

Warnings From Hosea

The prophet Hosea wrote about the sins common in Israel during a time of political prosperity and moral decline. The words of Hosea can be of great benefit to those of us living at the start of the 21st century. The church in our day shows some of the same signs of decline that Hosea saw among his people in his own day.

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (4:6)

Members of the church of Christ were once renowned for their knowledge of the Bible. Granted, many of their opponents ridiculed their study and reliance on the Bible as a legalistic obsession, but our brethren of the past went right on searching the scriptures and testing the spirits (Acts 17:1; 1 John 4:1). Without fear or regret they spoke as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11). They were unapologetic students of the word of God and they were intent on rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

Sadly, the same cannot be said as universally today as it once was. Today there is not as much of an emphasis in the lives of many members of the church upon learning the Bible and committing its teachings to memory. The knowledge many members today have of the Bible is only what they can find in a commentary or in a pre-printed class book. Real, in-depth study of the Bible is not the premium in their lives that it once was in the lives of their forebears. It is a dangerous reality that many members of the church in the 21st century cannot instruct others in the most basic facts concerning the plan of salvation, the church, true worship, or other matters. Worse still is that many are perfectly content in their lack of knowledge and would rather call the preacher when someone asks them a question than to study for themselves. We need to remember Hosea's words, for we too will be destroyed for lack of knowledge.

"My people ... have played the harlot against their God" (4:11)

Hosea condemned the tendency among His people to worship idols while at the same time pretending to worship God. You cannot worship God while worshipping idols. There is no fellowship between God and idols, and yet the children of Israel tried to serve both. They were miserable failures when they did so.

Well, dear friends, there is still no fellowship between God and idols (2 Corinthians 6:14-16), and yet many today have divided hearts. While idolatry of the rock worshipping kind may not be common today, there are those who put other things ahead of the Lord in their hearts and minds.

There are many so-called Christians who see nothing wrong with being unequally yoked together with unbelievers (vs. 14). Those who are unequally yoked together with unbelievers are those who allow unbelievers to be the driving force in their lives. The figure of speech reminds us of two animals yoked together to pull a plow. If an ox is yoked with another animal it will dominate and pull the weaker beast the way the ox wants to go. Here is the point: a Christian who binds himself in a relationship with an unbeliever in a manner that the unbeliever has control over his spiritual life will be led away from the Lord. One could marry an unbeliever who is hostile toward the Lord and His cause and this would be an unequal yoking. Unequal yoking could include a close friendship with an unbeliever in which the unbeliever seeks to undermine the faith of the believer. It could include a college student rooming with an unbeliever whose goal it is to ruin the faith of the believer. It could also include business arrangements in which the believer will be compelled by unbelievers to compromise his convictions.

It is vitally important that we remember the warnings of Paul the apostle: "*evil companionships corrupt good morals*" (1 Corinthians 15:33). We cannot afford to have divided hearts like the people of Hosea's day.

***"My people are bent on backsliding from Me ..."* (11:7)**

Backsliding is one of the biggest problems that God's people face in any generation. The meaning of backsliding is easy enough to understand; it is to slide back from faithfulness to the Lord. The Hebrew writer was especially concerned about the danger of backsliding. He said that it is impossible to renew to repentance those who fall away, because they continue on their course of crucifying the Son of God (Hebrews 6:4-6). He said that apostates are those who have an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God (3:12). Later in the book the writer says plainly that for those who sin willfully after having received a knowledge of the truth there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, "*but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries*" (10:26-27). Just like in the days of Hosea and the Hebrew writer there are those today who are bent on backsliding from the Lord.

Christians are bent on backsliding because they judge it too hard to serve the Lord. Many members of the church are so self-centered that they view obedience and service to God as a chore rather than a blessed privilege. They never imagine what a hard thing it must have been for the Lord and Savior to endure the sufferings of the cross for their sins (Hebrews 5:7). The only thing that people of this sort can think about is their own difficulties. What a pathetic shame it is to live your life so filled concern only about yourself and not for the Lord.

Christians are bent on backsliding because they love this world's goods. The New Testament teaches us that our citizenship is in Heaven (Philippians 2:20). And it teaches us that our time here is like the time of a sojourner and pilgrim (1 Peter 2:11). John exhorts us to not love the world (1 John 2:14-16). However, many Christians today are in love with this present life and with its material goods. These are the people who behave as if they are glad to go to Heaven, but only because it promises streets that are paved with gold (Revelation 21:21). If Heaven cannot match the mansions and 401K plans they have built for themselves in this life, then they would just as soon concentrate on being as comfortable now as possible. Yes, these statements are a bit tongue and cheek, but you know also that they are not too far off the mark.

Christians are bent on backsliding because they have the wrong priorities. Many who claim to be Christians are bent on backsliding because they simply cannot make up their minds that they need to follow the Lord fully. They have far too many things in mind that they want to be doing in this life to serve the Lord with complete loyalty. Some promise that they will be faithful later. "As soon as I get married and settled down, then I will serve the Lord!" is not good enough. "When I finish college and get my career going, I will put the Lord first in my life!" will not cut it. Any man who thinks that anything is more important than the Lord has the wrong priorities. We need to count the cost of discipleship. The Lord said that anyone of us who does not forsake all that he has cannot be the Lord's disciple (Luke 14:33).

If Hosea were living today, what would he write about you? What would he write about the church of which you are a member?

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