

Hosea: The Intolerant Love of God

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Preacher: Mike Scrivani

[0 : 00] Hosea chapter 1 and verses 1 and 2.

! And God had a blessing to the reading of His Word.

Would you please be seated? It can be said that few things in the course of history have had such a shaping influence on the lives of Christians as the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

What is the Catechism and where did it come from? Well, the Westminster Shorter Catechism is a concise summary of Christian doctrine.

And 107 questions and answers was composed, I should say, by the Westminster Assembly in London over 350 years ago.

[1 : 33] After being written, it was adopted immediately by the Church of Scotland and put into use. And one of its most primary questions is this.

What is the chief end of man? What is the chief end of man? And the answer is that man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

I'll say that again. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. And they got this answer from Scripture. And I want to show some of those Scriptures to you to support this answer.

First of all, in 1 Corinthians 10.31, there it says, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. In Romans 11.36, it says, for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.

To Him be glory forever. Amen. Psalm 73.24-26 says, you guide me with your counsel and afterward you will receive me to glory.

[2 : 37] Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

And then John 17.22-24. The glory that you have given me, Jesus prays, I have given to them, and that they may be one as we are one.

Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me may be with me where I am. To see my glory that you have given me because you love me before the foundation of the world.

So, according to Scripture, what is the chief end of man? Well, again, man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him, not just now in this life, but forever.

For all time. And so my question to you then is, is this your chief end? Right now, if you were to be asked, and if you were willing to be honest, is this the chief end of your life?

[3 : 43] Is this what you are living for? Is this the prize that you are pursuing? In Exodus chapter 20, if you'll remember, God gives the most famous moral code in all the world.

He gives His people the Ten Commandments. If you'll remember, He had just delivered them out of bondage to slavery to the Egyptians. He had brought them out.

He was going to deliver to them the promised land. They were slaves, and He had freed them. And the very first commandment that He gives them in the Ten Commandments is this.

I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me. And so that first commandment produces a natural question or wonder.

Well, what do you mean no other gods, God? And so He answers that immediately in the form of the second commandment. You shall have no other gods before me. Let me tell you what that means. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven, above or on the earth, beneath, in the waters below.

[4 : 48] You shall not bow down to worship them, He says. And so a lot of times when we read those scriptures and we hear about idols and idol worship, what we often picture in our minds and our imaginations is a primitive people in loincloths, dancing around a fire, enchanted, covered in some kind of a paint, and they're bowing down to statues that they've carved out of wood or out of

stone.

And to us, that's what we think of when idols and idol worship comes to our minds. However, while traditional idol worship still occurs like that in many places of the world, internal idol worship within our hearts is universal.

This is a problem that all men have. In Ezekiel chapter 14 verse 3, God says this about the elders in Israel, and it's true of us in our day as well.

Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumby blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all?

And so what God is implying here is that the human heart is an idol factory. We take things. They don't necessarily have to be bad things.

[6 : 11] Money isn't a bad thing. Relationships with other people isn't a bad thing. Health isn't a bad thing. Love isn't a bad thing. Family isn't a bad thing. But what we do is we take even these good things, and we make them ultimate things in our life.

We make them the chief end of our existence. And when we do that, we've created an idol. We have made those things our chief end, and they never can satisfy us or give us the worth that we're seeking that we can only find in God.

For example, in the world of professional athletics, many athletes in the pursuit of performing at their highest level possible have cheated.

They've taken performance-enhancing drugs, and as a result of that, their bodies later in life are more broken down than they otherwise would have been. Their playing careers often come to an end because they've been exposed, and then for the rest of their lives, they live with a solid reputation.

Think of baseball. Think of the steroids issue. And a lot of those guys who were no doubt Hall of Famers now aren't even welcome at many baseball events because they're cheaters.

[7 : 23] Lance Armstrong, for example, you know, he was one of the greatest heroes in the United States of America until he was found out to be a cheater, and he was exposed, and now his reputation is sullied forever.

Another example would be of a woman, a woman who grew up in poverty, and as an adult, she wanted so badly to have financial security that she passed over many other potential relationships because she was looking for a man with money.

And then when she married that man, she realized she didn't really love that man, and maybe he didn't even really love her. And so that marriage ended in divorce, and as a result of that divorce, she began to struggle economically, and what she feared most in life ended up being what she now was living, a life of poverty and alone.

You take, for an example, a drill sergeant. I've heard of a drill sergeant who was so severe with his soldiers, he wanted to discipline them, and they were disciplined so much so that he crushed their morale that finally when they got out into the battlefield, there was a breakdown in communication, and many of them lost their lives because of what he had done.

