

Knowledge of God above Offerings

Let us turn to our text of Hosea chapter 6. Hosea chapter 6. As you know, I'm going through the book of Hosea. I've gone through a couple of the minor prophets, and I'll stop now and then as I go through the book of the Bible and drill down into some of the verses. This is a classic verse, I think, to drill down into, as well as Hosea 4-6.

They're both verse 6 verses, and they tie into each other, actually. Let us listen attentively to the Word of God, Hosea chapter 6 verse 6. For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. Let us pray.

Almighty spirits, may you continue to open our eyes and guide us to more of the truth, the richness of verse 6 here. Have you called us, God, to the knowledge of who you are, and not only the knowledge of who you are, but a knowledge of who you are and what you have demanded and called of us as your people. And to those two things, God, may I speak clearly.

And God, I pray to your glory in this sermon that we would all thereby grow in the inner man with this truth we pray. Amen. The Lord's complaint against the Jews of Hosea's day, the Old Testament church, is compressed into a single two-fold sentence here.

The first part, which I preached on last week, is explicit, calling Israel to have what? Mercy towards their fellow Jews, instead of substituting it with shallow worship. I desire mercy, and not this kind of sacrifice you think is a replacement for us, the sacrifice of animals. Unfortunately, the Jews continued this demented approach during the time of Christ, who called it out as well.

As you recall, we went through those verses in the New Testament. The second part of this sentence is similar, but expresses the concern more implicitly with the words, knowledge of God. This is, I call it implicit insofar as the immediate concern, right, about mercy towards their fellow Christians, their fellow believers, is not explicit, but implicit in the phrase, knowledge of God.

In other words, having a proper knowledge of God would have led to mercy to one another. Taking the covenant seriously. Just as in the first part of the sentence, the word burnt offering is used to represent what? The outward religion.

Exercise with a hollow heart. Psalm 51, which we had referenced to earlier, mentions that. God wants a broken and contrite heart.

I read that as the call to worship this evening, and that is also a reminder here. God is not saying, I don't want ever sacrifices. Jews, stop the sacrifices.

Hosea, I don't want these. Quit going to Jerusalem. That's what he's saying.

He's saying the hollow heart that comes and uses external rights to replace what you're called to do in your heart before God, and especially before your fellow men, that is mercy. It was like them saying, look, we are doing well by doing this important thing, worshiping

God with a slaughter of animals. What more do we need? In response, God tells them they need the knowledge of the Most High.

Otherwise, their acts of outward worship are but distractions from the weightier matters of the law, as Jesus reminds us, which is what I preached on last week. So in this sermon, I want to unpack the knowledge of God. This phrase here, clearly pointing towards, as you recall, I point out once in a while, because it's helpful in reading these texts here, especially in the Psalms, but you have poetic elements in the Prophets.

He break parallelism, is what you have here. He's saying the same thing twice, but a little slightly different here. The knowledge of God means at the very least, you've got to know who God is, but also at the very most here, in what He requires of you, old man, but to love your neighbor and have mercy towards Him.

So I'm going to talk about both those knowledges here. Knowledge of God, God's teaching about Himself.

Knowledge of God's teaching about Himself

So the phrase here, the knowledge of God, as we back up a little bit here, includes not just the knowledge of Himself as such, that we call theology proper, theos, theo, right, and ology, the study of God, Him and Him alone.

But it must include that, but it includes more in this phrase here. Hosea 4, 1-2 reminds us of this fact, that the knowledge of God is tied to unmerciful acts. For the Lord God brings a charge, a complaint, sometimes translated, a legal, he's using a metaphor here, a legal charge against my own people, against the inhabitants of the land.

There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. Catch that? No truth, no mercy or knowledge. The two are wedded here.

By swearing and lying and killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraints with bloodshed upon bloodshed. Now clearly here, it's not worship per se, but the second table of the law, towards their neighbor that they're killing and lying and committing adultery. And he ties it to the mercy and the knowledge of God.

