

LifeWay Family Bible Series for Feb. 20: God is just in condemning sin, but also forgives_22105

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God is just in condemning sin, but also forgives

Hosea 11:1-11

By Leroy Fenton

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Christian love often can seem no deeper than the skin of personal convenience, far from the deeper sacrificial love of God. Ninety-five percent of those who call themselves Christian never lead a soul to Christ and for the most part hardly try. The church is like a crowd at a football game where 100,000 in the stands are spectators watching 22 players at work in the arena. Evangelism classes are avoided like the plague because of laziness, fear and pride.

We hide in the cloister of our Sunday school rooms and sanctuaries teaching lessons on love and listening to sermons on compassion like the

phantom of the opera hiding behind a mask. We always are grateful someone else does the work of love while we enjoy the glory.

Most Christians do not care enough to tithe and provide the means to send out those who are willing to go witness and make disciples. "We don't have the gift of evangelism" is often the glib disclaimer. Love becomes a word that does not penetrate our person and subsequently cannot penetrate into the world.

We have had 2,000 years to win the world to our God of love, but the Muslims have out-preached us with their Allah of sternness and legalism. To nation after nation, the American church has said, "Go to hell; we don't care enough to come. There is no place for you in our church."



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This fault of the church hardly represents the character of the God we worship and love. God wants all his creation to worship him and walk with him. He holds out his hands in a gesture of warmth to welcome and reclaim those who will repent and come home, regardless of their past rebellion.

Gomer is an Old Testament prodigal. Hosea is like the loving father of Luke 15. Gomer must have thought a thousand times in her moments of anguish,

“I wonder if my husband will have me back?”

Very few people have experienced Hosea's answer to a family dilemma by going to the streets, dark and dangerous, and finding the wasted wreckage of womanhood, taking money he could not afford to pay as her ransom and offering her another chance to stand at his side.

God already has paid the ransom price for every person enslaved by sin and lifts his hands to welcome home all the prodigals who will come to themselves. Rising from the ashes of brokenness and sickness of heart, Hosea walked with tears in the light of the love of God lavished upon destitute humanity.

God's grace is difficult to comprehend. God loves us and desires the broken relationship restored. Past failures make us fail again, haunt our psyche with doubt and self-deprecation. How could God love me after what I have done? How do I overcome the past and set the course for the future? Will God forgive me and welcome me back into his family?

Drifting away (Hosea 11:1-2)

Chapter 11 is a powerful expression of God's great heart of compassion for a people who will not let him love them or lead them. This emotional, tender, poetic yearning for a restored relationship from the very heart of God was expressed as a father's love for his wayward child.

Historical points of reference are used as examples of a father's reminiscing of parental love from the early years of childhood to the youthful rebellious years of Egyptian bondage (v. 1). This appeal to history is effective in illustrating past providence and great grace in Israel's behalf. Israel, the chosen people of God, had drifted away as God continued to call out to her, not unlike a fleeing child running for the dangerous street while

ignoring the pleading parent. One can feel the hunger to grasp the hand, the sadness in the words and the emptiness of the spirit of God who calls but finds no one listening.

Israel was so self-absorbed in her own passions and lusts satisfying her carnal nature that she was incapable of hearing the loving call of God. She had drifted so far away, she was not in touch with her own immorality or her uniqueness as the chosen people of God. Israel had adulterated herself and gone after other lovers and other gods.

We live in different days. The sexual revolution has turned “whoring” into “hooking-up.” The majority of our youth, including Christians, have experienced sex before graduating from high school. Sexual licentiousness is like a carnival of college coed dorms, hotel rooms, the backseat of cars or the bedroom of absent parents, encouraged by blatant movies and bold television. Our attitudes about sex are deformed.

Sexual innocence has been decapitated, and parental supervision has been bombed. With numerous opportunities for sexual experimentation with several partners, there is little resemblance to the days when sex usually was meant for marriage and those who were more inclined to a sensual nature were shamed.

Our age has drifted away from God and the biblical values and morals of the past generation, and it has come so quickly. Our dreams and hopes for the future of our nation and the church are in the hands of those who separate reason and values from feeling and pleasure. There is an emptiness of loss, a void of virtue that grip the aching heart of God.

In Hosea's Israel, the drift away was no more pronounced or sinful than that of our own. God says, “The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and burning incense to idols” (11:2). The drifting of America into adultery and godless unfaithfulness is

reminiscent of Israel's dilemma.

