



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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**Volume 10 Issue 28**

**August 7, 2011**

## **The Book of Hosea, A Survey, Part 11**

Hosea 4:1-10,

1 Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land; 2 there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

3 Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens, and even the fish of the sea are taken away.

4 Yet let no one contend, and let none accuse, for with you is my contention, O priest.

5 You shall stumble by day; the prophet also shall stumble with you by night; and I will destroy your mother.

6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

7 The more they increased, the more they sinned against me; I will change their glory into shame.

8 They feed on the sin of my people; they are greedy for their iniquity.

9 And it shall be like people, like priest; I will punish them for their ways and repay them for their deeds.

10 They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore, but not multiply, because they have forsaken the LORD to cherish 11 whoredom, wine, and new wine, which take away the understanding.

## Shepherding in the Kingdom of God

Shepherding is an important activity in the Kingdom of God.

1 Peter 5:1a, 2a, “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you...shepherd the flock of God among you...”

Truly anyone who would call themselves an elder has been charged with the pastoral care of the body. Yet we must not think of “pastoral care” as the prerogative of the office of elder alone. The calling and responsibility goes way beyond the formal office. Though Moses was charged with leading God’s people to the Promised Land, nevertheless God called him a “shepherd” in Isaiah 63:11. Though David was installed as God’s choice for King, nevertheless his identity was that of a “shepherd,” amazingly his entire ministrations as a king was summarized in these terms:

Psalm 78:72, “So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them with his skillful hands.”

In fact, every leader in the Old Testament would be held to this standard such that if they failed, they were rebuked with these words:

Ezekiel 34:2b, “Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves!”

Recall that “shepherd” was not an official office in the Old Testament. So, this was written to all in leadership.

You say, “Wow, leadership is a serious thing in the Kingdom of God. I’m glad I’m not a leader. I’d hate to be held to this standard!” Yet recall the words of Peter, which essentially says that we have been “blessed to be a blessing!” (1 Peter 3:9) In Philemon Paul describes the pastoral work of Philemon as that of “refreshment,” but then in Romans 1 applies that same calling to all in Christ.

James 1:27a, “Pure and undefiled religion is visit[ing] orphans and widows in their distress...”

This passage utilizes the language of pastoral care — “visiting” — yet applies it to the work of any and all who would be a man or a woman of God! We see it in Romans.

Romans 15:1, “Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength

and not *just* please ourselves.”

Once again the language of pastoral care is utilized here, but not for the formal office. All who are “strong” are charged with caring for the “weak!” In fact, this is the essence of what it means to know God.

Jeremiah 22:16, ““He pled the cause of the afflicted and needy; then it was well. Is not that what it means to know Me?’ declares the Lord.”

The point I want you to see in all of this is that membership in the Kingdom of God brings with it the responsibility to care for the body of Christ, formally or informally! This “oversight” is not limited to those called as elders; it devolves upon everyone in Christ. That is why when we come upon a passage like Hosea 4, in which God lodges a complaint against the faithless shepherds of Israel, we do not allow our eyes to glaze over, hoping that the elders of this church sit up and listen, because it is a responsibility given to all in Christ, this passage is applicable to every one of us!

Hosea 4-11:11 represents the second of three divisions in this book, and serves as an eight chapter rebuke of the people of God. It is not my intent to consider the whole of Hosea 4-11 in this survey. Rather I simply want to introduce you to this section by looking at the first ten verses.

By way of review, last time we began with:

- The Complaint, vv. 1-3- Recall, Israel no longer was functioning as a covenant community- faithfulness, kindness, and knowledge were gone! Instead the nation lived in open rebellion against the Lord such that the land in which they lived suffered! And this led to...
- The Caution, vv. 4-5. Here God told his people that they were in no condition to evaluate the “justness” of the punishment that was coming upon them. As they had exalted themselves over God, they were in rebellion against Him and so could not accurately evaluate the merits of anything God might do!
- With this, God transitioned into a lengthy description as to the cause of the coming Judgment, one of which was on account of the faithless shepherds/leaders of Israel. Why were they subject to judgment? Notice there were five reasons.

## Failure to Teach God’s Word

Hosea 4:6, “My people [which is a term of endearment and possessiveness; don’t ever forget that when it comes to any and all in the body of Christ, we are dealing with God’s most precious possession!] are destroyed for lack of [THE] knowledge.”

