

His Way or the Highway

Hosea 10:12-13

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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

I. Introduction:

“It’s His Way or the Highway.” I’m sure you’ve heard that expression before to describe one who insists that they are always right. When said in reference to an overbearing boss or anyone who narrow mindedly insists that everything be done according to how they would do it or else you can hit the road, then it is typically not meant as a compliment.

But when it comes to spiritual things (and more specifically) the way of eternal salvation, the scripture makes it clear that there is only one way and that way is Christ who said of Himself in John 14:6, “***I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.***” That’s not ambiguous is it? And unlike far-from-perfect men and women who may selfishly and sinfully insist that things must be their way or else the highway, the all-wise Creator, the Sovereign God of this universe, has every right and is perfectly just in asserting just that when it comes to His Gospel – in insisting on salvation according to His precise way – the only way of salvation whereby God could (and does) achieve His chief design to glorify Himself – that He might receive all praise and be worshipped as He is – as both a just God and a merciful Savior. As God, He deserves no less than to receive all glory and praise!

And the one way of salvation set forth in the Bible (God’s Gospel) is a way of mercy and grace in Christ. That is, it is based solely upon that which Christ accomplished for every sinner that He saves by His obedience unto death on the cross in their place, as their Substitute. And to apply our modern vernacular, salvation is His one way or else it’s the highway – that broad road, that highway, that leads to destruction.

Well in the 2 verses I’ve chosen as our text for today, Hosea 10, verses 12-13, we will see God’s characterization, through His prophet Hosea, of the problem that initially plagues us all due to our sinful, fallen nature. We will see it in God’s indictment of the nation Israel – how that they had trusted in their own way. But graciously, we also see in this passage God’s sure and certain way of salvation – a way of mercy and grace through the righteousness of another – the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. Background on Text:

A. Before we dive into our text, let me share a bit of background. The book of Hosea contains the Prophet’s message from God that was directed primarily to the 10 tribes that comprised the Northern Kingdom of Israel. And as we get to chapter 10, our text for today, Hosea is addressing their core problem – their sin which included their religious practices – their idolatry practiced in self-righteousness and unbelief.

- B. At the beginning of chapter 10, the Prophet writes, ***“Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself: according to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars; <altars of idolatry> according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images.² Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty: he shall break down their altars, he shall spoil their images.”*** Their images here refer to their idols. And notice he described their problem as bringing forth fruit unto themselves. So this is not fruit that would glorify God – not to the praise of the glory of God’s grace (His way), but to their praise and glory (their way). It’s the same as that which Paul called “fruit unto death” in Romans 7.
- C. Now Hosea’s indictment and warning against Israel due unto their idolatry and unbelief continues from here in chapter 10 until we get down to our text for today, where we will pickup in verse 12. Up until verse 12, we have words of judgment against Israel – words that can be applied spiritually to all of us in our original state of unbelief. But when we get to verse 12, he graciously directs them to the remedy they (and every other sinner) so desperately needs as He says...

III. Hosea 10:12-13:

“Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.¹³ Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men.”

Now from this point until the end of chapter 10, we find Hosea’s prophecy of the future physical destruction that Israel would and did face because of their idolatry and unbelief. But I’ve chosen to focus on these 2 because they stood out to me because in them we see clearly described both (1) the spiritual problem (or disease) of all in unbelief and (2) graciously we’re told where the certain remedy (or cure) is to be found. I’m speaking of a disease that is diagnosed in all of us and the one cure that is needed by all of us.

IV. Verse 13 – The Problem: So, let’s begin with a consideration of the problem as described by the Prophet in verse 13 where we read, ***“Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men.”***

- A. While there are many gospels, many ways by which men or women imagine they might be saved, they all can be categorized in 1 of 2 ways. One is God’s way and all others fall under the category of the way of man – “thy’ way. It’s either the way of grace, God’s way, or it’s the way of works – man’s way. And this simple distinction is useful in discerning the vital difference as to whether one is truly saved, a born again believer, or else still unwittingly lost in unbelief.