And so you see, athletic prowess, disciplined troops, financial security, these aren't bad things. They're not bad things. However, the pursuit of them, treating them as the chief end of your life, they turn people like this.

[8 : 50] They've taken good things. They've made them idols. They've obsessed over acquiring them and then keeping them. They worship them to try to keep them. So idols aren't just images that are carved of wood and stone that primitive people in the past and present offer worship to.

No, an idol is anything that a person seeks to give them what only God can supply. That's what an idol is, as defined by Scripture. An idol is anything that a person seeks to give them what only God can supply.

In the Bible, idol worship is portrayed as those things that people love, those things that people trust, and those things that people obey more than they love, trust, or obey God.

The Bible then uses three metaphors often to illustrate man's pursuit of idols that they seek to give them what only God can supply. And so the first metaphor that the Bible uses is religion.

There we see that God should be our only Savior. But oftentimes men look to personal achievement or they look to financial prosperity to give them the peace and the security that we so want.

[10:04] And instead of worshiping God as a result, they worship their careers, they worship their possessions, they worship other people instead of God, and they develop their own idolatrous religion.

The second metaphor is politics. God should be our one true Lord and Master. But whatever we love and whatever we trust, we also end up eventually serving.

We place our faith in men then more than in God to fix the problems that we feel like ail our society.

The third metaphor is that of marriage.

The Bible says that God should be our one true spouse. But when we desire and delight in other things more than God, what we end up doing is committing spiritual adultery.

We covet things, things that are not God, and then in coveting them in a way we deify them and we worship them. And so the marriage metaphor is used here in Hosea to depict a nation, not all that much unlike our own nation, a nation of idol worshipers who like a cheating wife or a cheating spouse has taken the unfailing love and loyalty of her husband and she's taken it for granted and instead she's pursued the affection of many other lovers.

[11:34] This is an uncomfortable book. Reading this passage, this book, this week and the weeks before it, it makes you feel uncomfortable.

There are some times I've read, I can't say that, God. I'm going to say that. I can't believe it. That's really uncomfortable to say. But this is God's word. And why it's so uncomfortable, I think, is because from Hosea, Hosea gives us a picture.

God gives us a picture that allows us to see things from His perspective. And man, that can be really uncomfortable to see things from God's point of view.

And His perspective is this, the perspective of a jilted husband. A husband who married the girl from the other side of the tracks. A girl with an unfavorable but well-earned reputation.

She's a prostitute. And all those other descriptive words that could be used to describe such a woman fit her perfectly. Despite her reputation, this man loved her.

[12:39] He chose her. And he pursued her as his bride. They entered then into the covenant of marriage. But the woman's ways did not come to an end after she married this man.

While her husband was out providing, she was still pursuing other relationships and other men. And everyone in the community knew it.

She'd get pregnant. She'd have children. Children whom very well could have been the product of her other relationships. However, her husband raised them as if they were his own.

No questions asked. Then one day, this wife decides that she'd like to have her old life back. A life without a husband.

A life without children. So she packs up all of her bags and she leaves to go live with another man. But before too long, he begins to abuse her, this new man.

[13:44] And then she gets passed along from one man to the next who does the exact same thing. By the end of it, she's a scarred and marred prostitute.

Worse off than she was before. Now, a lot of times we would look at that story and we would think, well, you know what? That's a good end right there.

Perhaps we would think, you know what? She's getting only what she deserved. She had a husband who loved her and she left him. Now she's simply reaping what she's sown. She's made her bed and now she's got to sleep in it.

And that could be the end of the story and many people would be satisfied with its conclusion. But thankfully for her and thankfully for us, that's not the end of the story.

This husband who loved her, despite all that she's done, loves her still. He finds her back on the other side of the tracks where he found her before and he buys her back, sets her free from those who are prostituting her out.

[14:57] He cleans her up. He treats her wounds. He adorns her with jewels. He packs up her stuff and he brings his wife back home because he loves her.

And there he continues to shower her with love and affection as if she hadn't done all those things. So this is what the book of Hosea is about.

Through Hosea, God enables us to see things from his point of view. And again, it's not a comfortable perspective to behold. However, through it, we come face to face with the deep, deep, unfailing love that God has for his people.

This is a great book. And the theme of this book is God's loyal love. God's loyal love for his covenant people, Israel, despite their idolatry.

