

EXPOSING A BROKEN RELATIONSHIP

Hosea 1:1-2; 2:2-5; 3:1-5

Several years ago, I saw a preview of a popular TV show about the work of police detectives in a large city in which one actor says, “He who maintains control wins!” That statement could have many interpretations, but the one I first thought of related to a Proverb that states the same idea: [He that is] slow to anger [is] better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city. [Prov. 16:32] The Living Bible uses the phrase “have self-control” rather than “ruleth his spirit.” We need to do some periodic self examinations to learn who or what controls us. We might be surprised to find, in most instances, we are controlled by what others think, say, and do. If we sense that someone is critical of us, then we get defensive; if we think someone is angry with us, then we also become angry; and if we think someone loves us, then we will have feelings of care and concern for them. This is **not** exercising self-control. It is rare to find a person who lives his life based upon “who he is” and upon predetermined principles he has adopted.

Have you known anyone who was so much in love with someone else that no matter what the other person did, they still loved them? Usually, our love is such that we are ready to forgive the small mistakes (if there are not too many of them). However, most people would have much difficulty in being reconciled to someone who had been guilty of something like infidelity.

Hosea was an Old Testament prophet who showed an unusual quality of love. God called upon him to show, in a dramatic way, the condition of the relationship of God with Israel. Hosea lived in the Eighth Century before the birth of Christ (about the same time as Amos and Micah) and he brought God’s message to Israel prior to their being conquered by the Assyrians. Hosea dramatized the message in the failed marriage relationship He had with his unfaithful wife Gomer.

These prophets lived in times of comparative affluence in Israel and Judah. This affluence, however, was not shared. The rich and powerful got richer and more powerful at the expense of the poor and vulnerable. All the prophets addressed this situation but they had different emphases. Amos concentrated on the social injustices of the people, Hosea stressed their unfaithfulness to God in their idolatry. This seems very similar to the situation today in our nation (or even the world). We have much affluence for some but many are in need. Some people tend to focus on social injustice and others on the basic flaw of moral decay in the culture. In Israel’s case the prophets were calling for the people to turn back to God and not trust in idols. In our day, the call from both political sides is that we let the idol of “big government” solve the problems of social injustice (by redistribution of wealth) and of moral decay (by stronger laws that prohibit certain activities). Those who are advocating a return to God and a rejection of trust in our own man-made institutions are ignored and disparaged which results in a worsening of the situation.

Something’s Not Right Here – 1:1-2

¹ The word of the LORD which came to Hosea the son of Beeri, during the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. ² When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and *have* children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD.” Hosea 1:1-2 (NASB95)

The list of kings of Judah and Israel tells us that God’s word to the prophet came to him over many years. Hosea was also a contemporary of Isaiah. God was using several messengers to attempt to get the attention of His people. Both Judah and Israel had turned away from God

and were trusting in themselves, in alliances with other nations, and were even relying on the pagan gods of the heathen nations. In God's eyes, this was unfaithfulness and He viewed it as spiritual adultery.

Biblical scholars are divided in their opinion of whether Gomer was a prostitute before Hosea married her or if she became one after their marriage. If she became a prostitute after their marriage, then the analogy of God's relationship with Israel would seem to be matched better. However, idolatry had been in the "gene pool" of the Israelites as far back as Abram's origins. Before God called Abram, he served idols in the land of Ur. Hosea knew before he married Gomer, she would become unfaithful to him. In the same way, God knew that the "chosen people" would be unfaithful to him.

God had referred to Gomer as an "adulterous wife." The King James Version translates the word as "a wife of whoredoms." The closest English equivalent to the Hebrew word used here would be "a wife of fornication." In a sense, each of these descriptions fit the situation with the nation. They had been unfaithful and were, therefore, adulterous. Occasionally, they had established alliances for financial gain and thus were guilty of whoredoms. In other cases, their sordid nature had led them into a lifestyle of sensuality and illicit pleasure as they engaged in the debauchery of pagan religions. In this, they qualified for the final description (a wife of fornication).

Not only would the wife Hosea was to marry be unfaithful in their relationship, her unfaithfulness would produce offspring that did not belong to Hosea. Many lives are complicated or ruined by the consequences (offspring) of sins. These complications are not the fruit of a godly life and produce trouble and heartaches that follow people for their entire lives.

Just as Hosea knew what was in store for himself, God knew that Israel would be unfaithful to Him when He brought them out of Egypt. Nevertheless, because of His love for them and His love for us, He built them into a nation so that His plan of restoration of mankind could be carried out.