- B. So I ask, “In which way do you trust?” Is your salvation presumed to be a product of your own doing (your decision for Jesus perhaps or something else you do or feel you’ve been enabled to do) or rather are you trusting solely in the product or merit of someone else’s doing – specifically the finished cross work that Jesus Christ the Savior has done for those He saves?
- C. Now there are several things I want you to observe in Hosea’s description of their evil. First, he says that they “plowed” wickedness. This is indicative of an evil or wickedness we do not recognize by nature to be evil or wicked. It’s that which is committed deliberately in the practice of religion. Hosea is continuing to address their idolatry here. And no one knowingly worships an idol. Rather we all initially worship an idol of our own imaginations in ignorance that we’re doing so.
- D. Hosea is speaking of a presumed (but false) way of salvation and of that which they have sowed – fruit unto themselves or fruit unto death. Plowing wickedness and reaping iniquity is what we all do by nature, even upon our first genuine interest in spiritual things. It is to look for salvation and acceptance before God based upon something done by or through us as sinners. And we reap what we sow – thereby we sin! Hosea is not telling Israel that they have fallen into some gross immorality, although many of them may well have. No, in using the analogy of farming, he is suggesting that you’ve labored and strived in your religious zeal, plowed so as to reap, but you’ve plowed as servants of sin, reaping sin.
- E. Plowing wickedness only reaps iniquity – sin. Theirs is a way of iniquity or inequity – for it is a way that ignores the perfection that God’s justice demands. It’s a presumed way of salvation that fails to address the sinner’s need for a perfect righteousness – one that will measure up or equal (be equitable to) that which a holy God requires. It’s a way void of the very impeccable righteousness of God by which all shall be judged according to Acts 17:31– the very righteousness of God in Christ – that which He accomplished for His people by His obedience unto death on Calvary’s cross.
- F. Plowing wickedness is to seek to meet God’s requirement for acceptance (righteousness) by your own efforts – self-righteousness. To the contrary, Romans 10:4 teaches that true believers are those who have been brought to see that Christ is the end (the finishing or fulfillment) of the law for righteousness – the very perfect satisfaction to God’s justice that is necessary for any to be accepted into His holy presence.

G. We see a great illustration of what it means to plow wickedness and reap iniquity in the picture of the preachers standing at the judgment as related by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount. There in Matthew 7, beginning in verse 21 He said, ***“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*** <In other words not all who are plowing, who make an effort in their natural desire to go to heaven, even those who will invoke the name of Christ – not all shall enter in. He continues saying...> ²²***Many will say to me in that day, <referring to the day of judgment> Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? ²³And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”***

That’s plowing wickedness and reaping iniquity – for they approach the judgment pleading their own works, resting in what they have done to be saved and our Lord says that’s iniquity, sin. It is inequitable for it does not equal that which is required.

I think a version of this passage applicable to many who call themselves Christians in our day might go something like this: “Lord, Lord, have we not accepted you as our personal Savior, have we not believed upon you, have we not strived to keep your commandments, have not we, we, we,” and you could go on. That’s salvation by works. That’s plowing – but it is plowing wickedness and reaping iniquity for it is daring to supplant that which is required for a sinner’s acceptance before God – the very righteousness of Christ – His accomplished saving work, replacing it with the sin tainted work of the sinner – as if our acceptance of Him could do what took the shedding of His precious blood for us – what is necessary for us to be accepted by Him.

H. Now look again in verse 13 where Hosea says that ***“...ye have eaten the fruit of lies.”*** When we seek salvation the way that seems right to us by nature, it is because we have bought into the popular (but false) religious doctrine that we’ve been taught – a way of salvation that is widely taught in our day. It’s the false gospel doctrine that suggests that salvation is at least in some way or to some degree conditioned on something we do or don’t do. And by nature that seems right to us and so we bite into that fruit of lies – hook, line and sinker.

I. Some of my generation or older will remember the Jonestown Massacre, a mass-suicide that took place back in 1978 by a religious cult. The cult leader was a guy named Jim Jones who had convinced his followers to move to Jonestown and then later ordered them to commit suicide by drinking grape-flavored Kool-Aid laced with potassium cyanide. Over 900 of those residents drank the Kool-Aid and died. And one lasting legacy lingering from that tragedy is this saying, “Don’t drink the Kool-Aid.”

