

“SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES”

I. Introduction

- A. The Old Testament’s prophetic books are not always easy reading.
- B. On the one hand, these books contain some of the most comforting and hopeful passages in all of Scripture.
- C. On the other hand, the Prophets also contain many passages like this one, passages where the focus is upon sin and its terrible consequences.
- D. It is significant that the Bible has so much to say about this subject.
- E. It is not a pleasant thing to think about, but God would not have dedicated such a significant portion of his Word to this subject if he did not want us to give it our careful consideration.
- F. We need to have a true grasp of the misery of our sinful condition before we can see the preciousness of God’s grace in Jesus Christ.
- G. In the words of the Puritan Thomas Watson, “Till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet.”

II. Sin Cannot Be Hidden from God

- A. The first thing that this passage shows us is that sin cannot be hidden from God.
 - 1. This point is emphasized by the ways in which the word “know” is used in verses 3 and 4.
 - 2. In verse 3 God says, “I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me”, while in verse 4 it says “they do not know the LORD.”
 - 3. Israel abandoned the knowledge of God to run after idols.

4. They no longer knew the Lord.
 5. But he still knew them.
 6. God knew about the shrines that they had built on the high places in Mizpah, Tabor, and elsewhere.
 7. God knew that they were engaging in cult prostitution.
 8. God knew about all of the other atrocities that they were committing.
 9. God was hidden from Israel, but their sins were not hidden from God.
- B. We all have things to hide, things that we don't want other people to know about us.
1. We keep our guard up in order to prevent people from knowing the things of which we are most ashamed.
 2. James Boice puts it well when he writes, "Why do we fear exposure? The answer is not an irrational fear at this point, for our fear is not irrational. It is rather that we do have something to hide. We are not what we ought to be." [50]
 3. We can have a measure of success in keeping other people from seeing all the way down into our hearts, but we cannot do this with God.
 4. All hearts are open to him.
 5. All desires are known to him.
 6. As it says in Hebrews 4:13, "no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

- C. Not only can we not hide our sin from God, but our sin also gets in the way of our turning back to God.
1. This is the point that is being made in the first part of verse 4, where it says, "Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God."
 2. Israel's sin acted as a barrier.
 3. It prevented them from returning to the Lord.
 4. There are a number of ways in which this can happen.
 5. Sometimes we feel so bad about our sin that we hesitate to turn to the Lord in repentance.
 6. Of course, that is the worst possible thing for us to do in that situation.
 7. It only leaves us weak and all the more prone to fall into further sin.
 8. Sin can also keep people from turning back to God by utterly blinding them.
 9. Sin can take such a hold on a person's will that he has no desire to return to God.
 10. Of course, that is the condition of each and every one of us apart from Christ.
 11. It is only because of the Holy Spirit's work of effectual calling in the hearts of the elect that anyone returns to the Lord.
 12. No one would ever seek God were it not for the fact that God first seeks us and calls us to himself.

III. Sin Causes God to Withdraw

- A. The next thing that we see in this chapter is that sin causes God to withdraw.
1. Before we look at how this idea is expressed in verse 6, we need to consider how the people are described in verse 5.
 2. This is what makes God's withdrawal so tragic.
 3. In spite of all of their pride, they were saddled with guilt.
 4. They were stumbling under the weight of their sin.
 5. The same thing is true of everyone who is outside of Christ.
 6. Whether your non-Christian neighbor realizes it or not, he is exactly like John Bunyan's pilgrim, weighed down by the heavy burden of sin's guilt.
- B. When God speaks of withdrawing from his people, this does not mean that true believers can lose their salvation.
1. We need to remember what the Lord said back in verse 2 about how he will discipline his people.
 2. God sometimes disciplines true believers by hiding his face from them.
 3. This is the only sense in which the Lord withdraws from those who are truly his people.
 4. At the same time, God withdraws from false believers by handing them over to their sin.
 5. God was doing both of these things to the people of Israel in Hosea's day.
 6. Some of them were experiencing the hiding of God's face.

7. Others were being given over to their sin.
8. God does both of these things in the church today.
9. On the one hand, God sometimes hides his face from true believers in response to their sin.
10. This is sometimes described as God's "fatherly displeasure."
11. On the other hand, when a church abandons God's truth and conforms to its surrounding culture, God withdraws from that church.
12. Even though the members of such churches take pride in how inclusive and welcoming they are and in all of the good deeds that they do in their community, the fact of the matter is that if God's Word is not being upheld in a church, God is not there.

