's commandments and it's very grotesque. They conflated the outward acts of tithes, kind of look at it as a tithe of sorts, a gift to God, to his church, with true inward honor of him.

To hide their indifference to their own parents. Now, what's the equivalent today? Well, back then again, it's no mercy for their parents. They'd rather give sacrifices to God.

Because you give your best offering, right? Your bullock, that costs money. But your family's starving. I'm going to offer God.

I'm honoring God. I love him so much. My family could starve.

God's going to get this bull that could feed my family. That's kind of what's going on here in Mark 7. Now, it sounds kind of, think about it, and you're like, wait, wait a minute. God wants the heart.

That's always the first commandment. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. That comes first, not your family.

So this act, though, is a conflict of outward act of worship, giving a bullock or giving a gift, korban, to the temple, versus what is really needed at the time to take care of your family or something along the lines of the second table. So that's where the conflict is. It's a conflict between the first table and the second table.

The first table gives way to the second when it comes to outward rights and acts. You're sick? Don't come to church, please. Stay home.

You're not more holy coming here. See that? That's an outward act. But the sixth commandment says stay healthy and keep other people healthy, doesn't it? That's a fulfillment of it.

So when they're in conflict on this axis, that gives way. But the first table never gives way with the heart, does it? You're not like, well, you could be. That's between you and God.

But ideally, you're at home saying, I wish I was at church worshiping God, hearing his word of being with the saints. But I can't. I'm sick.

I've got to stay home. Other people use it as an excuse just to stay home because they don't care about God. Again, these are heart matters.

The heart never should submit to one another, but always to Christ. So, that's what's going on here. Examples of this, the Papas teach, or these that used to teach during the time of Matthew Henry, that discharging children from all obligations to their parents by monastic vows.

You become a monk, just like Mark 7. You become a monk, everything I have is now Corban, given to the church, and I don't have to take care of my parents in their old age. That's what they taught. You're like, do you guys even read the Bible? Can you pretend you read the Bible? Can you be a little more subtle? So, that's one of the games they played.

Today, this is done nationally, this is done locally, and done in various ways, even in churches. Some telling those struggling by hard providence outside their control, try harder, but if it's a random stranger, they'll give them money and never ask questions about how they're living their lives. I've seen that.

That's not good. Those, unfortunately, have seen reports, I've read reports, the last couple years, of retired parents sending and spending their money to parachurches and not giving it to their family or their kids. It's another example.

You're like, what? I'm doing it for a good cause. No, you need to take care of your family. If they're in need, are they supposed to get some kind of retirement? The Bible literally says take care of your family, not just when they're sick, but also help give them a good inheritance.

So, they're playing games with the first table of God's law, right? In the name of the Lord, I'm going to take everything I have. Some things, sure, but everything? Really? You're not going to give your kids anything? Pharisees did it, and it still happens today, unfortunately. This is, in other words, they lack mercy towards their own family or their own nation or whatever the case may be, and sound pious because they do so many sacrifices, so many burnt offerings, so many whatever it is.

They can avoid their responsibility in the second table, or even the first table in this case, at times, for the knowledge of God. They want to stay ignorant. They have their heart far from the Lord.

The sum of the matter, Psalm 51 states, the sacrifices of God are broken spirits, a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Then thou shalt be pleased with sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offerings. The Lord forbids replacing love of God and love of neighbor with pious-looking outward rites, like sacrifices, and giving of large sums and tithes and whatnot.

Let us never pit mercy and sacrifice when God calls for both, brothers and sisters, but when there is a conflict, of course, justice and mercy should be preferred. Continue to pursue mercy toward each other, especially those in need near us, and so offer to God sacrifices both of the heart and of the hand, let us pray. Our Lord and Savior, help us in this regard.

There are other ways, of course, in which we can even deceive ourselves, as it were, and make excuses. We pray, Lord, that we would not, that we would always bring our hearts with our hands of sacrifices of praise, of giving of these offerings, of tithes, and of our own time in taking care and helping in the church, and certainly with our own family and our friends, and always given to you. And to that end, we pray for more of your strength.

Keep us humble, Lord, and not look down upon others that we say, oh, look at what they do, but rather, God, always be aware of what we are doing with a heart of humility and contrition, we pray for the love of Christ, amen.