Well sadly, in a spiritual sense, that is what we all by nature will do. As Hosea puts it, we will eat the fruit of lies, we will drink the Kool-Aid and this fruit of lies that suggests to you that salvation is at least in part based upon some requirement that you the sinner meets – that lie is just as deadly to our eternal well being as that potassium cyanide laced Kool-Aid was to the physical well being of those who drank it that day in Jonestown.

- J. Back in verse 13, Hosea continues saying, “...*ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men.*” Now consider what it means for one to trust in their own way, rather than in God’s way of salvation by grace.
1. First, our way is a way that seems right to us by nature. As we so often quote from Proverbs 16:25, God says, “*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, <but here’s the kicker> but the end thereof are the ways of death.*”
 2. Secondly trusting in our own way can also be understood as trusting in a way that is procured (at least in part) by our doing (works) instead of by God’s doing alone (grace). But clearly God’s Word sets forth that salvation is by grace, not by works (Eph 2:8-9).

And as Romans 4:4 and following teaches, “*Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.* <That is by fulfilling whatever your preferred brand of false religion prescribes as being necessary for you to do in order to be saved, you expose that you really didn’t need grace – you just needed to cut your end of the deal (just believe, etc.) and now you presume you will get the reward for having done so, because it is owed to you for doing your part. But that’s not God’s way. Paul continues in verse 5 saying...> ⁵*But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*

<In this context and in consideration of the verses that immediately follow this one, we can gain a better understanding of Paul’s intended meaning here in verse 5. It helps me to keep clear his intent if I read this verse something like this: “*But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, that which his faith looked to for righteousness was the righteousness that was counted, imputed or charged to him by God’s grace.*” For he continues with that thought in verse 6 saying...> ⁶*Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,* ⁷*Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.* ⁸*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute <or charge with> sin.”*

For those God saves, all who ultimately come to rest in Christ alone for all their salvation, their sins were all imputed or charged to Christ that He might fully pay the penalty due unto the guilt of their sins before the bar of God's holy justice. And God has imputed or charged to their accounts the very justice-satisfying righteousness that Christ rendered for them by His perfect obedience, even unto the death of the cross.

3. Thirdly, the way of salvation by works that would seem right to us by nature (in sharp contrast to God's way of grace) is the more popular way. Notice that aspect of Hosea's description as he wrote, "...***because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men.***" And the multitude here is identified by the reliance on their might. This speaks of man's way – and from a spiritual perspective a way whereby we seek to be saved by our own power, our own goodness, by our might.

This reminds me of one of my favorite passages where God, speaking through the Prophet Jeremiah, beginning in Jeremiah 9:23 says, "...***Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,*** <don't rely on the way that would seem right according to our own wisdom> ***neither let the mighty man glory in his might,*** <in the work of his own hand, man's might, as if he the sinner had the power or might to save himself> ***let not the rich man glory in his riches:*** <do not judge any temporal success or riches you may have been blessed to receive to be an indication of being eternally blessed> ²⁴***But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.***" It's the Lord's doing – what He exercised in the earth, as He lived here and died to save His people from their sins.

4. And 4thly, the way of salvation by works that would seem right to us by nature – our way (in sharp contrast to God's way of grace) is the way that ends in eternal destruction, akin to the prophecy of Hosea regarding the physical destruction of Israel found in the last 2 verses of Chapter 10. Spiritually speaking, man's natural way of salvation is a way of death as I've already quoted from Proverbs. Our Lord described it this way in His Sermon on the Mount beginning in Matthew 7:13 where we read, "***Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:*** ¹⁴***Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.***"

Here we have the 2 ways described and the broad way (the highway so to speak), the one most traveled leads to destruction in contrast to God's way, the less traveled way, which leads unto eternal life. In this sense we see how we can apply the popular expression used in today's sermon title, for it really is God's way or the highway. So we can't measure the validity of our view of salvation (our gospel) by its popularity. Just as Israel could not rely upon its many mighty warriors for its physical safety, neither should we rely upon and take comfort in being numbered among the many who rely upon the false refuge of their own might – upon something that proceeds from them which they imagine they can deliver so as to make the real difference in their own salvation. Ultimately, we must not drink that Kool-Aid. We must not eat the fruit of lies! It is deadly to remain in that camp.