And I believe that's continuing here, although the other part of the sacrifices is not lost either. He says here, not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, more than burnt offerings, more than outward conformity to the rituals of worship. So you've got two things going on here.

In other words, the first table and the second table. And in both cases, people of God in the Old Testament, too many of them in Hosea's time and other prophets as well, are playing fast and loose with God in his word. So on the one hand, they're ignoring God by ignoring their neighbor.

And the other, the knowledge of God here, the understanding of the right use of worship, the external forms were never there for their own ends, but to reinforce what we call

natural worship of the heart before God to help strengthen the inner man. But they didn't go that route at all. God wanted both.

So the knowledge of God here, although more broadly, it means, hey, towards your neighbor, if you have knowledge of God, you can love your neighbor, have mercy towards your neighbor, must include the knowledge of God proper. And so this phrase, knowledge of God and lack of knowledge of God is a theme in the book of Hosea. We have another verses here.

I'll go over again. Hosea 4.6, we know this one, I think, my people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge, because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you for being a priest for me. Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children.

So here it's negative, the lack of knowledge, there's ignorance, culpable ignorance, of course, of God, and of course, his ways, not just God himself. Theology is never an end to itself in terms of intellectual knowledge. Well, I know more about God, I can recite the Athanasian Creed, I can talk about the Trinity.

That's good. Now what? Well, now I praise God. Good.

With my mouth, good. And with my hands towards my neighbor. We must all be of a peace.

That's what's going on here. Hosea 4.1, we read that earlier. Hear the word of the Lord, you children of Israel, for the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants.

There is no truth, or mercy, or knowledge of God in the land. Right? No knowledge of God. The negation goes through all three words there.

Hosea 5.4, we read, they do not direct their deeds towards turning to their God, for the spirit of idolatry is in their midst, and they do not know the Lord. And then Hosea 13.4, yet I am the Lord your God ever since the land of Egypt, and you shall know no God but me, for there is no Savior besides me. So there's the knowledge theme, both the negation, the negative, no knowledge, lack of knowledge, ignorance.

On the other hand, I want knowledge. Here in this verse, for example, I desire, you ought to have knowledge of God, a proper knowledge of me, and therefore the proper knowledge of what I demand of you. The two go hand in hand.

Now there are different knowledge problems. That is, there's different reasons why men have a lack of knowledge of God, or even in the church. Remember, this context here is not the average pagan out there, but the church of the Old Testament, these are supposed to be people like us who believe in the Messiah.

In their case, of course, the Messiah to come, ours is the Messiah who has already come, the same Messiah, same Savior, same Lord, different historical reference. It makes a big difference, as we see, we don't have temples anymore, praise be to God, I don't have to kill animals, I would hate to do that. Things have changed, but many things have not, especially the substance of the matter, the substance of the gospel, the substance of the call to love

the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.

It's still the same here, although intermingled now with these outward forms that we don't have anymore, in the bad sense, of course, because as we know, they're worshiping false gods and the like. So the problem of knowledge for them is not genuine ignorance, as it is perhaps for many today in the American scene. More and more as the years go on, it's not like it was in the 70s and 80s when I was a kid, where you can kind of talk about God, maybe people have an idea maybe of what Christianity is about.

Ignorance is ripe, it's everywhere. They don't know, these people did know, this is a culpable ignorance, this is the kind of ignorance in the church here, of I don't really want to know any more about God, I'm kind of happy where I'm at. That's what's going on here, the Jews of Hosea's day, they don't want to learn more, they are conveniently forgetting, we may say, if you've ever heard that phrase, or you're forgetting yourself, we'll point out other times that way of speaking, we don't really mean that knowledge was never really there and it just disappeared, but you're actually morally culpable, and you're kind of hiding from what you know to be true in the church.

That's what's going on here. We've met people like that, we've done it ourselves at times. That's what it means with respect to ignorance, for they certainly have been taught much, they know they should be going to Jerusalem, for example, the prophets are here telling them of these things, they know it's in their hearts, in their heart of hearts.

