

“Deceiving and Self-Deceived”  
Pastor John Bronson

Amos 2:4-5

September 29, 2013

Order of Worship for September 29, 2013, title, “Deceiving and Self-Deceived”, text, Amos 2:4-5

Opening Song:

Welcome and Invocation: Mathew 5:17-20 and Galatians 5:14-16

Ministry Moment:

Message Theme: The Lord judges His chosen people according to the word He has given them

Worship Theme: God is great, perfect in knowledge and in wisdom, unlimited in power and unchanging in His purposes

Sunday Evening in the Word  
Effective and Fruitful Faith: 2 Peter 1:1-15  
5:30 pm – 7:00 pm in the Church Library

**Opening Song:**

“10,000 Reasons”

Overhead

**Welcome**

Steven and Laura Finn

**Invocation:** Matthew 5:17-20 and Galatians 5:14-16

Luke Lundberg

**Ministry Moment:**

Jason Nyberg

**Special Music:**

“Beautiful, Beautiful”

by Valerie Cagnacci and Tara Wixom

**Preparing the Heart in Song:**

“In the Secret”

Overhead

“Holy is the Lord”

Overhead

“You Are My King”

Overhead

**Offering:**

Deanna Avery

**Offertory:**

Emily Cagnacci

**Message:**

“Deceiving and Self-Deceived”  
Amos 2:4-5 Pastor John Bronson

**Response to the Word:**

“One Thing Remains”

Overhead

**Parting Word of Grace and Invitation to Prayer**

**Sunday Evening in the Word:**

5:30-7 pm in the Church Library  
Effective and Fruitful Faith: 2 Peter 1:1-15

“The Prayer Closet”

September 15, 2013

*“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”*

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

**The Nelsons:** that the Spirit will impart His joy to them as they promote missions locally and work with missionary candidates; the Lord will render them effective in influencing their children and neighbors for godliness; they will be protected from illness and loss; Pray that we will be a blessing to the EFCA EQUIP team by being faithful in my work this coming year. I will continue to put in full work hours from my home office as we collaborate on many projects via the internet.

**President Obama:** the Lord will direct him to right priorities in the proper administration of the Law and defense of the Constitution; the Spirit will open his mind and heart to the Gospel; the Lord will enable him to know and love the truth

**Women’s Ministries:** the Lord will meet with the women in their fall retreat for significant spiritual growth, deepened bonds of friendship and renewed vision for ministry in the coming year

**Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week:** Al Billington (husband of Debbie): Pray for the public safety personnel that put their lives on the line each day for their communities and their families that anticipate their safe return each day at end of watch.

**Young Adult of the Week:** Alysia Ballantyne (daughter of John and Cheryl): please pray that she remain diligent as she finishes her last year, that she would be filled with hope when considering her future and that she continually wait for God’s guidance and wisdom

**Please pray for the health and recovery of our church family:** Bob Boettcher, Carol Bernerd, Carole Lindsey, Dick & Jane Miller, Ellen McNabb, Joe Avery, Phil Peterson, Randy Bowen

(please call the office to request updates)

1.

The title for today’s message is “Deceiving and Self-Deceived.” Amongst the most striking of human abilities is imagination. We are able to see beyond the given to the possible. Imagination lies at the heart of human creativity whether we think of the arts or science or technological advance. No less wonderful is imagination’s ability to feed hope into our lives. That was so much of the special music today. Hope is poured into our lives through imagination. We can imagine ourselves as people remarkably changed. It takes little thought to see how this connects with grace. Grace extends to us the possibility of an imagined future far better than our present reality.

All this is to the good. The capacity of the mind to cast ourselves forward into a future that is not presently real but is one that we would like to grab a hold of, and grace offers that opportunity to us, because God gives us His strength and the wisdom of His word. That is to the good. But there is of course, as with all things human, another side. Imagination can also enable us to distort our perception and understanding of reality. Some dreams lead to great achievements; other dreams lead to the bondage of the soul. Paul puts it this way; “*...evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*” The fact that we can deceive one another is imagination at work. The fact that we ourselves end up being deceived even by our own deceptions – we believe our lies – is again the work of imagination that has lost its contact with the Living God and now is operating on its own. When we operate on our own, beloved, we are in our profound trouble. 2 Timothy 3:18 is where Paul makes that observation.

