

THE DECEPTION OF SIN AND OUR FIGHT AGAINST IT

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“Sin is modest, as it were, in its first motions and proposals, but having once gotten a footing in a heart by them, it constantly makes more sure its foothold pressing on into a more serious degree. This new acting and pressing forward makes the soul take little notice of the fall from God which has already happened; it thinks all is indifferent as long as there is no more observable progress into sin. And so far as the soul has become insensible of any sin, it is hardened. But sin is still pressing forward, and that because it has no bound but the utter abolishment of God and opposition of him, it proceeds towards its goal by degrees, making good the ground which it has hardened, not by nature, but by deceit. Now nothing can prevent this unless sin is put to death with a death that withers the root and strikes at the head of sin every hour, so that whatever sin we aim at is crossed out.”

This is a paraphrase of John Owen’s words in his book *The Mortification of Sin*. And I wanted to start out today’s sermon with this quote because after just hearing Hosea 10 read to us, I think John Owen gets at the heart of God’s message to Israel in the 8th century B.C., but also to the heart of us in modern America.

Sin is a little word with a big level of awareness. Everyone knows what sin means. The interesting thing in our culture is how we view sin. Sin has become almost a synonymous with fun, deep delight, joy, success. We have songs about sin, shows about sin, cities nicknaming themselves after sin, the University of Montana has an organization on campus called the Student Involvement Network which has been branded, nicknamed, and paraded around campus as the acronym, “SIN.”

The issue with our culture is not that we do not know what sin means, it’s that we do not know what sin is. People know sin is wrong, but what we view as wrong is very subjective.

So the question we need to answer in order to properly kill sin as John Owen mentioned, and to rightly live, as Hosea will discuss, is what makes our actions right or wrong? What justifies our rightness?

Righteousness is the idea that we are acting rightly before God, and in order for us to properly battle for righteousness, we need to let the book of Hosea examine our hearts today. Let’s **pray**.

If you have your Bible open up to Hosea chapter 10, and we are really building off the passage that John preached on last week. God is pointing out Israel’s sin, and forth telling the destruction that will happen because of it.

Politically I want to remind us of the situation Israel is currently in. They are currently under the ultimate rule of Samaria, but Israel also sees this big nation named Assyria who is starting to encroach on Samaria. I remember in my 8th grade history class my teacher would always describe world politics with this phrase: “The enemy of my enemy is my friend.” So Israel sees Assyria and they see a nation who can come and free them from Samaritan rule. But what God has already told us in Hosea is the very nation they are looking to for hope, is the very nation that God is going to bring on Israel to judge them for their sins.

That’s the political climate. The spiritual one is that, like the Owen quote described, Israel has become blind to its sin. It cannot see it.

This is where we pick up in the book of Hosea. **Hosea 10:1.**

Israel is a luxurious vine. It looks good. And Israel loves this phrase, throughout the Old Testament God refers to his people as a “vine” so Israel knows this phrase. They think they are living on the high horse right now.

They are thriving socially, they are building new temples, pillars describe the strength of their buildings, their country is has been much improved, Assyria is knocking on their backdoor waiting to save them from their lousy Samaritan friends. Things are looking good.

But here is the problem: **Hosea 10:2**

Their heart is false. You see Israel fell into the trap of thinking that as long as they were doing well, and being prosperous, they must not be sinning. How often do we think that in our own lives? How often are we blinded by sin, because we find our lives so comfortable that nothing could be wrong?

How can I be sinning when I have no worries like this? How can I be sinning when my relationship with my spouse is great? My school is going well, I got a promotion at work.

This is the first point I want to make today: **The Problem of Sin**

Sin is stealthy. It does not self-identify for you. The prosperity gospel is a heresy that is sweeping the world today, it is feasting on the poor, and sending many people to hell. The idea of the prosperity gospel is that if you are a really good Christian, and really love God, God will keep you healthy, wealthy and wise. This is life of victorious living.

As evangelical Christian's we should be very quick to see the flaw in this theology as God has not promised us worldly riches, but spiritual riches. In fact some of the most sincere Christians the world knows are being murdered for their faith in the horn of Africa and in parts of Asia.

Yet, how many of us believe a functional prosperity gospel when it comes to sin in our lives. Everyone is quick to examine themselves when a problem comes, but if things are going great, we assume that everything is perfect. We equate comfort and ease of living with righteousness before God.

But look at what Solomon says in **Ecclesiastes 8:10-11**.

He says I saw men go to church each week, I saw them praised before men, yet I saw them buried as the wicked. Why? Because they failed to see that their lives were evil because they had become content, they were not immediately punished for the evil they did, so they assumed it wasn't really sin.

Now I want you to hear me here. The real issue with the people Solomon is talking about, the real issue with Israel, and the real issue with us isn't that we have become content, it's that we have become deceived. God is not opposed to contentment. God is a God of satisfaction and deep contentment. God is opposed to sinful deception which leads to false contentment.