But unfortunately today, it is a big problem in, amongst Christians in America, this problem of understanding who God is, properly speaking, that is theology. We haven't got to the other point, which is what he therefore demands of us, but who is he? Who is this God with whom we have to deal with? This study, I think it was about 2007-2008, we don't have a lot of them, because you know it takes money to do big studies, and a lot of the studies are run by unbelievers, they don't really care about what Christians think, but this study was a Lifeway study, and I have another one from Pew Forum, which is a bigger organization. 59% of evangelicals believe the Holy Spirit is a force, and not a personal being.

I guess they've been watching too much Star Wars, I don't know. It's sad, you're just like, what? You read here, I know I read through Hosea and the prophets, you're like, how can they really think that Baal and Astaroth and them is really God, and mix the worship together, are they crazy? And here we have, in our own backyard, 59%, brothers and sisters, it's a random sample, it's a relatively large sample as I recall, I have it in my notes elsewhere. And then the Pew study is 57% believe there are different ways to heaven than Christ, who claim to be evangelical.

With numbers like that, you're like, why do I want to call myself evangelical? Well, we don't, we call ourselves Presbyterian or Reformed, and there's another reason why. Not to look down on other people, no, I'm better than you, that's not the point, that's never been the point. So this morning when I preach on, there's good works that go before you, that's evidence, light of day, this is clearly evidence of bad works, of ignorance.

Some of it is pure ignorance, they go into places, maybe they're cults, I mean, cult members now call themselves evangelicals. We forget this, the Mormons and everyone else want to play fast and loose with this. So these numbers could reflect some of that, but you know in your own experience, I know in my experience, it's even in the circles that aren't cults.

It's not good, it's sad, and there's also culpable ignorance. What it is in each case, I don't know, but it's there. And only, this was a Barna study, and only 3%, it was when a book of his came out in 2014, I think it was, I have it at home, Unchristian it was called, it was a big thing for a while.

It had lots of stats, very helpful stats, only 3% of the most committed evangelicals, so they try to demarcate, these are self-reported, I know this, that's the best you can do unless you can get someone's heart, you just ask them, are you embarrassed to talk about Jesus? Well no, okay, that's a good step. Are you born again, are you evangelical? Of those committed, these are people who supposedly have a Christian worldview, and they would go through these questions, do you believe in God, do you believe in providence, do you believe in sin, do you believe in salvation by faith alone, and they miss other parts of a key understanding in that list of a worldview, in fact, it's a deficient list, in other words. 3% have what they call a Christian worldview, and that worldview, according to their own book, is still deficient.

It's missing other things that we would consider basic Christianity. It's really something. It's not good, brothers and sisters, we are in the beginning of a dark age amongst Christendom in many ways.

I recently discovered some prominent dispensationalists, in fact, if you recall, I wrote a forward to that systematic theology republished by Barrett Press, by Joseph Weissman, and he came from those circles, he was a dispensationalist in England and whatnot, and they were asserting the Muslims, the modern Jews believe in the same God as we do. I was just like, what? These were just small-time dispensationalists, I'm not going to give names, you can ask me later. This is where we are.

We read Hosea, like, I guess that's us. That's the American church, it's the Western church, same God as Christians, in that case, they're not violating the first commandment, they're only violating the second commandment, but maybe even not that, I suppose. Knowledge about worshiping God, that leaves us here, can never get away from the fact that once you learn about God, you have to worship God, it comes naturally to those who are born again.

Learning about him is actually, in one sense, an act of worship, because whatever we have God is immediately the object of our thoughts, in word, in gestures, in our actions, it's an act of worship. We went over that, 2023, when I went over the class on worship. No graven images, that's pretty, I mean, that's there, we know that, the second commandment, the ten commandments, there's no tall statues with masses of people bowing down to them like they did in the old days, and so we, I suppose, pat ourselves on the back, collectively, as American Christians, look, we're not as bad as the Jews of old.

I mean, I don't know, some of the stuff you can see at the mega churches is quite astounding. Protestia, it's called, online, I don't endorse everything they do, but they like to show and expose a bunch of crazy stuff going on in these churches. I think the latest one

was Mario Kart or something like that, right, and they had a big stage up here, just entertainment.

