

DECIDING ON DISCIPLINE

Hosea 8:1-3,7-10; 9:7-8; 10:10-12

What does take to get the attention of someone who is obviously on the road to ruin and you can see that if they continue in the way they are going that nothing good will result from it? Maybe it has always been this way, but it seems that everywhere you look you can see people and nations making decisions that will have long-term consequences that may be irreversible. If you saw such behavior in your child, how would you handle it? Most of us would try to reason with the child and if that did not work, then you might try some sort of discipline such as restricting the use of their car or their computer or their activities. In times past, corporal punishment might have been used. If these tactics work, then we would have spared the child a lot of grief that he or she might otherwise encounter. If it doesn't work, then accidents can happen, health problems develop or something equally bad may get the attention of the person and result in a change of behavior. Sometimes nothing works and really bad consequences can result. You have probably known of cases where something like this has occurred.

Such situations can be between you and a friend who is involved in questionable behavior or between you and your ageing parent who refuses to stop driving when they can't see or hear or react quickly. It can happen in a nation that makes wrong choices and wrecks their economy or destroys their moral base. When do the discipline actions and the consequences of bad behavior stop being a warning to turn back and eventually become the very thing that destroys the person or the nation?

This was sort of like what was going on between God and Israel in the eighth century BC when He was using His prophets to reason with the nation. The consequences of their choices resulted in failures, sometimes God would allow their enemies to oppress them or send natural disasters such as droughts upon the land to try to get their attention. At some point the warning signs increase in their intensity to the point that they are no long redemptive but become punitive and even destructive.

Check Your Relationship – 8:1-3

¹ Put the trumpet to your lips! Like an eagle the enemy comes against the house of the LORD, Because they have transgressed My covenant And rebelled against My law. ²They cry out to Me, "My God, we of Israel know You!" ³ Israel has rejected the good; The enemy will pursue him. Hosea 8:1-3 (NASB95)

It is interesting that God gives people warnings of impending trouble by sending messages and messengers to sound the alarm so that they can turn away from the disaster or at least know why it happened if they choose to continue down the same path. Here we see the words of Hosea from God to the nation of Israel that an enemy would suddenly come upon them without further warning. They probably thought, "We've heard all this before. No one would dare attack us. We are God's people." Sound familiar? Who would have thought that some ragtag group of malcontents would fly airplanes into the World Trade Center buildings and into the Pentagon building?

Why would an enemy be allowed to come against the people of Israel? There are at least four provocations mentioned in these few verses. The first reason was *transgressing God's covenant* He had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and then with their ancestors through Moses. As Matthew Henry pointed out in his commentary, this was not just committing sin as people do in the normal course of living, but was related to doing things that violated the stipulations of the agreement God had with them. The essence of the covenant was simply this: "You will be My people and I will be your God." This violation of the covenant was the main

message that God was proclaiming through Hosea when He had Hosea marry the adulterous woman named Gomer. By worshiping pagan gods, Israel had rejected Jehovah and disavowed the covenant.

Reason number two was that the people of Israel had rebelled against the *law of God*. The purpose of law is to define limits and boundaries for behavior. I guess it is possible for people to keep the law and transgress the covenant. In fact, that would be a good description of someone who is a moralist but does not believe in God. It could be a moralist who ascribes to Hinduism or even Islam. Another way to look at this is to consider whether there are those who worship God and are very careful to not go astray by putting their trust in pagan beliefs and yet rebel against the law of God? Another way to ask this same question would be “are Christians capable of getting caught up in a life of immorality?” That is a tough question.

Trying to answer that question may lead us to the third charge or indictment against Israel and that was they were *living a deceitful life*. We see this charge in the first part of verse two. The people were saying “we know you, God.” In making such a statement, they were deceiving themselves. This is like a person who claims to be a Christian but has not been born again of the Spirit of God. There is a fairly widespread belief that going through the motions of attending church, giving money, singing in the choir, reading the Bible, makes a person a child of God.

The fourth charge against Israel was that they had *rejected “the good.”* The meaning of this statement is probably best understood in light of the statement Jesus made when someone referred to Him as good master (teacher). His reply was “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.” In rejecting “the good,” they had rejected God and turned to that which was demeaning, hateful, prideful, arrogant, disrespectful, filthy, perverted, etc. Does this have a familiar ring to it? Is this not what we are witnessing in our own culture? When we turn away from what is good, we end up neglecting God and turning away from Him.