V. Verse 12 – The Cure: Now Hosea not only described their problem, a disease common to all, but likewise he described the sure and certain cure back in verse 12 where we read, ***“Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.”***

- A. In this Holy Spirit inspired language we have concisely depicted God's way of salvation in sharp contrast to the natural way of fallen, sinful man that we just examined from verse 13. And here God graciously gives us the answer to our desperate need. If salvation is truly of grace, not at all conditioned on me and you the sinner in any way or to any degree, then what do we do?
- B. In this verse we have not only a prophecy but a commandment from God. Notice he says, ***“...it is time to seek the Lord!”*** The Lord as used here is Jehovah God our Savior – the covenant God of grace and mercy who justifies ungodly sinners such as we all are. And it is that God you are to seek. He's telling the nation not to turn to Egypt or Assyria as they had sought alliances with them contrary to God's commands. He's telling them don't turn to idols – specifically telling them to not look to yourself! Instead turn to the Lord who justified the father of their nation, Abraham, based upon the work of the promised Messiah. He's telling this nation to seek the Lord who had established for their nation the sacrificial system by which sinners were taught how they might approach a holy God – all on the basis of a blood offering which pictured that offering of the future Lamb of God of God on Calvary's cross.
- C. Israel had sought after God according to their own ways, their own thoughts and ideas, but as Hosea had explained in the prior verses, they had failed to seek the Lord. And there we all find common ground with this nation in their idolatry.

Now not many folks think of themselves as ever having worshiped an idol, but the Bible tells us that all men by nature will not seek the Lord. That is we won't of our own free will seek the Lord, not as He is. As Romans 3:10-11 declares, "***As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: ¹¹There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.***" If you believe the Bible then you must believe this factual statement, that in our natural state none of us seek after the true and living God.

D. And yet we are commanded to seek Him. Consider these verses:

1. From the Prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 55:6: "***Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.***"
2. From Christ Himself in His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:33a: "***But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;...***"

E. Now some will object, "Wait a minute. You just showed me how God declares that none will seek after Him and yet you've also shown how we are indeed commanded to seek after Him. Are you saying that I may seek Him and yet not find Him?" Well, let's look at God's Word for an answer to that. In Isaiah 45:19, the Lord says, "***I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right.***" God has never commanded anyone to seek him in vain.

F. You won't find anywhere in scripture God saying, "Seek me, but you may not find me." No, instead in the Sermon on the Mount (in Matthew 7:7-8) Christ said, "***Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: ⁸For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.***"

G. Here is how what may seem on the surface to be a paradox is to be rightly understood: By nature, according to our way, our own natural thoughts and ideas, derived from what the scriptures call our desperately wicked hearts, we are spiritually blind, deceived so that we don't know how to seek the Lord. We don't seek Him His way. It takes a work of the Spirit. But here in Hosea 10:12, He graciously tells us how. It's right here for us to see if so blessed with the God-given understanding of faith.

H. We are told, "***Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground:...***"

1. What does this mean – to sow to yourselves in righteousness? Does that mean I am to go and try to make myself righteous by my best efforts, to do the best I can to earn or merit God's eternal favor and blessing? Well, we know that can't be what is meant.