Hosea was a prophet whom God required to "live out" the message. He did what the Lord instructed him. He married Gomer and three children were born to her. They gave the children strange names. They named the first Jezreel which was a place of many murders. The next was a daughter who was named Lo-ruhamah (meaning, no compassion) and the third child was named Lo-ammi which meant "not my people." Some commentators think that the first child was Hosea's son, but the other two were likely fathered by someone else. These names speak of the judgments that God would send upon the people.

The people of Israel would be punished for the bloodshed they had committed. This judgment would result in the end of the kingdom of Israel. We would not have to have much of an imagination to think about how our nation has committed bloodshed of innocent lives and, since God is consistent in His judgments, we might think that abortions resulting from worshiping at the altar of humanistic personal freedom will bring similar judgment on our nation.

Naming the second child "no compassion" was also related to the type of judgment that would come upon Israel in that the nation would not recover as was the case of judgment that would come to Judah some time later. One might wonder if we are on a downhill slide and if there is any possibility of turning our nation around. Are we repeating the error of Israel?

The name of the third child is probably a confirmation that the child was fathered by someone other than Hosea. This name also spoke to a change in the way God viewed the Northern Kingdom after centuries of rebellion and spiritual adultery. They had viewed themselves as not being related to God and had eliminated Him from their lives and He would

treat them as if that were the truth. We can see that we have (as a result of secular humanism) done everything in our power as a nation to eliminate any influence of the teaching of the Bible or adherence to Godly morality from our nation. People are declaring openly that we are no longer a Christian nation. Such behaviors and attitudes come with a price.

D. A. Carson has noted that the narrative in Hosea follows a pattern of “hope - judgment - hope.” What we have examined thus far are hope and judgment and it would seem there is no further hope. However, starting in verse ten of chapter one, we see hope reemerge. In order to avoid conflicts with the strong pronouncements against the Northern Kingdom of Israel given earlier, we might conclude that the pronouncements of hope starting in verse ten are related to the “Israel of God” or the church.

It is in the church that those who were not the people of God (the Gentiles) are now proclaimed to be sons of the living God (Lo-ammi has become Ammi). It is in the church that we have accepted one Leader (who is Christ the Lord). It is in the church that we have the reversal of the judgment of Jezreel in that we have been forgiven. It is in the church that we can reverse the “no compassion” proclamation and it become compassion (Lo-ruhamah has become Ruhamah). (See also Hosea 2:1)

Your Sins Will Come Out – 2:2-5

²“Contend with your mother, contend, For she is not my wife, and I am not her husband; And let her put away her harlotry from her face And her adultery from between her breasts, ³Or I will strip her naked And expose her as on the day when she was born. I will also make her like a wilderness, Make her like desert land And slay her with thirst. ⁴“Also, I will have no compassion on her children, Because they are children of harlotry. ⁵“For their mother has played the harlot; She who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, Who give *me* my bread and my water, My wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.’ Hosea 2:2-5 (NASB95)

The Israelites had fallen into thinking that the Canaanites were right about Baal and the fertility of the land. ‘The LORD’ (Jehovah) may well have done some things for the Israelites, like bringing them out of Egypt, but they thought that perhaps they needed to be on good terms with the god of the land as well (2:5). Hosea pointed out the seriousness of this error (2:8): because of it God will take away the blessing which He gave in the first place, and will bring Israel to realize the actual source of those blessings. Israel would have a time of deprivation (2:3, 6, 9).

In verse two we see an imperative or command to plead or contend with “your mother.” This follows instructions in verse one to make a pronouncement to the people that they had been declared to be the people of God and that they had obtained God’s mercy. To whom was this command given? If we look back in chapter one, we see that these were instructions to those considered to be the true Israel. Not everyone agrees as to whom this refers. Is this the church, the gathered nation of Israel in the last days, or to the faithful of Israel in Hosea’s time?

If these words are for the church, then we can see that this is a call to tell the gospel (good news) to those in the world so they can become the people of God (ammi) and can obtain mercy (ruhamah). Those who have been saved are then told to take this message to those who are still estranged from God. These are referred to as their “mother” or the people group out of which they came. Whether it has any significance or not, the name of the “mother” was Gomer which literally means “complete” or total. Could this be an indication that the problem represented by Gomer’s life applies to the totality of humanity? It is certainly the condition of mankind apart from the saving grace that God offers through Jesus Christ.

If the reference is related to the godly people of Israel, then Hosea was sending them a message from God to speak to their kinsmen about their lost condition that had put the nation on

a road to destruction. The message was a stark reminder that they had fallen from their position of being in a loving and caring relationship with God to being in open rebellion against Him from which they needed to repent. The consequence of not repenting was exposure to reveal what the nation had become. This outcome would apply to Israel in Hosea's time or to the world today.