The consequences of such behaviors are that a person or a nation will find themselves weakened and exposed to the powerful who would do harm to them and it will come upon them so quickly they will not be able to protect themselves as they attempt to escape. This is exactly what Moses had told them would happen in Deuteronomy 28:49-50.

The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; A nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favor to the young:

You Reap What You Sow – 8:7-10

⁷ For they sow the wind And they reap the whirlwind. The standing grain has no heads; It yields no grain. Should it yield, strangers would swallow it up. ⁸ Israel is swallowed up; They are now among the nations Like a vessel in which no one delights. ⁹ For they have gone up to Assyria, *Like* a wild donkey all alone; Ephraim has hired lovers. ¹⁰ Even though they hire *allies* among the nations, Now I will gather them up; And they will begin to diminish Because of the burden of the king of princes. Hosea 8:7-10 (NASB95)

If we go back to the time when Noah and his family came out of the Ark after the flood we find a promise made to him and all mankind (Gen 8:22) that simply states “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.” While the emphasis of this verse is the continuing cyclical nature of the world in which we live, there is an implied promise that seeds that are planted produce a harvest. Like so many things this is a double-edged sword. If we sow good things, then we generally will reap welcomed rewards; but, if evil things are planted then the results are troubles and problems. This is exactly what Israel would be experiencing from the choices they had made over the centuries of failure to put their trust exclusively in the Lord of all Creation.

Some commentators associate verse seven with Israel’s practice of idol worship of the

golden calf that had been set up in Samaria and the fact that what they had sowed was a great and pretentious show of religion and devotion to something they had created with their own hands rather than worshiping and honoring the One Who had created them. They anticipated peace, prosperity, happiness, and success but the result was that all their useless efforts (sowing the wind) produced nothing other than God's rebuke and wrath (whirlwind). This whirlwind would take the form of the Assyrian army that would rush in upon them causing destruction. The basic principle is that which was stated by Paul in his letter to the Galatians in 6:8 that those who sow to the flesh, of the flesh reap corruption.

The other viewpoint is that alliances they were making with foreign nations were the futile efforts (sowing the wind) that would come back as the very thing that would be the means of their destruction. They saw all the turmoil in the nations around them and they were making alliances with anyone and all in the hope of picking the winner. The fact is that none of these nations was a winner. The only winning strategy was to trust in God and they could not bring themselves to return to what they abandoned for so long. The seeds were various treaties which produced nothing of any benefit just like sowing seed in a field that barely sprouts and that which does sprout fails to produce any grain. As it turned out, any success the nation did have was eventually taken away because they had to pay tribute to those with whom they made alliances.

Not only did these foreign nations eat up what the nation produced, then eventually devoured the nation itself. This is like people today who engage in wrong behavior such as illegal drug use. The demands of the addiction deplete the resources of the user and eventually destroy or consume the person as well.

In verse eight, Hosea wrote as if the outcome had already been accomplished rather something that would happen in the future. Let's look at what God saw as a "done deal." Israel is swallowed up. This is exactly what came to pass as the nation was overrun, destroyed, and dispersed throughout the region. They would be treated as a container for bodily wastes or a "chamber pot." This is a rather graphic description of the way these people would be treated by their enemies.

In verse nine, Hosea continued to give the reasons for such a dismal future for the nation. They trusted in the Assyrians and the Assyrians were treacherous people that could not be trusted. Hosea described what they did as the actions of a wild donkey which may have been a reference to Ishmael the son of Hagar fathered by Abraham. The Angel of the Lord told Hagar that her son would be like a wild donkey of the desert – his hand would be against every man and every man's hand would be against him. Perhaps this is what Israel had become. (Some commentators have suggested that this was a description of the leader of the Assyrians who acted contentiously with all people.)

The name Ephraim was commonly used as a reference to Israel in many of the Old Testament writings, and here we see that the nation was having to buy friendship among their natural enemies. Does this not sound familiar to what we are doing in giving foreign aid to Egypt and others who despise us so they will cooperate with us? Hey! It's not working any better for us than it did for Israel in Hosea's time. The only thing that Israel got out of it was less wealth because they were wasting the resources on such useless efforts to buy loyalty among those who do not understand the term.