So as we go through the verses and the chapters, this will be the theme. God's loyal love for his covenant people, Israel, despite the fact that they've cheated on him, despite the fact that they have worshipped and pursued other gods instead of him.

[16:07] Now here's the main idea for this morning's message. The Lord's love for his people is unending and will not tolerate a rival and will tolerate no rival.

The Lord's love for his people is unending and will tolerate no rival. And we'll see that again over and over in the pages of this book. So to better understand it and how it applies to our day today, we need to understand the times in which Hosea lived and his family.

So the first thing that I want us to see this morning and understand is Hosea and his times. There again in verse 1 it tells us the time in which Hosea lived, these men who had reigned and this period in Israel's history.

And so I want to give you a brief history, a brief rundown of who these people are and the history that they have, that they have in their more recent history I should say.

Israel, if you remember, commenced as a nation when God brought them out of slavery from the Egyptians. And if you remember, it was after the 10th plague when they were finally set free from their slavery.

[17:17] If you remember that Israel was to sacrifice an unblemished male lamb and that they were to take its blood and they were to use its blood to cover their doorposts so that when the angel of death came through Egypt it would pass over them.

They were protected by the blood of the lamb. This was a people who had been redeemed by the blood of the lamb. And as believers today, we have also been redeemed by Jesus Christ who was the sinless lamb of God.

From there, if you remember, the nation's leader was Moses, their first prominent leader. He was then later preceded by Joshua who led them to the promised land and the conquest of it.

After Joshua came a series of judges until the time came when the people demanded that they have a king. Their first king was Saul and Saul was a terrible failure.

Their second king was David and David was God's model king. A man who the Bible says describes as being after God's own heart.

[18:27] And under David, Israel began to become a powerful nation. And then when he died, his son Solomon reigned in his place. And the first few years of Solomon's reign was a golden age for Israel.

It prospered in just about every way conceivable. However, Solomon's reign saw Israel again introduced to idol worship. When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam became king.

And Rehoboam was a horrific leader. And it was because of him and during his reign that the nation of Israel split into two. You had the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel also referred to as Ephraim.

And so, Hosea was ministering to the northern kingdom of Israel. And he was doing so around 760, between 760 and 723 B.C.

By this time, Israel had immersed itself into the practice of worshipping idols. They made their own idols.

[19:36] They adopted the idols of foreign nations as their own. This was also a nation that was marked by its political bloodshed.

King after king would be overthrown and would be assassinated by those who were seeking power. And so, Hosea ministered to a people that were far from God.

In terms of religion, they pursued other gods. In terms of politics, they were corrupt, devious, and bloodthirsty. In terms of morals, they were adulterous, prostitution, loose living, and violence ran rampant in their society.

So, when we see that picture of who these people were, we can draw a lot of parallels, can't we, between Israel back then and the United States of America right now.

You see a lot of similarities, at least I do. And here we see also as bad as we think things might be right now, they've been this bad before. They have been worse than our times in the past.

[20:40] And so, Hosea bears witness to a very decadent society in the last century of its existence. So, you see, during this time, Israel was prospering in the eyes of the world.

This was a strong people in the world's eyes. They were doing well economically. They had strong, powerful military allies. None of them, none of them would have assumed that the nation was on the brink of collapse.

And yet it was. What caused that collapse? Well, the underlying cause was not their political corruption.

That wasn't the primary cause that led to their collapse, nor was it their corrupt morality. The primary cause of their collapse was their corruption religiously, spiritually.

Their spiritual corruption led to their moral corruption. And their moral corruption led to their political corruption. You see a theme there in the days in which we live?

[21 : 46] The further we are from God, the less moral we are as a people. And that's reflected in our politics and the people who represent us.

God knew what these people needed. God knew that what they needed wasn't political reform or moral reform as much as what they needed was spiritual reform.

They wouldn't turn to God on their own. Their sins would be justly punished, but in the end God would make a way to save them. So again, does that message sound familiar to you?

That sounds like the gospel to me. So right now, what our nation needs most is for the church to be the church. What does the United States of America need now?

Not so much political reform, not so much moral reform, spiritual reform has to come first. Our nation is in need of another reformation. Unfortunately, what we too often see is that the world is winning Christians instead of Christians who are winning unbelievers out of the world.

[23 : 00] I read an article this week that John MacArthur came out with and it's a critique of what many are calling the social justice gospel. And this is what he said about it.

He said, it's the next logical step for a church that is completely ensnared in efforts to please the culture. For decades, the popular notion has been that if the church was going to reach the culture, it first needed to connect with the style and methods of secular pop culture or academic fads.

