

Good News for Hypocrites

Hosea 10:1-11

Relentless (Book of Hosea)

Prepared by: Matthew S. Black

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“It is not the being seen of men that is wrong, but doing these things for the purpose of being seen of men. The problem with the hypocrite is his motivation.

He does not want to be holy; he only wants to seem to be holy. He is more concerned with his reputation for righteousness than about actually becoming righteous. The admiration of men matters more to him than the approval of God.”

- **St. Augustine**

Introduction: Open your Bible to Hosea 10. I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: "A Gospel Invitation to Hypocrites."

The Epidemic

In the modern age we have tended to reduce the notion of hypocrisy to mere duplicity. The modern notion is that a hypocrite is someone who says one thing but does another, a person who is two-faced, who is inconsistent or phony. The Bible's description of hypocrisy does not exclude this notion but is far deeper.

The Biblical understanding enunciated is rooted in the New Testament insight of the hypocrite, ὑποκριταί (hypokritai), which means “stage actors.”

A hypocrite is not really a true believer – they are just acting a role. And when no one is looking (i.e. the audience is gone) they revert to their true self, which is someone quite different.

Hypocrisy defined – In effect the Bible describes hypocrisy as the sad state of a person who reduces himself to being an actor on a stage, because he does not truly know the Lord.

There are many people who live their life in a desperate search for human approval and applause. They discern their dignity and worth, not from God, (who is in effect a stranger to them), but from what other human beings think of them. They are willing to adapt themselves often in dramatic ways to win approval. They are willing to play many roles and wear many masks to give the audience what they want. They are like actors on a stage, who seek applause or perhaps laughter and approval.

Turning toward the Hypocrite

In Hosea 10, the prophecy now turns to the false converts of Israel. If you remember, chapters 8-9 were concerned with the backsliding believers in Israel. God would never punish His children, but He will visit them and chasten them and cause them pain in order to bring them back. In Hosea 10, we have a true Gospel invitation to hypocrites. This chapter is a wake up call to those who find following God a burden – those who have no meaningful relationship with God. This is an invitation to those who are play acting.

St. Aurelius Augustine, fourth century bishop of Hippo in North Africa, defined hypocrisy in this way:

“It is not the being seen of men that is wrong, but doing these things for the purpose of being seen of men. The problem with the hypocrite is his motivation. He does not want to be holy; he only wants to seem to be holy. He is more concerned with his reputation for righteousness than about actually becoming righteous. The admiration of men matters more to him than the approval of God.”¹

In verses 1-8, we see a divine diagnosis of hypocrisy.

I. **The Diagnosis of Hypocrisy**, vs.1-8

Over and over again in the Old Testament, Israel is portrayed as God’s choice vine or vineyard. Jeremiah wrote, “I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?” (2:21)²

It is the same in Hosea. In chapter 10 Israel is termed a “spreading” or “luxuriant” vine. But her fruit is not what God desires. It is the fruit of idolatrous religion, fruit unto herself.

The Problem Begins in the Heart

The diagnosis of hypocrisy begins in the heart. God has given Israel all the rich soil of His Word and prophets and the Temple worship to grow in. They are a fruitful vine. But they have a problem with the heart.

We read in **Hosea 10:1-2**, “Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars. ²**Their heart is false**; now they must bear their guilt. The Lord will break down their altars and destroy their pillars.”

Putting on a Mask

The ESV begins verse 2 with the words, “Their heart is **false**.” But the word translated “false” is *chalaq*, which literally means “smooth.” Applied to a person’s speech, we would translate *chalaq* as “oily,” “slick,” “double-tongued,” or “deceitful.” The idea is that the people went through the motions of doing one thing when actually they were intent on doing something else. Do we have that today? Of course we do. Consequently, we must see the examples that Hosea gives in terms of our own hypocrisy.³ We might call it “putting on a mask.”

Clarification – Battle Between Flesh and Spirit

All true Christians struggle with sin and inconsistency. Paul describes it as a battle in **Galatians 5:17**, “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”

For the hypocrite, he really doesn’t have this battle. He may battle with guilt. But the Spirit of God does not indwell the hypocrite. The hypocrite does not want to be holy (as Augustine said) but he wants to be seen of men. The hypocrite has a problem with a false, or deceitful heart.

¹ St. Augustine, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: First Series, Volume VI*, ed. by Philip Schaff (Hendrickson Pub; 2nd edition, 1996), 37.

² Boice, J. M. (2002). *The Minor Prophets: an expositional commentary* (p. 79). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

³ *Ibid*, 80.

We see at least three areas of hypocrisy here.

AREAS OF HYPOCRISY

1. Insincere, or non-engaged worship (vs. 2)

Vs. 2, “**Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt. The Lord will break down their altars and destroy their pillars.**” The first area in which Israel may be said to have had a divided or deceitful heart is her purported *love for God contrasted with her true unfaithfulness*.