IV. Sin Brings Misery

- A. We turn now to the next part of our text, where we see that sin brings misery.
 1. God speaks of judgment that will fall upon both the northern and southern kingdoms.
 2. Ephraim will be crushed because they went after filth.
 3. They let their hearts desire the wicked things that belonged to the worship of their pagan neighbors.
 4. Judah will have God's wrath poured out upon them like water, and the specific reason cited for this is because they moved landmarks.
 5. They were guilty of land-grabbing.
 6. The reason why that sin was so serious in Israel was because of the symbolic significance of the Promised Land.

7. The land inheritance that was apportioned among Israel's tribes was a symbol of the eternal inheritance that the redeemed will enjoy in heaven.
 8. By stealing land, the people of Judah were robbing their neighbors of the symbol of God's promise.
 9. As a result, the Assyrians invasion of Israel will spill over into Judah and have an affect upon their inheritance.
- B. God describes the misery that will befall his people by saying this: "I am like a moth to Ephraim, and like dry rot to the house of Judah."
1. Moths ruin clothes.
 2. Dry rot ruins structures.
 3. Both work slowly over time.
 4. You don't realize the damage that is being done until it is too late.
 5. The same thing happens when we persist in sowing to the flesh.
 6. We don't realize it when we are indulging in sin, but our lives are slowly being eaten away by it.
 7. God tells us this so that we will understand the nature of our plight.
 8. He wants us to see that if we fail to turn to him for deliverance from our sin, we will be utterly ruined by it.

V. Sin Causes Us to Look Elsewhere for Relief

- A. In the next section, we see that sin causes us to look elsewhere for relief.
1. Verse 13 tells us that when Ephraim saw his sickness, he went to Assyria for help.

2. This is something that Israel's kings did on a number of occasions.
 3. When troubles arose, they looked to other nations instead of to the Lord for help.
 4. One moment they would look to Egypt, and the next they would look to Assyria.
 5. The irony was that it was the Assyrians who eventually wiped Israel out.
 6. God warned his people, telling them that the king of Assyria "is not able to cure you or heal your wound."
 7. The fact that Israel turned to a political power for relief demonstrated their failure to see that their ailment was spiritual in nature.
- B. Every single person in this world feels the ache of the misery that has come upon our race as a result of our sin.
1. Human beings experience weakness, pain, frustration, instability, loneliness, loss, sorrow, and many other types of misery.
 2. And people respond to these things in the same way that the nation of Israel responded to the troubles that befell them: by looking for relief in the things of this world.
 3. But this only breeds more misery.
 4. It leads to things like addiction, debt, discontentment, dissension, worry, guilt, spiritual blindness.
 5. There is nothing in this world that can heal the wound that our sin has inflicted upon us.
 6. When we foolishly turn to the things of the world for relief, we are doing exactly what the Israelites were doing by going to Assyria for

help.

7. God's words in Jeremiah 2 provide an apt summary: "they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water." (Jer. 2:13)

VI. Sin Must Be Repented of

- A. This brings us to the closing verses of this chapter, where we see that sin must be repented of.

1. God says that he will be like a lion to Ephraim and to Judah.
2. He will tear at them in the same way that a lion uses its claws to tear at its prey.
3. He will carry them off and no one will be able to rescue them.
4. Try to imagine what it would be like to be attacked by a lion.
5. What a terrifying and utterly hopeless plight!
6. That is a picture of the plight that befalls man when he persists in his rebellion against the Lord.
7. This is why the nations are warned in Psalm 2, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him." (v. 12)
8. As Derek Kidner summarizes that verse, "There is no refuge from [the Son]; only refuge in him."

- B. In the final verse of our passage, the Lord says that he will return to his place until his people repent of their sins and turn to him as their only place of refuge.

1. When we persist in our rebellion against him, the Lord hides his face from us until we acknowledge our guilt and seek him.

2. We are given a powerful picture of this in Psalm 32, where David writes, "For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin." (Ps. 32:3-5)
3. David's words in that psalm remind me of the character of Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale in the novel *The Scarlett Letter*.
4. Dimmesdale was so wracked with guilt over his secret sexual sin with Hester Prynne that he became physically ill.
5. It was only when he openly acknowledged his guilt that he found relief from his state of spiritual anguish.
6. We need to make the same acknowledgement before God.
7. We must not keep silent about our sin.
8. We must not try to hide it or ignore it or excuse it or make light of it.
9. We need to acknowledge our guilt and earnestly seek the face of the Lord.
10. And when we do that, when we seek the Lord through the mediation of Jesus Christ, we have no reason to fear God's judgment.
11. For Jesus himself has told us, "whoever comes to me I will never cast out." (Jn. 6:37)