If I want entertainment like that, I'll go find the good stuff. Why do I want to go to church? I'll pay money for good entertainment and go to Disneyland, and not pretend this church can pull it off. The church can't pull it off.

They shouldn't be pulling it off. That's not their job, and many have found a replacement for God's worship, and they do it on Saturday, of course. Others are eager to leave so they can go to their sports game on the Lord's day.

Now, how do you fix this? How do you gain knowledge of God, knowledge of God proper? Well, in the Old Testament, they had two offices in particular, although the Father was involved in this, of course, but publicly you had the priests and the prophets, and Malachi 2.7 is a classic passage about mute priests and the like, and Moses touches upon this in Deuteronomy 33.10 as well. Nehemiah 8.8 is a good passage to show us how they kept knowledge of God, to know more of the Lord God Almighty. Nehemiah here, so we read, so they read distinctly from the book in the law of God, and they gave the sense and helped them to understand the reading, and Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites, who taught the people, said to all the people, and continues on in the text here, that they are there in the Old Testament with their office taking the time to instruct the people of God so they can avoid this error and this danger of going after outward forms of sacrifices and burnt offerings.

They think that's good enough before God. He doesn't really need my heart. He doesn't really need me to love my neighbor.

This is sufficient. No, they gave the sense. They were preaching.

It wasn't just simply reading the text. They gave the sense of the text, which is my job as a pastor. That leads naturally to the New Testament era, where now we have this office that wasn't there in the Old Testament, although part of the functions were.

Teaching was a function, but it was in a different office. It's a priest. I'm not a priest.

Don't come to me. They don't exist anymore. Read the book of Hebrews, and so the pastors now have this churchly duty, and again, I'm not going to talk about fathers.

They also have a duty. 1 Timothy 3, we've been over that in the morning. 1 Corinthians 1 through 3. I finished 1 Corinthians late last year, I guess.

And if they withhold the truth, these pastors and these churches, they contribute to what? The growing ignorance of the Lord God Almighty, which itself is a sin. It's not enough. When we read a verse that says you have to have the knowledge of God, what it also doesn't imply.

It implies the lack of knowledge is a problem. You should avoid that, and in fact, you should use the means, the causes, the occasions, and provocations they're unto. All right, larger catechism question 99.

To promote said knowledge of God, and that's why we have a rich history in America of doing that, and in our families and like, we have Sunday school, which is actually around before rakes. As you recall, I studied the whole Sunday school phenomenon a number of years ago, the homeschoolers. We've had some kind of instruction of kids of catechisms on Sunday, outside of formal worship, even on Saturdays at times, and certainly at schools, and the Scottish tradition, and the Dutch tradition, everything else.

It's always been there, even though you can't find a Bible verse for it. Where's a Bible verse for Sunday school class? You don't really need one. It's an opportunity that you can create on the obvious day of the Lord's day, to talk about who? The Lord, to the kids.

To individual duty, so that's the fathers, especially the fathers, called to instruct and guide by example. Mothers are called to instruct their children as well. You can go through the book of Proverbs.

I'm not going to go through all those verses. I can find some for you if you want. And you yourself, whether you're a father or not, whether you're married or not, you have a duty and responsibility to yourself, to learn of God, to learn of his ways, to read his Bible, to meditate thereupon, and to seek help through the church to learn a little more.

Now you're not all called to be theologians in that sense. I know that people like to use that phrase, we're all theologians. I see where that went when it comes to feminists in the church.

That was a mistake. But you are called to learn about God, a little more perhaps than where you are right now. People always ask how much more? I can't answer that.

It just depends where you are in life. Not as much as me. You're not called to be a pastor, a theologian, properly speaking.

Any more than you're called to be an ambassador, although you're a visitor to another country. There's a difference. Although you still what? I still represent America.

Yeah, but you're not an ambassador. That makes all the difference in the world. We are.