Heed a Warning When You Hear It – 9:7-8

⁷The days of punishment have come, The days of retribution have come; Let Israel know *this!* The prophet is a fool, The inspired man is demented, Because of the grossness of your iniquity, And *because* your hostility is *so* great. ⁸

Ephraim was a watchman with my God, a prophet; *Yet* the snare of a bird catcher is in all his ways, *And* there is *only* hostility in the house of his God. Hosea 9:7-8 (NASB95)

There are a lot of catchy sayings that have great truths associated with them. One of my favorites is “The things you do when you don’t have to, will determine what you are when it is too late.” This is just another way of saying that we need to heed a warning when we hear it. If we put it off, then we will run out of time to get prepared for what is coming. Hosea had been warning the nation of what was coming their way because of God’s judgment on them and in these verses he declared that the time had come and they had used up their opportunities.

The statements that follow this pronouncement can be taken in two ways. He told them that because of their gross iniquity and their great hostility that the prophet is a fool and the inspired person was insane. One possible interpretation if this statement is that the people were so caught up in their sinfulness that they totally dismissed the true prophets and those whom God had inspired to bring a warning message to the nations. We can see this very thing happening in our culture today. Anyone who makes reference to the word of God or quotes the Scriptures as a basis for decisions we should be making as a nation is ridiculed and thought to be some kind of religious fanatic. The other interpretation is that the nation had listened to false prophets and those who just claimed to have an inspired message which resulted in the chaos and confusion and pending destruction that was happening to the nation. We could make an argument for that as being true for our nation also. The bottom line is that failure to listen to and heed the truth or listening to and believing a lie will lead to punishments and retribution.

The reference to Ephraim being a watchman for the nation was likely a reference to the fact that they were geographically located so that invading enemies or foreign threats would encounter Ephraim first. As such they had a responsibility to reject the bad influence and embrace the good and to pass on the warnings of what was happening to the rest of the nation. The problem was that they had become corrupted in their outlook and instead of being a buffer to filter and slow down the ungodly influences; they wound up embracing the errors they encountered which eventually harmed all the other tribes as well.

Ephraim was a large and influential tribe and they had a responsibility to do the right thing that could have produced benefit for the entire nation but they made poor choices and the opposite happened. Do we have anything similar happening in our nation today? What about the influence of a state such as California? Many new trends get their start in that state and I have even heard some say, “as California goes, so goes the nation.” In addition to this, the motion picture industry is located in California and they have done much to have a negative influence on the morality of the nation by what they choose to embrace and promote through the media outlets.

Realize What Time It Is – 10:10-12

¹⁰When it is My desire, I will chastise them; And the peoples will be gathered against them When they are bound for their double guilt. ¹¹Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh, But I will come over her fair neck *with a yoke*; I will harness Ephraim, Judah will plow, Jacob will harrow for himself. ¹²Sow with a view to righteousness, Reap in accordance with kindness; Break up your fallow ground, For it is time to seek the LORD Until He comes to rain righteousness on you. Hosea 10:10-12 (NASB95)

The message here is couched in terms of plowing and working the land with animals. Hosea was telling them that the people of Israel that in the past, they had experienced relative ease in the burdens they had. The picture was that of a heifer that pulled a threshing sledge over the grain which was fairly light duty and the heifer was free to eat some of the grain. This was going to change because at a time of God’s own choosing He would release the Assyrians upon them and then they would experience difficult times and hard conditions. They would be like an

animal in a yoke and would be required to pull a double plow that represented the dual nature of the sins that had brought them to where they were. Those two sins were (first of all) going after other gods and trusting in them and (second) making alliances with other nations with the thought in mind that they would provide protection for Israel. The brief reference to Judah indicated that they would have conditions less severe than the Northern Kingdom. Instead of a plow, they would have to pull a harrow that breaks up clods of dirt which was much lighter duty.

We see, even at this late time in the course of what was happening, that an appeal was made for the people to do the right thing. Hosea went back to the theme of sowing and reaping and encouraged the Israelite to sow the kind of seed that would produce a crop that would be beneficial for them. This takes some planning ahead and thinking about the future. If we want to have food to eat at harvest time, then we have to prepare the ground and plant the seeds that will produce the food we need. If the ground is left unplowed and good seeds are not planted, then all we will harvest will be an abundance of weeds. Israel was figuratively approaching the end of the planting season when they could still turn back to God when Hosea's message was given to them. The question for us as individuals and as a nation is what kind of time table are we on with regard to seeking the Lord and responding to His discipline?