To that end, he says, the church surrendered its historic forms of worship. In many cases, everything that once constituted a traditional worship service disappeared altogether, giving way to rock concert formats and everything else the church could borrow from the entertainment industry. Craving acceptance in the broader culture, the church carelessly copied the world style and preferences and fleeting fads. Having thoroughly absorbed the world's methods, the church is now being forced to adapt the world's message.

I also saw this week that Pope Francis is coming out with a book. And the book, he's written others before, I believe, but this book is called God is Young is the title of it.

[24 : 12] God is Young. And so his point of the book is that God is the eternal one, that God though is changing, that God is a young God.

And basically what he's doing is he's trying to appeal to younger people and say, hey, this is a God that you could like. This is a God that you could worship. This is a God that you could go to church and learn about because he's young like you're young.

He's changing with the times like you are changing with the times. And of course, there's no biblical ground in that. God is obviously not young. God is described as the Bible of the ancient of days. God needs no rejuvenation or renewal because he does not tire. God does not love innovation but demands conformity. This is the God of the Bible. But people feel like he's not appealing enough so we've got to do things for younger people and more people to come to church so that they'll like God.

Charles Spurgeon once said that a time will come when instead of shepherds feeding the sheep the church will have clowns entertaining the goats. That time has come.

[25 : 21] In many churches and in many cases we have a lot of clowns pretending that they're pastors. And in church today we have a lot of people who come to church because they want to be entertained by the clowns instead of hear God's word.

And so what we've seen is the juvenileization of the church. This church that should be the mighty power and force for God in this world has become a silly thing.

We have mega church pastors I've heard of one. I saw one who was using a sermon illustration and he was using water guns and then he started spraying people in the church with water guns and rest assured there's places to put things like that here but I don't have any water guns back here to squirt you with.

But I don't know what the point was but you know it got a good laugh. It got a good reaction. I heard another pastor recently who was bringing wild cage animals into the sanctuary to use as sermon illustrations.

You know a mountain lion was brought in and there's a lot of oohs there's a lot of ahs and really what they're going for is a response. You know what the response that they want is I can't believe they did that in church.

[26 : 28] I can't believe that church is doing that. Man that's so cool. That's neat. But the response shouldn't be I can't believe that they're doing that in church.

That church is fun. When instead the response should be I can't believe how sinful and flawed that I am. But yet I can't believe the immensity of the love of God.

That despite my flaws despite my sin that Jesus Christ died for me. And I'm loved by him more than I ever dared hope.

That's the message. That's the message that sparks revival. Not squirting people with water guns. And so my hope is that through this book you'll see from God's point of view that you will encounter afresh the deep love that God has for you.

And that he will fan that into a flame. And that as a result of that you will desire to live for him more. That you will see that there is no other idol. There is no other thing that can give you what only God can give you.

[27 : 37] What only he can supply. So now you understand Hosea and his time. Let's better understand Hosea and his family. Verse 2. The Lord speaks to Hosea and he says to him, go take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord.

Hosea's name means salvation. Again, he was born of the son of Beery. He probably was a young man by the time he was called, maybe in his 20s, mid-20s, when the Lord calls him to be a prophet and when the Lord calls him to marry Gomer, a wife of whoredom.

There is some debate over whether or not Gomer was already living as a prostitute before she married Hosea and she later entered into that practice after they were married. There is some debate over whether or not this marriage was literal at all.

Some Bible scholars believe that it is a parable. Others believe that it is referring to just all the women of Israel in this way.

But for me, I believe that the best understanding of Scripture is a straightforward understanding of Scripture and I believe that when we read this book, we have that straightforward understanding of this text and it is implying to us a literal understanding that this was a marriage that happened, that these were real people, that this really did take place.

[29 : 03] And so I will come from this text as a literal understanding, a straightforward understanding of what is being said here. And so Hosea here introduces us to a family which is a miniature of our world.

It's a problem family. And God compares his situation not to that of a dictator whose orders must be obeyed and nobody dare question them, nor does God compare it to a father who adores his wife and children and they adore him in return.

No, God uses this comparison of a husband whose wife has left him and a father whose children are like strangers in his own house. So at some point, Hosea marries and falls in love with Gomer, who is known for her in moral ways.

At God's instruction, he married her and they began to have children. Later on, his wife fell back into her old ways and she left Hosea with her children to pursue other lovers.

But then in chapter 3, God calls Hosea to go and to rescue his estranged wife. Hosea does as he's instructed. He goes and he buys his wife out of slavery and he brings her back home.