The word, *knowledge*, refers to the knowledge inherent in a covenant relationship with God (cf. v. 1)- specifically:

- What God is like.
- That which constitutes His will.
- An understanding of His service.

- The knowledge of the call which He has placed on His people.

This and much more is what is in mind here. Get this, God gave His people leaders whose purpose was to lead the people of God in what it means to have a relationship with God, and they completely neglected their calling! Israel as a people were estranged from God. They did not delight in Him. His character was foreign to them. His grace was an alien concept with the result that these, "...people without understanding [were] ruined" (Hosea 4:17)!

Family of God I hope you see it! This is our calling as a church, leaders, parents, husbands, and church members. Accordingly, this must be the passion of each of us! In Luke 2 we discover that which encompasses healthy growth and development as image bearers:

Luke 2:52, "And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."

Christ developed in four areas:

- Knowledge — which is the focus of a good education.
- Physical development — "He increased in stature."
- Spiritual development — "He increased in favor with God."
- Social development — "He increased in favor... with man."

Now as we look at this list as shepherds (which is what we all are in Christ), there is no question that the most important quality to a shepherd is that of our spiritual development. The other three actually serve this calling. Yet when it comes to the pastoral care of our children, for example, what is it that we as Christian families characteristically neglect? We are graduating children who...

- Know their history.
- Are accomplished sportsmen, debaters, musicians, etc...
- Well-liked by their peers.

But their walk with God at best is weak! In fact, this continues to be one of the top issues facing the church today, by the time our children get to High School, so many of them are already gone! Now what do you suppose is God's commentary on this scene? He who indicted the leaders of Israel on account of Israel's "lack of knowledge"?

Hosea 4:6, "because you have rejected knowledge."

The word for "reject" carries the nuance of "despising" and so "taking lightly." We do this all the time in the church as it relates to "the knowledge of God." There is no urgency in our fellowship. We are happy to keep the conversation light and easy.

Hosea 4:6, "I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children."

The word *forgotten* here is strong, it means to deliberately fail to recall or remember. This

constitutes a pun in the Hebrew revolving around two key words: “reject” and “forget.” Because His people rejected encouraging and so cultivating each other’s walks with Christ, who wants to be so hyper-spiritual? God would reject these leaders from further service. In other words, their talent would be “taken away and given to someone else” (Matthew 25:28)! Because His people had deliberately forgotten and so neglected the word and so the will of God, they’d lose the next generation as a result!

Now don’t misunderstand this. God is NOT condemning these people; RATHER He is doing two things. In the former indictment, He is taking away their talent and giving it to someone who will use it. This isn’t a punishment, but a necessity on account of limited resources. If we refuse to be used by God to bless another person, God will use someone else.

In the latter, He is describing the generational consequence of neglect in our walks with God. If we neglect the word of God, meaning not teach it to our children, not teach them how to study it or even to love it, our children will suffer!

Our whole philosophy of study hour arose on account of this point. Our desire is for the entire family to hear the same teaching that they might have a vehicle of discussion during the week. Have you utilized this vehicle? Or have you simply gone through the motions?

A significant minority here has chosen not to participate in this ministry; and honestly that’s fine. Our structure for study hour is simply an attempt at helping you minister to your family. Neglect this ministry; just don’t neglect the calling as it relates to your child!

### **The Corruption of their Success**

Hosea 4:7, “the more they [the priests and hence the leaders/shepherds] multiplied, the more they sinned against Me.”

This is a conundrum of epic proportions! In the Kingdom of God, one of the most precious gifts of the Lord to His people is leadership.

Ephesians 4:4-7, “*There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. BUT to each one of us grace was GIVEN according to the measure of Christ’s GIFT.*”

After stating in creedal form some of the most wonderful blessings of the Lord, Paul essentially says, “And yet beyond all of these things, God has given us the gift of grace!” Wow! What a blessing. Now skip down to Ephesians 4:11 where the “gift-concept” is further expounded upon.

Ephesians 4:11, “And [alongside the gift of grace] He GAVE some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers.”

Do you see the flow of Ephesians 4? Ranking up there among God’s more important gifts given to His

people is leadership/pastors/shepherds! Accordingly we would expect that the more leaders God gives His people, the greater will be the blessing.