So you have individual responsibilities as well. The knowledge of God here, when he speaks of this, I desire mercy, and I desire the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings, is a knowledge that must have faith. You must never forget that.

He's not going to say it here because every text can't say everything at once. That's not the point of it. But we know in Hebrews 4 too.

For indeed, the gospel was preached to us as well as to them. To us, the New Testament, to them in the desert. That's the context.

What desert? Well, there in Sinai. Who? What people? The Jews of Old Testament. It's the Old Testament church.

They too were called to believe as we are, he says, for indeed the gospel, the good news was preached to them. But the word which they heard in the desert did not profit them. Why did it not profit them? Not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.

It was shallow worship. It was an empty heart. There was no faith and trust in God.

And that's what's going on here, perhaps for a lot of them, not necessarily all of them because Christians can fall into sin as well. But if you do not have faith, if you do not mix it with faith, the knowledge of God will only lead you to hell a little faster. Knowledge of God about himself, but also knowledge of God's teaching about each other.

The duty we have to him. The duty that we have to him is worship. Earlier, now it's with respect to one another.

This is where mercy comes in. This word here, mercy or chesed. The Lord berates them for resting upon the sacrifices I pointed out last week and outward forms of formal public worship while being unmerciful to each other and unfaithful to God.

Hosea 4, 1 and 2 especially highlights that with that list of sins in their actions and in their hearts. And so this second part about knowledge is knowledge of God that should lead to a love of a neighbor is what's implied here because of the what I see very clearly the Hebraic parallelism.

Knowledge of God's Teaching about Each Other

Again, Hosea 4, 1 God says there is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land and everyone what by swearing, lying, killing, stealing, committing adultery.

Write the next verse. Write the next sentence. This is what he's talking about.

You really know about me? Then why are you doing these things to your neighbors? Something wrong here. Serious sin. And the order is the same.

Mercy and knowledge here in verse 1 and 2 and then here in chapter 6. Knowledge about duties to each other then. Let's get to that point. The second table in other words, right? You have the Ten Commandments, the first four.

We call the first table. It's about God. Your duty to God, who God is and what he wants of us.

The second table was the last six commandments. It's our duty to men, to one another. Beginning with the root of human responsibility towards one another which is in the family.

Even those who attend a place of worship at least once a week according to various studies have a problem naming all ten commandments. Thou shalt not kill. 70% can name it.

That's a good start. Thou shalt not steal. That's 69%.

Yet more knew the parts of the Big Mac. Two beef all patties. Oh was it two all beef patties.

79% and then the lettuce even 76%. Why is that? Well commercialism really works doesn't it? You don't think they spend billions of dollars for ads, billboards, radio spots, and tv commercials because it doesn't work. The little jingos, the repetition right this morning.

Repetition is what? The mother of learning. Repetition is the mother of learning. Repetition is the mother of learning and that's what you get with these commercials and these themes and these brandings that go on.

The brand and it's not necessarily wrong per se but you can see some of the dangers there. It sinks into your heart and your ears. Let's sing more about God and his law, the Psalms and the like.

Sing God and sing about his word and get that into our hearts. About 10 years ago, so it was 10 years ago, 12 years ago, the same book, the Barna's book on Christian. Finding on the state of American Christians.

So he went over and asked again a large sample size. You need at least 3,000 or more and he had that. Cohabitation is not a sin.

One-third of the older Christians, my generation, the Gen X, 42% were, excuse me, one-third of Gen Xers believe cohabitation is not sin. Now brothers and sisters, the question, cohabitation, is it a sin or is it not? They don't believe it is a sin. One-third of those polled, one-third of those who claim to be evangelical Christians, said it's not a sin.

We're not talking about just people off on the street who are unbelievers or Mormons or something. Well, maybe Mormons again. Who knows these days unfortunately.

59% of the younger generation at that time said cohabitation is not a sin. Fantasies about people as not a sin, one-third again of Gen Xers and 57% of the younger are like, nah, it's not a sin. Relations outside of marriage, 23% versus 44%.