As we continue our study of the minor prophet Amos, we take up God’s judgment on the southern kingdom of Judah. That is the remnant of the empire first built by David and brought to its greatest size and wealth by David’s son Solomon. Then, under Solomon’s foolish son Rehoboam, the kingdom was broken into two smaller kingdoms, the smaller kingdom of Judah in the south and the larger and much richer of Israel or Samaria in the north. When Amos was sent by God, he was sent to penetrate the dark cloud of self-deception by which both of these kingdoms had silenced the voice of God. It was the need to penetrate that cloud of self-deception which determined the way the Amos represents God. You might recall that this was our first message. When Amos comes he first speaks of God as the God of the Covenant. This is the God that draws us into a living and promised based relationship with Him. It was full of joy and glory and gladness and sweet remembrance on the part of the Jews as they considered God’s greatness in having brought them out of Egypt and its bondage and into the Promised Land. “Oh, good things!” said they. However, the very next thing that God has Amos say is that the God of the Covenant roars like a lion at His own people, and it was the roar of a lion about to strike and kill! Something had gone profoundly wrong amongst His people. The last of the introductory comments that we receive is that God is a God of holiness, a holiness of a holy fire that burns for purity in His people, and it was indeed purity which His people had forgotten.

Before addressing directly God’s word to Israel, the northern kingdom, God had Amos direct His word of judgment, of condemnation against the sins of the nations surrounding Israel in the north and Judah in the south. In that second message we considered the way God condemns the wickedness of nations when in their cruelty and greed and hatred they deface the dignity of humanity as made in the image and likeness of God. God, of course, still stands as the judge over all things. He still takes account of the behavior of all nations and how they treat one another and how they treat their citizens within them. You and I can anticipate the day when God will once again act in wrath to bring upon the heads of the nations a retribution for the way in which they have degraded humanity. That day will come and you and I should anticipate that day with satisfaction in the anticipation of the affirmation of the holiness and justice of God. We should desire that to come, but we should not desire it too keenly, for you and I do not want to see the day of grace drawn too swiftly to a conclusion. In this age you and I have the opportunity to pray

for and to give witness to the lost and to continue to extend the gospel and the possibility of salvation. We should not neglect that opportunity.

A notable shift occurs when God has Amos direct his comments to Judah in particular. This shift foreshadows God’s statement that He gives in Amos 3:2. At that point he says this, *“You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for your iniquities.”* It is very wise and necessary for us to have a keen, clear and consistent grasp on that statement. It is contrary to most of our casual thoughts. “Because I know you, because I have made myself known to you, because I have called you in My grace and drawn you close to Me, because I have opened the counsel of the Spirit of God that you would have the wisdom of God: because these things are true, I will judge your iniquities.” So often we assume that grace means we have been removed from virtually all accountability, but this is contrary to the teaching of God’s word. This is what God says through Amos to Judah, 2:4-5,

*“Thus says the Lord, ‘For three transgressions of Judah and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have rejected the Law of the Lord and have not kept His statutes, but their lies have led them astray, those after which their fathers walked. So I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem.’”*

If you look at the other judgments that precede this you will see that the rhetorical or the literary form of the judgment here is the same as it was for the six preceding nations, the Gentile or heathen nations. We learn that Judah has decisively crossed the line, and the judgment which the Lord has so far withheld will now fall on them. He says, “I have had it! Three transgressions and four: that is it; it is coming and will not stop.” As Amos spells out the judgment, however, a difference from the other nations comes clear. The heathen nations were judged for their manifestly immoral dealings with one another, actions which anyone anywhere would recognize as inhumane in the extreme. This needs to be recognized as the Law of Nature and of Nature’s God. That is the Law referenced, by the way, in the Declaration of Independence. When it comes to Judah, however, we see that Judah is part of the covenant people of God. The Judeans, both the kings and the people at large, have received the Law of God. In their midst they have the temple of God and as well the Levitical priesthood who were set apart by God to preach and teach that Law to the people. Therefore Judah will be judged by the Law of God, not just by the law of nature.

Perhaps hearing these comments rings a familiar note in some of our ears. Like the covenant people of old we too have received not only the Law as given in the Old Testament, but we have received the up-grade of the Law as given in the New Covenant. We are right if we draw a short line of connection from here to I Peter 4:17, for at that point we read, *“For it is time for the judgment to begin at the household of God.”* So often, is it not true, so we tell ourselves, “O, I can hardly wait for the rapture. Why do I want the rapture? Well because we go whoop up and out and we suffer no problems whatsoever, and all the bad people are left behind and God gets them: yeah!” But that is not what Peter says at all. What Peter says is judgment first begins with the covenant people. You and I probably ought not to concern ourselves too much with what happens to the rest, for at that point our work is done, and they are left to their own resources.