Persistent love (Hosea 11:3-4)

Hosea garnered his gospel out of his grief over Gomer's whorish life and her spurning of his love. The deep loving heart of God became the mirror of his own redeeming forgiveness that pushed him to the slave block to buy back his bride.

Understanding the love of God, he captured the nature of true biblical faith and prophetically foretold the coming history of Israel. This ungrateful nation had turned its back upon the God who had reached out to her. Four analogies are used for God's fatherly love: God taught them “to walk,” “healed them,” “lifted the yoke from their neck” and “bent down to feed them” (vv. 3-4).

Israel gave Baal credit for her past and vision for her future in spite of God's persistence “with cords of human kindness, and ties of love” (v. 3). Ephraim, the younger son of Joseph, was the name of one of the 12 tribes of Israel. Following the Syro-Ephraimite War, 734-732 B.C., part of the outer land was taken by Assyria, leaving the more central area where Ephraim was located. Ephraim, being the more prominent, became a designated name for Israel.

Determined rebellion (Hosea 11:5-7)

Rebellion, stubbornness and disobedience inevitably would bring doom to Israel through the judgment of God. Disintegration of character and flagrant worship of pagan idols left Israel in a terrible condition of determined depravity. Their conflict with God and ignoring of his law would lead to another captivity at the hands of the Assyrians, not unlike what had been experienced in Egypt (v. 5).

The force of this play on words should have been intimidating but went unheeded “because they refuse to repent” (v. 5). If undiscerning Israel wanted bondage, they would have it at the hands of the Assyrians whose “swords will flash in their cities, will destroy the bars of their gates and put an end to their plans” (v. 6). God would give them up, would not hold them back and would grant their determined desire.

The bondage of sin would bring its just reward and results. God will go as far as he dares, but there comes a time when he turns his back upon rebelliousness and incorporates the harsh judgment of love so that “even if they call to the Most High, he will by no means exalt them” (v. 7).

Amazing grace (Hosea 11:8-11)

God recoiled at the thought that Israel would be like Admah and Zebolim (v. 8), two cities obliterated along with Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 10:19, 14:2-8). The very thought brought God to have “warm and tender” compassion upon Israel. Their consequences brought his compassion. God did not want to do what he had to do.

That is tough love—doing what is necessary to bring about repentance and reconciliation. However, God would not execute his “fierce anger” or take his judgment to its ultimate possibilities. His judgment would be restrained in that God would “not again destroy” Israel.

There is a softness even in God's justice that reveals his compassion and character. Were it not for this reprieve, he could have abandoned Israel forever rather than continue his part of the covenant. Only because of the balance of anger and grace, wrath and love is redemption possible. Because “I am God, and not man,” God would come not in wrath only but in love so that when his “children come trembling” from the “roar” of his wrath “like doves from Assyria,” God would “settle them in their homes”(vv. 9-11).

Tough love acts with restraint. Rather than continuing to guide, control and enable, it turns loose and allows the consequences of poor choices to take their natural course. Never giving up, love waits for the judgment and penalty that comes with those poor choices to create painful losses that open up the insubordinate heart to hear and the defiant mind to understand so the will of rebellion can be broken. Sometimes this comes quickly; for many, it takes years. And for some, it never happens.

This last possibility makes it very difficult to turn loose, for there is always the possibility the prodigal will not come to himself and come home again. Hosea, out of his own experience of grace, shows that God is hesitant to turn Israel loose with “How can I give you up” and “How can I hand you over” (v. 8).

Just as Hosea struggled to both hang on or give up on his estranged wife, so God struggled with Israel. God, with this anguish over Israel, will forever be praised for his willingness, likewise, to hand over his only Son to be crucified for the sins of the world.

At some point, it becomes obvious that turning loose is the only way for both to win. That is the amazing grace of God—loving someone enough to turn loose and wait for the opportunity to redeem from bondage, regardless of the cost. God will give a person up but never give up on a person. God, in keeping with his creation, will never make a robot out of a person but never quits trying to woo a person's will to a voluntary and spontaneous relationship of love and respect. Such a dynamic makes our humanity filled with the splendor of living in his image.

Discussion question

- ♦ What signs are there that Christians may be drifting from their responsibilities as children of God?

- ◆ How have you experienced the persistence of God's love?
- ◆ What task has God called you to that you have given up on, but he still waits for your obedience?

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