That is why when we read Hosea 4:7 we ought to be left speechless. Speaking of the leaders that God gave to His people, “The more they multiplied... *the more God’s people grew!*” Such is our expectation. Yet that is not what we read here. Rather we read, “The more they multiplied, the more they sinned against Me!” More leaders in Israel meant more sin as they out-did one another in treachery and furthering their own agenda rather than God’s! No wonder Israel was taken into captivity! In fact notice the result.

Hosea 4:7, “I will change their glory into shame.”

That which should have been the basis for “Well done thou good and faithful servant” became THE basis of shame in their lives. When God looked out over His people and saw their spiritual ignorance and immaturity, and then summoned His leaders to Himself, those who enjoyed their position of authority on earth-, He had but one question:

- Do the people whom I’ve entrusted to your care know Me?
- Do they love Me?
- Are they fervent servants of Mine?

There are many privileges to the leadership positions we hold in the body of Christ — elders, deacons, husbands, parents, and friendships. But the questions are these:

- Are you using the position God has given you for good?
- Are you using your office unto the growth and maturation of God’s people?
- Dads, are you living to grow your wife in grace?
- Dads and moms, is your concern for your children’s walk with Christ?

If not, then that which should have been your glory will most certainly be your shame!

Proverbs 10:1b, “A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother.”

If this doesn’t send a shiver up your back, you are not listening! Notice the third reason for God’s complaint against the Shepherds of Israel at this time, their fleecing of the flock.

### **Their Fleecing of the Flock**

Hosea 4:8, “they feed on the sin of My people [lit., they enthusiastically eat on sin], and direct their desire toward their iniquity [lit., “they lift up their throat in the eagerness to swallow”].”

The words used here for “feed” and “desire” can be used in the context of war (cf. Isaiah 61:6). Accordingly think of a victorious army banqueting at the end of a hard-fought battle. What do you see?

- Goblets filled with wine.

- Congratulatory smiles on every face.
- Singing, shouting, dancing, and celebrating.
- Arms around each other.
- Various and sundry toasts.

That is the idea here! As the leadership in Israel looked out over the people of God engaged in unspeakable acts of sin, these leaders did not grieve or rebuke, but they celebrated, they took delight in the nation's sin! Now as perverse as this may sound, in the Bible this can be done in a variety of ways.

First there is the celebrating on account of physical gain. This could very well be all that is in mind here. See the way God supported the priests in the Old Testament was through the sin offering. When such a sacrifice was made, the priest dissected the animal, placed the choice viscera on the Altar of Burnt Offering, but then was allowed to keep most of the animal and its hide for his own support. Accordingly, it could very well be that the priests were not grieved over the people's sin because it simply meant more food for them. In this case, these false shepherds had become Christ-merchants- seeking to derive personal benefit from their service in Christ's Kingdom!

Secondly, there is the celebrating on account of Self-Justification. Paul speaking of the sinner and his sin says this:

Romans 1:32, "And, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them."

Truly, "sinners love company" for the more who participate in a sin the more acceptable the sin becomes. That is why though less than two percent of the population in America calls themselves homosexual, nevertheless this two percent want the entire nation not only to allow them to practice their sin, but to endorse it and so approve it! And so it was at this time in Hosea's day. The priests loved it when the people of God gave themselves to sin, because the priests were doing the same (cf. v. 9). The more the people sinned, the more the perverse life was normalized.

Thirdly, there is the celebrating on account of power retained.

Galatians 2:15, "We *are* Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the Gentiles..."

Paul is using the terminology of the Jews of his day to prove that Israel was just as sinful as the Gentile. However that the terminology existed tells us something. To the typical Jew of the New Testament era, the Gentile was a "sinner!" In fact, the more they sinned, the more godly and upright Israel appeared.

Soon, there came to be what amounted to a "feeding" on the gossip that came to a Jewish village concerning the outside world. And so it was amongst the priests of Israel when it came to the people's sin. The more the nation sinned, the more powerful their position came. It's akin to the arrogance that can be found amongst the old upper class/aristocracy. In their thinking, they were morally and essentially above the common man. Accordingly, they delighted over the poverty and

broken lives of the proletariat. For all of it perpetuated their moral superiority.