One of the commentators that I read, AJ Motyer, entitled this section of his commentary, “The Perils of Uniqueness”. Quoting him: “The Jews, the covenant people of God were unique amongst all the nations of the world and Christians, most particularly the New Covenant people of God are unique amongst all the peoples and regions of the world. We need to pay attention to what God says through His servant Amos.” In the gospels Jesus is quoted as saying that from the one to whom much is given, much is expected. As people of the covenant, whether we are thinking of the Old or the New, we have received a rich treasury of truth, truth about God as well as the way of life that is pleasing in His eyes, the way of life that He blesses.

We are responsible for living faithfully according to those riches. This will be Amos' point in speaking to both Judah and Samaria.

Another of Mr. Motyer's comments in his commentary, “The Day of the Lion”, is this, capturing the essence of the problem: “The people to whom Amos spoke had devalued the doctrine of election [chosen by God] into a non-moral doctrine of divine favoritism: Israel was God's “pet”, surrounded by a divine imperial preference, protected, subsidized, the recipient of many unique allowances and special pleadings. [This was how they do their relationship with God and God's relationship with them]. The word to this people is based on the inflexible, unchanging righteousness of the Lord God. The foundation for such a message is unobtrusively laid when Amos brings his charges against the nations. He speaks in the name of the God of righteousness, Yahwey or Jehovah, the God of the Covenant, and neither here nor elsewhere in his book does the title ‘God of Israel’ appear.” He never refers to Him as the God of Israel, the special people. Instead he says, “You have sinned and forfeited your standing. I am drawing back from you and I am saying I am the God of righteousness and I am the God of the covenant.” If you remember the covenant, there are clear expectations laid out for Israel to fulfill if the blessings of God are to remain.

The people of God in any age are expected to live at a higher level of moral integrity than those who do not know God. God judges the covenant people on precisely this basis, on what they have been told rather than what they remember. Can I repeat that? The people of God, the covenant people are judged on this basis, on what they have been told, not what they remember. What do we think? Does that surprise any of us? “Oh, well, Lord, I never had time to read my Bible. I was so busy doing this and that. So I had no idea You had any of those expectations!” “Really? Well, I am so glad to know, despite the fact that My Son gave His life in order that you might have this word; despite the fact that I through the ages have sent man after man, preacher after preacher, teacher after teacher, prophet after prophet; despite the fact that My word of truth is preached and taught all over the face of the world, I am sure that you have an iron clad excuse for why you don't know anything today.” I do not think that that is true at all.

*“Thus says the Lord: ‘For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have rejected the Law of the Lord, and have not kept his statutes, but their lies have led them astray, those after which their fathers walked. So I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem.’”*

God begins speaking with Judah. Judah has retained the temple and the Levitical priesthood, and has not indulged in worshiping with calf idols: those were all things that happened in the northern kingdom. But we should recognize that God does not play favorites in His judgments. This is in contrast to His grace. We have a problem here. Grace is always favoritism, always. That should not surprise us; after all the definition of grace is “unmerited favor”, it is not favor that is earned. This, by the way, is also why grace is always sovereign. It has to be sovereign, that is, the determinations of grace are always internal with God. Why is that the case? It is so because grace is never called forth by our merits and it is never blocked or prevented by our demerits. That is nature of grace. That, by the way, is why we love our children if we are good parents and understand the relationship that is between us. That is the nature of unconditional love. How many of us have raised children who never made an error. How many of us were children who never made an error?! Do the errors of the child destroy the love of the parent? No, of course not; are there consequences? Yes, of course. Are there consequences according to the nature of the instruction that the parent has given to the child and the set of expectations that are reasonably placed upon that child? Yes, there are. And so it is between us and God. That begins to lead us to the patterns of self-deception whereby we get ourselves into the deepest possible degree of trouble.

What is God’s judgment regarding Judah? The true spiritual condition of Judah and what elicits God’s judgment is that she has rejected the authority of the Law of the Lord. You must listen carefully. It is not that she had rejected the temple, it is not that she had rejected the priesthood, she had not rejected the ritual and the ceremony of the covenant. Judah had kept all of the outward appearance and show of a fine religion, a worship of God. But she had set aside the substance of that worship. Judah’s worship of God adorned her hopes but left untouched her character, her behavior. How had this come to pass? We must understand that it is not simply a matter of transgressing or breaking the Law. The entire sacrificial system was put in place in the recognition that people both forget and break the Law. In this regard there were sacrifices for both intentional and unintentional sins. So now we are standing before the Lord and He says, “By the way, I see that on such and such a day I see that you were engaged in such and such an activity.” “I am so sorry! I had forgotten Your instruction. I had become confused in my mind. I weep before You. I am broken hearted. I recognize my failure. I recognize that I have fallen short. I cry out to You, God in heaven, to have mercy upon me. Don’t ever let me fall in that way again. That is a path I never should have taken. How could I not have seen that? I don’t know how I couldn’t have seen it. Please forgive me.” That is a sweet song to our God.