Marriage Mean Exclusivity – this applies to worship

The whole background of the book, Hosea’s marriage, comes into view here, for in Hosea love or faithfulness (hate or unfaithfulness) is illustrated by faithfulness or unfaithfulness in marriage. No doubt, when Hosea’s wife Gomer went off with her lovers, she would have said that she was not being entirely unfaithful to Hosea. She may have said that she did “still love him.” But “love” like that has no place in marriage. By its very nature and by the law of God marriage is an exclusive affair. It is one man and one woman, faithful to each other—“in plenty or in want, in joy or in sorrow, in sickness or in health, until death us do part.” When another comes into the marriage what happens is that love is betrayed and the vacillating partner is seen to be unfaithful.

This is what Israel was doing. She was coming to the shrines of Jehovah and was pretending to worship him. She would have said that YHWH was her God. But even while she was saying this, Israel was multiplying false altars and dedicating “sacred stones.” She would have said that these were for God. But God had not commanded them. He did not desire them. Israel was really committing spiritual adultery with the idols of the land.

Hypocritical Formalism or Moralism Today

Today millions of so-called Christians do the same thing. They would not think of denying the existence of the Christian God. They would even claim to be his people, to worship him. “We go to church,” they would claim. “We are not Jews or Buddhists or Muslims. We are Christians.” But instead of worshiping and serving him, such people are actually often in church only because of what people will think of them if they do not go or in order to make a good impression so that they might be able to do better in their business.

Let us make sure that we do not have a divided heart when we worship God. We don’t attend church to be seen of others. We want to help them with a good testimony, but we attend because God commands us, and He is worthy. Let us also make sure that we do not merely say that we love God, but actually love him and show it by the way we order our lives.⁴

Blaming the Leadership

When YHWH confronts their false, or hypocritical heart, their answer to their own hypocrisy in worship is: “I’m too far gone – we have no king because we did not fear the Lord.” **Hosea 10:3**, “For now they will say: “We have no king, for we do not fear the Lord; and a king—what could he do for us?”” The monarchy of Israel is so far gone, but this is just an excuse. Of course they did have a king (Jeroboam II) but his power was spotty. There were warlords all over the land, but there was in principle no central power, no true authoritative king.

⁴ Ibid, 81.

So the tribes of northern Israel continued worshipping at the places YHWH had not prescribed. YHWH had set up the Temple in Jerusalem, but Jeroboam I set up the golden calf worship in Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12:26–30).

We do the same – we can't live holy lives – look at our culture. Look at all the hypocrites in the churches. Christian men are addicted to porn. Once godly men are committing adultery. If this is the case, then how can you expect my worship to be fervent? All that is just excuse making. Change your heart. Repent. Soften your heart to God. Come with true, fervent worship! He is worthy. If you truly know God you will worship and serve Him no matter how perverse the culture is or how hypocritical the churches are. You worship God because He is worthy, not because His people are.

2. Empty religious repetitions.

Hosea 10:4, “They utter mere words; with empty oaths they make covenants; so judgment springs up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field.” Hosea is talking about the hollow repetition of covenant formulae before Yahweh. “They speak words” here contrasts verbal pretense with actual devotion of the heart (the NIV rendering, “They make many promises,” reads far too much into the text). They go through the liturgical declarations of fealty to Yahweh, but these mean nothing to them. They do not fear him.⁵

People like this say all the right things when called upon, but they are mere words. They have no heart commitment to the Lord.

3. Misguided emotions.

Hosea 10:5-6, “The inhabitants of Samaria tremble for the calf of Beth-aven. Its people mourn for it, and so do its idolatrous priests— those who rejoiced over it and over its glory— for it has departed from them.”

The terms “tremble,” “mourn,” and “rejoice” do not describe anxiety over the well-being of their idol. Instead, they are here part of the vocabulary of the fertility cult. The people were in awe of Baal but ritually mourned for him in commemoration of his battle with Mot (death) and his descent into the underworld.

Self-mutilation may well have accompanied this mourning. Then they gave themselves over to ecstasies, orgies, and emotional frenzy in order to awaken and celebrate the return of the god and of fertility.⁶

The End is Destruction

The final destruction of golden calf worship is expressed in **verse 6**, “The thing itself shall be carried to Assyria as tribute to the great king. Ephraim shall be put to shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his idol.” The bull god would be carried away with their whole country. It made the people feel good, but it wrecked their lives. Misguided emotions lead to train wrecks! Just because something makes you feel good does not mean that it is good. **Jer. 17:9**, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can understand it?”

Many churches are fueled by misguided emotions. Don't get me wrong. Emotions are good and created by God. It is our hearts that are twisted. We must be led by the principles of our faith, not by feeling. Music in church can be the centerpiece. We must be careful that we don't turn our churches into theatres.

⁵ Garrett, D. A. (1997). *Hosea, Joel* (Vol. 19A, p. 208). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁶ Ibid, 209.

Entertaining the Goats

Charles Spurgeon said, “A time will come when instead of shepherds feeding the sheep, the church will have clowns entertaining the goats...Unless our faith makes us pine after holiness and pant after conformity to God, it is no better than the faith of devils, and perhaps it is not even so good as that.”

Powerless Leaders Heading for Destruction

Hosea 10:7, “Samaria's king shall perish like a twig on the face of the waters.”