- (a) For as we read in Titus 3:5a, “***Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us,..***”
- (b) And we know if this ‘sowing to yourselves in righteousness’ referred to our own efforts that Hosea would have applauded Israel in their religious zeal and they would have found God’s blessing. Israel was seeking something. They were busy about their religion. If asked what they were busy about, they may well have replied, “We are sowing to righteousness.” But that is not God’s commentary on what Israel was doing.
- (c) Look at that with me in Romans 9, beginning in verse 31 where it reads, “***But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.*** ³²*Wherefore? <Why?> Because they sought it not by faith, <Well how then did they seek righteousness – that which God requires for eternal salvation?> but as it were by the works of the law. <By their works – they were trying to be righteous by their works! They were trusting in their way> For they stumbled at that stumblingstone;* ³³*As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion <a symbol of the church> a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him <that stumbling stone is a person> shall not be ashamed.*” That is referring to Christ.
- (d) To seek righteousness by faith is to seek it in Christ and find it in Christ! As we read from Matthew, “***Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.***” Paul is showing here in Romans that to seek righteousness by your works is futile as you won’t find it there. But as he continues his discourse in chapter 10, and as I quoted earlier from verse 4, it is declared that for all true believers, “***...Christ is the end <or finishing or fulfillment> of the law for righteousness...***” If you’re a true believer, that’s where you find your righteousness.
- (e) The scripture says we reap what we sow. Notice how in verse 12 of our text that along with the command to “***Sow to yourselves in righteousness***” it says “***reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground***” If we truly sow in righteousness in keeping with what is intended here – we reap in mercy. And in mercy – in the merits of another, not our own, we find equity – a righteousness that actually answers the demands of God’s holy law and justice. See the contrast between this command to sow so as to reap in mercy rather than plowing so as to reap iniquity.
- (f) Seek God from the perspective of what you really are – as a sinner in desperate need of mercy. It is to be reduced to the plea, “God be merciful to me the sinner.” If you come to God on the basis of your having accepted Him (or anything else done by, in or through you the sinner) then you’re not reaping mercy – you don’t even need mercy by that way of thinking. You just need to fulfill your end of the bargain as prescribed by the religious leaders you’ve followed. But if they promote that your salvation is in some way conditioned (to any degree) on you rather than solely conditioned on Christ, then don’t drink their Kool-Aid. Don’t eat that fruit of lies. That’s not sowing in righteousness and that’s not reaping in mercy.

(g) Now only God the Holy Spirit can and does break up the fallow ground of our hearts that would have us swallow our self-righteous, religious pride and come to Christ for all of our salvation. The Lord describes this saving work of the Spirit in Ezekiel 36, verses 25-26 saying, ***“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. ²⁶A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, <the fallow ground will be broken up> and I will give you an heart of flesh.”*** - a fleshy, pliable heart, one made willing to seek the Lord based upon His way, not the highway – but His way of righteousness!

2. And then in the latter part of verse 12 we read, ***“...for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.”***

(a) Hosea is speaking of something to come – someone who would come and “rain righteousness upon you.” This is referring to Christ, the coming Messiah! We can know this in part because Hosea had used the rain metaphor earlier back in chapter 6 to prophesy of the coming Messiah.

(b) Rain falls from the heavens and that is where the only perfect righteousness comes from that will fit our need so as to find us justified, not guilty, accepted in the beloved (in Christ) before a holy God. God is telling Israel He is going to send this rain and by revelation of the New Testament, we know He indeed has – He has sent the Lord our righteousness (that’s how Christ and His church are described by the Prophet Jeremiah).

(c) The Psalmist spoke of Christ’s coming in similar terms in Psalms 72:6 where it reads, ***“He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth.”***

VI. Conclusion:

That’s what we need – we need righteousness to rain down upon the broken ground of our hearts that we might seek and find Him as the Lord, our righteousness! The Bible teaches us that God’s way of salvation is a way of His might, a way of mercy and grace, a way of righteousness! As we’ve seen today, God’s one way of salvation is a narrow way, not the broad highway of today’s popular versions of so-called Christianity (or any other religion) that will have their adherents trusting in their own way rather than His.

It's important that you see the difference in these 2 ways for it truly is God's way or else the highway. And we're talking about where we will spend eternity. I pray that all who hear this will heed Hosea's warning that it is time to seek the Lord. You would do well to make time for that.

I pray that the Lord whose righteousness rained from heaven in the Person and work of Jesus Christ some 2000 years ago, will in our day rain righteousness upon your heart so that by His blood-bought gift of faith you will flee to Christ for His righteousness, for that's God's way, the only way of salvation. It truly is His Way or the Highway!

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself – the Bible.