But that is not the condition of Judah. Amos says that Judah has rejected the Law. What that amounts to is that she has denied the authority of the Law and its standing as the true measure of the righteousness or of one’s standing in a right relationship with God. “You cannot possibly expect me to have done that! You cannot possibly expect me to have remembered that. I cannot be held responsible for this!” More than that what we are told is that Judah has rejected the Law based on or by means of a lie. They have told themselves untruths as the means by which they have canceled out the Law as that which indeed holds them truly or authoritatively accountable to God. Amos does not tell us specifically what those lies were. Had he been speaking to Judah – remember that he is speaking to Israel, the northern kingdom – but had he been speaking to the southern kingdom I am sure he would have spelled out those lies, and I am sure they would have recognized them immediately and known virtually from the outset that those were the things they were saying to one another to justify what they did and what they did not do.

Insofar as Motyer’s statement to Israel is equally applicable to Judah, in other words the whole covenant people of God, we simply need to look to Deuteronomy 9:4-6. This is part of the covenant relationship, the promise based relationship between God and His people. God lays out with clarity His expectations. Here in these verses (Dt. 9:4-6) God is giving a clear warning to His people: “Do not do this!”

*“Do not say in your heart, after the Lord your God has thrust [the people of the land] out before you, “It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,” whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out before you. Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God is driving them out from before you and that he may confirm the word that the Lord swore to your fathers to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Know, therefore, that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people.”*

Judah in the south and Israel in the north have said of themselves: “We are the chosen.” But God says, “You are the stubborn!” Is there not a difference in perception? These words that come from the One who reads our hearts and knows our innermost thoughts... What is significant for us to know is not how the Jews talked themselves out of obedience. What is significant is to know how we do it. How do we talk ourselves out of obedience? How do we persuade ourselves that we don’t need to do this and we don’t need to do that and we can put a low priority on this, and we ought not to get overly concerned about what God

has to say in these matters? How do we do that? I have been around a while; practiced some of this myself. These are some, I believe, of the ways we do it: “after all we’re saved by grace, not by works.” “I am sure grace will take care of this.” Or, “Look, we’re just sinners. God couldn’t possibly expect us to do all that stuff,” in spite of the fact that He has given us His Spirit, He has forgiven us our sins precisely so that we can do all that stuff. “Look, isn’t it true; God loves us the way we are!” “You have to recognize that whereas it might be true for most, in this situation it is different.” Or, “I’m different.” And on we go, finding excuses.

But what have we really done? We have denied the authority of the Law. We have said, “He will not hold us accountable.” It is essential to recognize that half-truths are still lies. If we pick up grace to say “forgiven” and do not take grace and say “obey”, it is a half-truth and it is a whole lie. Listen again to what was so well read earlier in the service: *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

It becomes imperative, does it not, if you take those words as they were written, to understand just exactly what it is that grace has brought us, what has Jesus accomplished for us? What has He done? He has removed from us the penalty for our failure to keep the Law perfectly. That is why we live under grace. We don’t live under the penalties of the Law. We are free from the rituals and the ceremonies which were the prefiguring or the “pointing-forward-to” the arrangements God put in place to teach his people. There are two critical things that God wanted to teach to His people. The first is that He is holy. How holy is He? He is so holy that He cannot look upon sin. The second essential thing is the wonderful promise of God’s gracious provision for cleansing us from our sins. But these two things join for a conclusion. The conclusion is essential in the purposes of God. The whole story we remember begins where? In the Garden. With whom? With Adam and Eve. What were they supposed to do? They were supposed to keep the garden. According to Whose instructions? According to God’s instructions. God had given all things under their control. What did they do? They said, “No”. They denied God’s word, and they lost their privilege. But God never changes His purposes. So now His purposes have returned, and what does God want of us? He wants us to take care of the garden according to His instructions. That is the promise of God’s gracious provision for the cleansing and forgiveness of His people so that we will fulfill His purposes. That is why.

