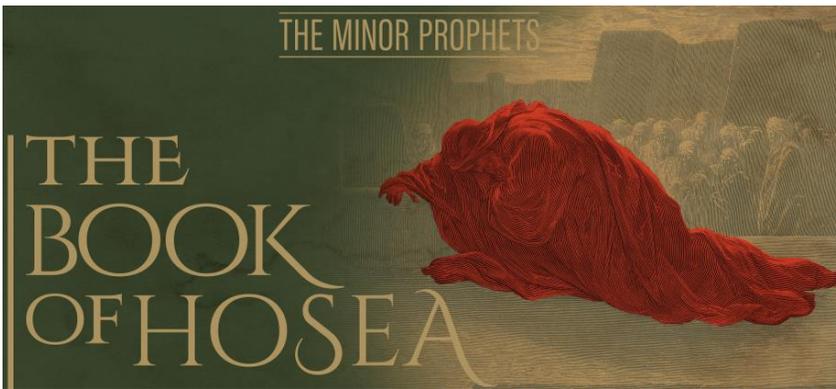


HOSEA

Faithful Love for the Unfaithful Lover

A St. Paul's Lutheran Bible Study



Fickleness is an excellent word to describe the people of Israel. They – by virtue – were unfaithful, inconsistent, erratic, changeable, and lacking steadfastness. But how were they fickle? Well, fickleness seems to go together with idolatry. In other words, when we worship an idol or when we idolatry the Lord, we go the way of manipulation. That is to say, the people of Israel believed they could sing repentant songs or bring a sacrifice to God, and then He must respond to them with favor. However, in the next hour, the Israelites believed that they could let this faith and love disappear as they went on with other things. The Israelites believed that they could come and do the liturgy and offer up a sacrifice (go through the motions, as they say), and then God would magically forgive them, and all would be well. And since God would magically forgive them, well... they could continue doing whatever they wanted.

It is so very important to keep in mind that the problem with this kind of thinking and acting does not fall on the liturgy or the sacrifices. The liturgy and sacrifices were good, not evil. However, when the people of Israel turned the liturgy and sacrifices into magical acts to try and manipulate God, well, good was made into evil. The people spurned God through the abuse of holy things!

Tragically, in our day and age, people will reject the holy things of God because of their abuse. For example, consider the following:

"I have seen way too many people baptized in the church as a baby only to grow up to live a crazy sin filled life! We baptize them, confirm them, and then they drift into the world, never to return! Obviously, baptism for babies does not work; it produces nominal Christians at best. Let the child grow up and then baptized.

HOSEA 6:1-11

Author:

Hosea the Prophet

Date:

740-715 BC

Place:

Israel

Purpose:

Israel was like an unfaithful wife. She was attracted away from her husband (the Lord) to other lovers (idols). In the book of Hosea, the Lord calls Israel back to Himself. It is a call for Israel to forsake her unfaithfulness and be restored in the Lord's faithfulness.

Other:

Hosea is the most quoted book of the Minor Prophets in the New Testament.

A problem exists in this rationale. The problem is that infant baptism is considered invalid based on the failed result of lawlessness and leaving the faith. In a sense, this is reverse-pragmatism. Instead of the end justifying the means, this reverse-pragmatism uses the end to criticize and invalidate the means.

Borrowing some thoughts from Martin Luther's Large Catechism, let me rephrase a gentle rebuttal to the reverse-pragmatism rationale:

If a nonbeliever comes into a worship service, hears the Word, and leaves unchanged or even more hardened to the Word, we certainly would not consider the preached Word as invalid. If a person does not believe in Jesus, we also wouldn't say that this unbelief makes Christ into nothing. If a child or citizen disobeys the civil government or his/her parents, we would not say that the Government and the parents are invalid, that they are nothing.

Logically, these examples don't make sense, and these examples expose the problems with reverse-pragmatism. Luther comments that this kind of rationale has inverted the whole argument. He states,

"My dear, just invert the argument and rather draw this conclusion: For this very reason, Baptism is something and is right because it has been wrongly received. For if Baptism was not right and true in itself, it could not be misused or sinned against. The saying is, 'Abuse does not destroy the essence, but confirms it.' For gold is not the less gold even though a harlot wears it in sin and shame."

Back to the theme of fickleness, though. The theme of fickleness that is identified in Hosea 6 is also addressed elsewhere: the New Testament book of James. James says, *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."* But what does James mean when he says that they are not doers of the Word? It is easy to jump to the conclusion that these individuals heard the Gospel but then they somehow failed to perform properly, that they were not living out the Christian life by doing Christian things. However, this is not what James is confronting specifically in our text. What he is confronting are individuals who merely hear the Word, and then it does not take root. They hear the Word without faith. In other words, to be a doer of the Word means that the hearer will experience repentance of sins, faith in the Gospel, and assurance in the Gospel.

Put another way, here is the main problem. Can you imagine looking in the mirror, seeing who you are, and then 10 minutes later forgetting who you are, what you are about, what you do for a living, etc...? This is crazy. People who forget who they are after looking in a mirror are those that we would classify as mentally ill. However, this is what so often happens spiritually speaking. This is what James and Hosea 6 are confronting. Fickleness is when you hear of sin and God's forgiveness, but then, 10 minutes later, after church, the circumstances of life, our jobs, our projects, and the things of the world enter in, and the message of the Word simply vanishes; it is lost and forgotten. It goes in one ear and out the other. This is what it means to be a hearer of the Word only. This is what James and Hosea 6 are concerned about. Now it makes sense why the Lord says to Israel - and us - *"For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."* The Lord is not rejecting the sacrifices and liturgy but rejecting Israel's fickleness and them not being doers of the word.