Our heart is false. Before sin is ever an action issue, it's a heart issue. Even though the vine of Israel was producing great fruit, it was bad fruit. Yet we have been blinded by our own heart and we see not the fruit for what it is because we fail to see our heart for what it is.

Look and see what a false heart produces: **Hosea 10:3-6**

This is the second point: **The Danger of Sin**.

In this passage we saw two things, we saw the heart problem, and we saw the heart reaction.

The heart problem is in vv **3-4**. They do not fear the Lord, and they have no need for a King. They are doing fine on their own. God is a good guy, but he has really proved to be powerless concerning most things. We increased our fruit, we built the alters, we improved the country, we sired up the pillars. We got this.

And out of this problem we see their reaction: **5-6**. Israel's heart was false, because it claimed to worship God, but really worshipped an idol. Hosea is using a play on words here and instead of calling the temple town Bethel, which means "House of God" he's calling the temple Beth-Aven which means "House of Idolatry."

Back in 1 Kings 12 we see King Jeroboam set up two golden calves to keep people from going to Jerusalem to worship. This was something which he should have never done, but in his foolishness he never meant to make an idol. What he meant to do was set up a representation of God which the people could worship. Unfortunately, as other nations came in, they also introduced Ba'al worship. And Ba'al is typically represented by a cow. So as the people of God came into the holy places to worship God, they slowly began to sacrifice and worship a cow who came to represent Ba'al. The subtlety of sin had captured their hearts. Their actions were justified, but their hearts were deceived.

The humor of this passage is that Israel doesn't fear God, they don't fear foreign kings, but if you were to take away their wooden idol, they become completely undone. Which is why God says, this idol will be taken away from you by the King of Assyria like a cheap souvenir from a road side truck stop.

This is why the allegory of Hosea and Gomer works so well for the people of Israel. Look back at **Hosea 2:7-10**. You see Israel was sure that they had earned their own favor, and they attributed it to Baal, but really it was God who provided for them, God who granted them fruit, and he did it so that they might reap the benefits of covenant faithfulness and that God would be made glorious through his people.

But their hearts were false. They were a slave to their passions and help captive by their idol. They stopped fighting sin.

Our God is too loving a God to allow his people to worship things other than himself. So he would act towards Israel by judging them with other nations. Samaria's Kings will fall like a twig on the sea, the high places of Israel's sin will be destroyed, the weapons and warriors of Israel will fail, so much so that they will cry out to the mountains to fall on them in order to cover their shame.

Look at what God says to his people in **Hosea 10:9-10**. God will break the cycle of sin through judgment.

Now in closing I want to read verses **11-13**.

This is the final point: **The Fight Against Sin**

God says that your days of easy labor and gluttony in the field are done, and now you will be subject to my discipline and in that discipline seek my face again.

Look back at God's words in verses **12-13**.

God says you reap what you sow. We all seemingly want that don't we? We have probably said or heard someone say: Why can't good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people? The problem with that is we had that option, our hearts just proved that we are incapable of being good people.

Our hearts were too hardened by sin. Like earth caked by the sun for years, our meager shovels just seemed to bounce off the hardness we had created. The Old Testament highlights Israel's inability to sow righteousness.

Righteousness is based on your heart, and Israel's heart was continually wicked.

In fact the vine analogy that Hosea opened with, one that was so familiar to the Jews is riddled with irony. The great vine of Israel was actually their downfall. The vine was bad. In fact throughout the Old Testament we see the vine analogy used not to show the growth of the vine, but the failure of it. It produces sour grapes, it gets choked out by weeds, it withers in the sun, it gets cut off.

We cannot fight against sin if our heart is dead in it.

But look at what Jesus said in John **15:1-5**. You see Israel failed as the vine, because it was never meant to be the ultimate vine. Jesus is.

When Jesus came to the earth, he lives a sinless life among a sinful humanity. He was faced with the subtle call of sin, but he resisted. He was offered the deceitful lies boasting comfort and success, but he fought it.

And those who are Christ's draw from the vine of Christ. **Romans 5:17**

Where our hearts were once incapable of anything due to our hardness, Christ has tilled our hard hearts for us. His blood has made us fertile for faith and now we can resist all of sin because we are no longer pulling from a false heart and weak vine, but we are able to resist the subtly of sin because Christ has already overcome it.

You see Israel tried to draw its power and its strength from itself, and it was not enough to expose its sin and save it from judgment. Yet in Christ, God has given us as new covenant believers a different vine to pull from, we are not the vine, we are the branch that takes its nutrients from the vine.

The application of this passage to us is that we can avoid the mistakes of Israel because we have a greater capacity to fight for righteousness in our lives.

So church: are you actively fighting against the sin in your life? Are you actively looking at your life through the lens of Christ rather than the lens of culture and are you putting to death the subtle lies and the poison of death?

The beauty of this is that we are not called to fight this fight alone. The author of Hebrews calls the church to join in the plowing of hearts together, and I want to leave us with this verse, and I want us to make this verse our prayer as we attempt to avoid the idolatry and sin of Israel through the grace of God: **Hebrews 3:13-15**