We are, figuratively speaking, draped with the perfect righteousness of Jesus Himself. That is what protects us from the holiness of God the Father. We also receive the Holy Spirit Who is the Spirit of righteousness in our hearts. The Spirit always seeks to purify us and lead us to a life of righteousness. We can, of course, resist the Spirit. Paul tells us we can grieve the Spirit. Hear again what was read so well earlier this morning, Galatians 5. *“For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. [Slavery to what? Well it is to sin!] “... You were running well, who hindered you from obeying the truth? [Obeying? Yes, the obedience of faith!] “... You were called to freedom brothers, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. [Oh! It is not the headlong pursuit of my private passions and desires; not the satisfaction of my ambitions; but learning to live my life that I might bless others: Oh, that is right!] “The whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the flesh.”* To the

Ephesians Paul said that we can grieve the Spirit. Love is wounded by rebellion and by folly. Beloved, who will give you the greatest amount of pain in your life? It is those you love the most, of course! For love renders the heart vulnerable to the condition of the beloved. So God has given to us the greatest possible expression and reality of love that anybody could ever dream of, sending His perfect and sinless Son to die for those who are sinners. Now we who have received the gift of His forgiveness, received the gift of His love, we who have been drawn close to Him, what do we think happens to God when we chose to sin? It is pain, it is grief, it is sorrow in the heart of God! All of that grief and all of that sorrow has been taken and absorbed by the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross and He asks that you and I, when we know we have sinned would come and say, “I am so sorry! I repent! I am sorry I turned and went down that path. I should have never made that choice. My mind was confused and I let things cloud my judgment. Please O God of heaven restore me, bless me, renew me, forgive me, set me again upon the path of life that I might serve You.” Do not say, “O, I’m sure grace will cover it.” Those are the arrogant words of those who have turned away from God, not those who lay hold of His promises.

Grace is not indifferent to our condition. The Spirit who indwells us, bringing God’s truth to bless and transform us is no less holy than God the Father or God the Son. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty! Think about our nation. Think about what has happened to us as a people. Think about what has happened on the land over these last couple of years. Is it possible God is calling us to repent? Is it possible that God is calling us to a renewal of faith, to a renewed conviction, a renewed love for Him and for our neighbor?

The other day my wife received an email from someone she has not spoken with for forty years. They were in college together. They played on a basketball team together. They were good friends. This young lady came to our home just a year after we were married and I was attending seminary and my wife was supporting me. She said a variety of things about the remarkable life she has lived. She has two daughters. She is divorced. For eleven years she has been living with her female partner. Now what do you do with that? Beloved, do we know how to love sinners? Is that, perhaps, what God is telling us? It will not do to gather in your self-righteous groups, to separate you from all that you consider to be unworthy and to tightly bind yourself together and look with censorious judgment out upon the lost who are sunk in their sin and say, “Sin!” because we are called to love the lost. But beloved we are called to love the lost without compromising our commitment to a holy God. The culture of the United States has become a cesspool. We have to know how to love the people in that pool and remain holy at the same time. I do not know about you, but I do know about me. I am feeling crushed beneath the burden of that love. I do not consider myself capable. I need an incredible amount of help. I bet we all do. You and I need to figure out how we are going to understand this Word, rely upon the Spirit to gain the wisdom that is necessary, not to save our souls but to be the instruments of God’s grace to save others’.

Please pray with me: Our heavenly Father heaven forbid, by Your grace forbid that we should be a Judah, twisting Your promises into excuses for our sinfulness, our selfishness, our self-righteousness. Let this be true! Rather, Father, grant by the power of Your Holy Spirit an unfolding and opening to the truth of Your Holy Word an understanding in our minds and a strength in the inner man that will allow us to love the lost and to love You. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.



Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. Does the Bible’s teaching on the present as well as the future judgment on the nations have much meaning to you? Do you respect “the law of Nature and of Nature’s God” as the Founders’ did, as check on the arbitrary rules and laws of men?
2. Is it fair or just for God to judge differing people according to differing standards based on what they could know and did know?
3. Do you characteristically see one of the consequences of grace in our lives being the rightful expectation that we will live at a higher level of moral integrity than the rest of humanity?
4. Why is grace always a form of favoritism and is therefore selective rather than universal in its application whereas justice and judgment is always universal?
5. Do you think the contemporary worship of God in our churches is effective in calling people live morally exemplary lives in honor of God?
6. What is the difference between transgressing the law and rejecting the law? Which seem more characteristic amongst contemporary Christians?
7. What was the lie that Judah told herself so as to escape the moral authority of the Law?
8. What was the purpose of the Law for God’s chosen people?
9. How do we characteristically talk ourselves out of the authority of the Law?
10. What has Jesus done for us, that is, what is the work of grace in our lives?