[30 : 22] Nothing then is told to us more about what happens from that point, but the story seems to make sense in the assumption that from that point forward, they lived happily as husband and wife.

And so the entire experience was very painful for Hosea. There are few worse things, few more painful things to experience in this life than the betrayal of your spouse.

But this is analogous to the relationship between God and his people. God chose a bride. She was impure from the very beginning, from the earliest days.

But she responded to his calls and things were good for a generation or so. Then the nation fell back into sin and subsequently, as a result of its sin, it fell into bondage.

God lets his people fall into serious calamities and distresses. Gomer falls back into slavery. But this time, God will come, God will redeem her as he's redeemed his people.

[31 : 41] After disciplining them, and then will resume the marriage relationship with them. This is a book filled with good news. The pain that Hosea experienced expressed God's love and desire for his people in this way.

How can I give you up? was the cry of Hosea. How can I give you up? is the cry of God. And so in Hosea, we are reminded that God loves the loveless.

That God values the otherwise worthless. That he loves them enough to pay the ultimate price for their redemption. And so through this message that was given to ancient Israel, though it still speaks volumes to us today as the body of Christ.

And through this book, we will see the awesome, amazing love that God has for his people. Too often we don't see it this way, do we?

A lot of times we think that in order for God to love us, we've got to be pure first. And a lot of times we don't realize just how sinful we are. And we think, of course God loves me, I'm great.

[32 : 56] Why wouldn't he love me? Now as I was putting together this sermon this week, I remembered a lesson that I had in youth group one time, and our teacher meant well. We were talking about sexual purity.

And so he used an illustration, and he brought a candy bar, it was a Kit Cat. And he was using the illustration as, you know, you are the Kit Cat, right?

And this is representative of your sexual purity. And so he said, he invited somebody in the group, hey, who wants to have this candy bar? And of course, you know, it's teens, it's chocolate, I love Kit Kats now, as a matter of fact.

And so lots of eager volunteers to come up. And so one was picked, he came up, he's like, all right, it's yours, why don't you open it up? And so he opens it up, describe how, you know, it feels good to open it up, the smell, the chocolate, whatever, and he's like, go ahead and take a bite.

So he takes a bite, and he's like, all right, now you've got to give it back to me. So he gives it back to him, and he tries to put it back together like it was before, and then he asks again, now who wants to have a bite?

[34 : 06] You know, you still have some boys that's like, well, you know, I don't have to bite the part where he ate, so I'll bite another in. But it got to the point where this thing was all twisted, and the wrapper was junk, and the candy bar was all covered in spit, and it was gross, and nobody wanted it anymore.

And his point was to us, you know, now that's you. Who wants this? None of you guys want this anymore. It's just trash. It's just garbage. And man, I understand the point that he was trying to make, because yes, we need to teach our men and women, young men and women, the importance of sexual purity.

But you know what? You know who wanted that eaten piece of garbage that we were ready to throw into the trash? You know who would want that candy bar still? God.

Jesus Christ still wants it. Man, you look at the woman at the well, you look at the woman caught in adultery, you look at yourself. We're that candy bar.

We're Gomer. We were not pure when the Lord pursued us, when the Lord called us to salvation. He made us pure, but he had to do that by sending his son to bleed and die on the cross for our sins.

[35 : 25] We were not a holy people before we met God, but because of Jesus Christ, he's made us a holy people, fit to live in his presence forever.

But in order for that to be, it required his son, Jesus Christ, coming to us, living the life of purity that we could not live, dying for our sins that we should have died in our place, enduring the wrath of God for what we've done, being buried, and in the grave for three days, and then he was resurrected as proof that the price for our sin had been paid, that a way for us to have eternal life with God the Father forever had been made.

Jesus Christ, the way, the truth, and the life. And so what we're going to see in this book is Jesus. We're going to see God. We're going to see the love that God has for us. We're going to come face to face with the gospel here in the Old Testament.

And if you're hearing that news today and you're like, man, that sounds good, Pastor Mike, I can't believe it. If you knew the things that I did, I couldn't imagine that God could forgive me. The Bible says that if you confess of your sins, you believe in your heart that Jesus is Christ, that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

And if you're making that decision today, if you're coming face to face with that reality today and you know that you need to put your faith in Jesus Christ, then I encourage you to come down as we sing our invitation hymn.

[37 : 00] This is going to be a great book. There's a lot for us to learn and a lot for us to grow from. So I encourage you to be reading Hosea ahead of time as we go through this wonderful book together.

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