Drunkenness is a sin. One-third didn't think it was a sin and 13% did think it was a sin amongst the younger and then anti-abortion was even worse. That is, they were okay with abortion.

People claiming to be Christians, even evangelicals, hence the title of the book, Un-Christian. You're a Christian but are you really? What's going on here? Now, it's not just, of course, what they believe in these matters. Ultimately, it's what they believe about God and Christ.

They could be confused about some of these things but other ones I think are pretty clear. None of these things, that is, being drunk, killing your baby, cohabitation, relations outside of marriage, are certainly acts of mercy. They're not.

So, here we have again people calling themselves Christians that go to church, according to the study, this same group here, the Un-Christian, the book, they're going to church, they think fornication is okay, right, and the like. So, they have their outward worship but they don't have acts of mercy. They have quite the opposite.

How do we gain knowledge then in such a context today, brothers, sisters? The same thing as well. We need to dig into the Word of God. We need to spend the time we can.

That's why God gave us the Lord's Day for one thing, secondarily but primarily for Him, of course, but to be with Him is to learn more about Him. So, they need to learn theology, who God is and what He requires of us, that He's a holy God, that He will punish His people. He will discipline them as a father disciplines His people.

We read that in the Psalm. We sang it. God, you've abandoned us.

What has happened to us? Because God is punishing them. And so, we must learn the first table of the law. We must learn the second table of the law.

We must learn what? Law and gospel. The law so we know what's wrong, what to flee from, what is righteous, what is good, what to cling to, but also bring conviction upon our hearts. This is wrong.

This is false worship. This is a wrong understanding of God. That's not a little thing to have such blatant, heretical views of who our God is and what salvation entails.

But, of course, the second table of the law, to teach it to ourselves anew, to teach it to our children and our children's children, to catechize them, to catechize ourselves, to listen to good preaching, to find a good church. That's why God gave us the body of Christ because He knows we need help because we could also be like these Jews in Hosea's time. And perhaps we are in our own way, but the Lord is merciful.

And so, He has given us Christ, and Christ has given us the church for He is the head of the church. Pastors, in particular, must have, therefore, what? Applied the word of God, the word of the Lord, both the law and the gospel, the law to bring conviction and direction, and the gospel to bring relief in Jesus Christ. Christian sin as well.

Talk about this morning, right? Christian sin as well in various degrees. Some very heinous and others not so heinous, but it's all sin before God. And they must, therefore, be told of these things.

Too many churches are just lax on this department of the law of God. It's not winsome. It's not friendly.

It scares people. Brothers and sisters, we need it. They needed it.

That's why I give the context here. I went over this a number of years ago. I went through the stats.

I got these stats again to remind us this is the world we live in here in America, the Christian world in particular, where ignorance runs amok, that the application of the preaching of the word of God must not be general and vague, but particular, because you have to repent of particular sins particularly. Or it's just virtue signaling. We don't want virtue signaling in the church.

It's a real sin. The churches must confess real sins, must detail those real sins, but also not just the church, but Christians as well. We are called, brothers and sisters, to a knowledge of the Lord our God, a knowledge of theology proper of who He is, of course, and what flows from that knowledge of what He requires of us here in particular towards one another.

We are called, yes, to the outward forms of worship. We're supposed to, in the Old Testament, we were Jews, have sacrifices, burn offerings. Today, it's the Lord's Supper and baptism and coming to church, forsaking not the assembly of yourselves in Hebrews 10.

But those should never eclipse the true knowledge of God, a love of Him, and the love of our neighbor. Let us pray. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, glorious, blessed three in one, help us, we pray, to continue to love you, to have mercy, a covenantal mercy towards one another, and a knowledge of God, a knowledge that goes beyond our head into our hearts, into our hands, Lord God Almighty.

And then you shall be pleased, as we read at the end of Psalm 51, with the sacrifices and the burnt offerings, that is, the outward forms of worship. Our Lord God and Savior, help us, we pray, to depend upon Jesus Christ, to live a life of humility, and to follow you all the days of our life by your strength and mercy, we pray. Amen.