Their point was not that they literally were without anyone on the throne but that the king had no real legitimacy and little power or hope of success. Such a king is like a stick on water in that he can exercise no control over events.

Hosea 10:8, “⁸The high places of Aven [wickedness], the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed. Thorn and thistle shall grow up on their altars, and they shall say to the mountains, “Cover us,” and to the hills, “Fall on us.” In v. 8 Hosea’s complaint concludes with a promise that Bethel (here called Aven or “wickedness”) and its associated shrines would be annihilated. The designation “the sin of Israel” for the Bethel shrine is similar to the constant refrain in Kings that the shrines at Dan and Bethel were the means by which Jeroboam son of Nebat “made Israel sin” (e.g., 2 Kgs 3:3).⁷

The misguided emotions were used to bring Israel into wickedness and ruin. Don’t trust any leader that uses the rush of emotions as a platform and foundation for ministry.

II. The Remedy for Hypocrisy, vs.9-12

God’s People Must Live Differently

God says something else too: His people must and will live differently. One good statement of the principle is in Paul’s second letter to Timothy: “But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.” (2 Tim. 2:19).

In Hosea the theme comes through as an appeal to God’s people. To those whose hearts were divided—who spoke of love when they were actually unfaithful, who pretended to be truthful while practicing falsehood, who posed as righteous while indulging in sin—God appeals for love, righteousness, and truth.⁸

1. Acknowledge Your Helplessness

Yahweh reveals that Israel has nothing to look forward to but a complete military collapse. **Hosea 10:9-10**, “From the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel; there they have continued. Shall not the war against the unjust overtake them in Gibeah? ¹⁰When I please, I will discipline them, and nations shall be gathered against them when they are bound up for their double iniquity.”

⁷ Ibid, 212.

⁸ Boice, 83.

Reference to the Strength of the Flesh

The text again returns to Gibeah. Obviously Gibeah is remembered as the place of depravity and civil war in its early years according to Judges 19-20. But this is also the fortress city of Saul, the epitome of Israel depending on a human king.

Saul's Gibeah was a fortress-palace. The fortress had a wall some 4 foot thick, and a tower. The fortress fell into decay after the reign of David, and it does not seem to have had great military significance during Hosea's lifetime. Nevertheless, Gibeah's role as a type for dependence on military might is vital for the message of this passage.⁹

In referring to Gibeah here, God is showing both the **decadence** of Israel and its **dependence** on military strength. **Zech. 4:6** says it best: "Not by [military] might, nor by [the] strength [of man's wisdom], but by my Spirit, says the Lord."

The association of Gibeah with Saul, a king who relied heavily on force of arms but lacked David's devotion to Yahweh, reinforces this association.

We Cannot Save Ourselves

What we have naturally will always fail us. We cannot save ourselves. We need to see our own need of the Savior.

2. Repent of Your Sin

These verses return to the metaphor of Israel as a farm.

Hosea 10:11-12, "Ephraim was a trained calf that loved to thresh, and I spared her fair neck; but I will put Ephraim to the yoke; Judah must plow; Jacob must harrow [make plow rows] for himself. ¹² Sow for yourselves **righteousness**; reap **steadfast love**; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you."

Here Israel is a strong heifer that is capable and willing to plow but which only plants bad seed in the land she has prepared. Yahweh exhorts Israel the strong heifer to produce fruit worthy of the people of God. The promise that God would come and rain down righteousness on the nation is an oracle of salvation.¹⁰

This is a message we need for today! Be like a strong bull and stop planting sin – instead start doing what is right, and you will reap HESED: God's relentless love.

The Apostle John's Instructions

Righteousness and love are the two marks that John in 1 John speaks of as marks of true Christians. Some time before John's writing, some of the more intellectual members of the Christian community had withdrawn from the believers' fellowship to found a "church" of their own (cf. 1 John 2:19).¹¹ The false teachers were very self focused and gloried in and emphasized intellectual knowledge to a fault. They said more important than anything is that you have the secret knowledge, that's why they were called Gnostics (Greek for "knowledge").

John wrote about eleven evidences of true believers to combat the Gnostic "antinomians." Antinomian means "anti-law" and implies that you can call yourself a believer and have no rule for living or holiness of life.

The Practice of a Godly Life

⁹ Garrett, 214-216.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Boice, 83.

According to the apostle John, one of the marks of a true Christian is **the presence of practical righteousness in the believer's life.**

1 John 3:4-8, “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. ⁸Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.”

This does not mean that a Christian must be without sin. In fact, John says that a person who claims to be without sin deceives himself and makes God out to be a liar, for God says that all sin (1:8, 10). It means that the one professing to know God must be progressing in righteousness so that his profession is increasingly matched by his conduct.¹² A true Christian will always be “growing and changing in Christ.”

The Practice of Loving God and the Brothers

We love God by loving other Christians. Do we love our “forever family” in noticeable ways? John 13:35, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” 1 John 3:14-15, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. ¹⁵Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

Break up Your Fallow Ground

Hosea 10:12, “Sow for yourselves **righteousness**; reap **steadfast love**; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.”

¹² Ibid.