It seems that we are seeing more and more revelations in our nation of people who are being "exposed" because they lied and cheated and had been involved in sordid affairs. The solution that many seek is to try to do a better job of hiding what is wrong rather than repenting and doing the right thing. Those who would try to hide their evil deeds need to be reminded that exposure may be least of their worries. The picture of what would follow exposure was that of being stranded and lost in a desert where it was almost certain that a person would die of thirst.

There is an excellent contrast picture of this situation in Psalm 91 which speaks of those who dwell in the secret place of the Most High being able to abide under the shadow of the Almighty. For those who have abandoned God and have tried to eliminate all Godly influence from their sphere of influence, they are exposed to the searing sun in a desert-like environment and the results are death and destruction.

Furthermore, there would be no compassion on the future generations if the "mother" did not repent and come back to God Who is the Source of all things good. The problem we see in current society is that people have an erroneous idea that the government is the source of every blessing. This is what was described by Hosea in verse five of chapter two. The "people" will put their trust in what they perceive to be the origin of their blessings. If a person sells his allegiance (vote) to the highest bidder then this is nothing less than an act of prostitution. Not only does such immorality affect the one who commits the act, the effects have generational consequences because the children who are born into such a culture will be entrapped to committing the error and poor judgments in the future.

Redemption Carries a Price – 3:1-5

¹ Then the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman *who* is loved by *her* husband, yet an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes." ² So I bought her for myself for fifteen *shekels* of silver and a homer and a half of barley. ³ Then I said to her, "You shall stay with me for many days. You shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man; so I will also be toward you." ⁴ For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or *sacred* pillar and without ephod or household idols. ⁵ Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days. Hosea 3:1-5 (NASB95)

The initial marriage of Hosea to Gomer was a picture of God rescuing the children of Israel from Egypt. Eventually, Israel had gone away from God and had participated in pagan religions. Time after time, they would have to be rescued from the nations that oppressed them. This continual care of God for His people is pictured in Hosea going to find his unfaithful wife and buying her back. However, we see that in this passage she is not referred to as his wife but as a woman. We recall from Hosea 2:2 that the declaration was made that "she is not my wife and I am not her husband." This declaration was made because of the actions of turning to other men (gods, in the case of Israel) and the love of "grape cakes" which was likely an offering made to pagan gods.

In the KJV and in Young's Literal Translation, the word "husband" is not used in verse one. Instead the word "friend" is used. If this idea is linked to verse three in which the woman was to not have any conjugal relationships, then verse one is probably better interpreted to mean that Hosea was to love her in a platonic relationship; that is, as a friend. The second part of verse one tells us that this would also be the way God would love Israel.

Redeeming an unfaithful former wife was a very unusual thing for a husband to do. If a wife had been so unfaithful, then most men would have not wanted to have anything further to do with such a woman. This is evidence of conditional love. The fact that God redeemed Israel time after time is evidence of a kind of love that endures because it is based on the character of God and not on what Israel did or did not do. Notice that the price paid in silver was only half of that for a female slave and the rest of the price was made up in grain. Hosea paid this for the redemption of his wife, who has become the slave of someone else. The price being half grain was because this amount was the allowance of food for a slave, and of the coarsest kind, not wheat, but barley. As applied to Israel, the nation was the slave of sin and the low price was an indication of Israel's decreased value.

We see in verse three that this relationship would continue for "many days" and the evidence of it was that there would be little (or no) religious activity by these Israelites for an extended period of time. This lack of activity apparently would include both legitimate and illegitimate religious activities. This inactivity was to continue until they would seek the Lord in the last days. We should not jump to the conclusion that this is something that is yet to happen since we have been in the "last days" for some 2000 years.

Summary Thoughts on Unconditional Acceptance in Relationships

Most of us experience conditional acceptance, conditional friendship and conditional love. Most of the time, we **give** conditional acceptance, friendship and love. Usually, it is something that we **do** or someone **does** that sets the conditions. Children find acceptance IF they are well behaved, IF they make good grades, IF they excel in sports, IF they are pretty. Adults, find friendship IF they are successful, influential, rich, nice looking, famous, witty. Sometimes in marriages one person will love another IF he or she does what the other wants. People can sense if the Acceptance, Friendship or Love is conditional or not. If we sense that the Acceptance-Friendship-Love is conditional, then we will likely try to find a "better deal" with other people. If no other deal is available, then most will endure the "conditional" relationship rather than have no relationship at all. This may be the reason that really deep and lasting relationships with our acquaintances and friends are so rare. It may also be the reason why so many children cannot wait to get away from home. I guess that, deep down, all of us realize that conditional acceptance, conditional friendship, and conditional love are based on selfish motives and not on real concern for the other person or even a genuine basic goodness. Conditional love is not real love and has no real power to transform.

We see real love and acceptance in the way God dealt with the nation of Israel and especially the way he deals with every person. "But God commended His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners; Christ died for us."