Brothers and sisters such an abuse of one's office can be found today in our ministries. What is it that a loving heart does NOT do? Paul speaking of love states that "[It] does not rejoice in unrighteousness..." (1 Corinthians 13:6) That Paul wrote this tell us that one of our inclinations will be to take joy in another's sin. And we do this all the time:

- When another person struggles in our midst, rather than grieving or praying we delight in the fact that we don't struggle in that way; and so we feed on the sin of God's people.
- When a covenant child outside of our family doesn't succeed, we can be found deriving satisfaction because our child has succeeded; and so we feed on the sin of God's people.
- When a brother or sister falls and we find delight in telling others about it, we are feeding on the sin of God's people.

Truly that which sin ought to evoke in us is grief and a longing to correct it. Yet rarely is such an attitude found today, neither was it found amongst the shepherds of Hosea's day.

### Failure to Lead

Hosea 4:9a, "and it will be, like people, like priest."

The implication here is that those whom God placed amongst His people to lead them unto Christ became followers. At this time it wasn't, "As the leaders go, so go the people."

It was just the opposite. And so rather than lead Israel, the leadership put their finger in the air to see which way the people's desire was blowing, and then they gave them what they wanted.

- Did Israel want sex in worship? They got it!
- Did they want wild, crazy dancing?
- Did they want music that moved them?
- Did they want experiential worship? Then out with the old and in with the new!

Was it that obvious? Yes and more so.

Recall that all leadership in the Northern Kingdom was a sham. The priesthood was offered to any who desired it. Their purpose was to appease the people of God so that they would not attend the worship that occurred in at the Temple in Jerusalem.

This resulted in the ministry and service of the northern priest was wholly man-centered and man-driven!

You see it all the time today in the church. From our worship to our youth ministries, from the ministries we offer to those we don't. If the people are buying it, the church is all too-willing to sell it! Now hear me carefully. This is NOT: What issues are facing our congregation today? How can we grow our people in spite of them? But rather, it is a people-centered drive which offers that which will sell the most!



When shepherds lead in this way, whether that be elders, parents, brothers and sisters in Christ, God truly is displeased. We are not called to be an accomplice in ministry (that is not support); rather we are called to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15)! Israel wasn’t doing that at the time of Hosea. Notice God’s final problem when it came to His shepherds.

## Rebellion

Hosea 4:10, “they have stopped giving heed to the Lord.”

This perhaps was THE core issue from which all the other abuses flowed. As a leadership, Israel stopped...

- Doing God’s work in God’s way.
- Inquiring of the Lord as to how their ministry was to be carried out.

Though God is the author of man and so knows what we need, how we ought to worship, what we ought to think, etc., the priests/shepherds abandoned His word. They became rudderless and drifted into all sorts of abuse in the name of the good of God’s people. Now don’t miss it: God’s people were thrilled, the offering couldn’t have been better, and the seats of the auditorium were filled. Yet God was quite displeased!

In the latter part of the eighth century B.C. Israel ran headlong into sin, and those whom God gave to raise the voice of objection or steer the nation aright were silent, NOT because they feared man BUT because they had long since forgotten their objective, lived to please themselves, and so longed for the praises of man.

In fact, from this short list of indictments against the false shepherds of Israel, we can derive a good understanding of what faithful shepherding/pastoral care/genuine fellowship/faithful parenting ought to look like.

- It is word based and word driven. The goal is NOT feeling a certain way on the part of our disciples, BUT the cultivation of a submissive heart and life to the Lord. Is this your goal for your people?
- As the people of God take seriously their call to minister, the proliferation of shepherding doesn’t become a movement and so a technique to follow. Rather, the passion remains a grass-roots endeavor on the part of the people of God. Shepherding is not primarily what they do, but what they are!
- The ministry of pastoral care is done in humility, out of a love for Christ and the other person, with no concern as to “what’s in it?” for the minister. Gratification is derived not from anything received in return, BUT in the knowledge that God is well-pleased. The sin and folly of a Christemporos (a Christ-merchant) is not named amongst us.
- The content, method, and goal of the ministry are established by Christ and not the felt needs or wishes of our people. It is to Christ we long to be faithful. Success is determined not by the accolades of the people of God, but the bottom line: was God’s work done in God’s way? Were we faithful?

- The shepherd ministers as one who knows God’s word and himself is submitting to it. Accordingly, such things as “duty” or “seeking to be a blessing” do not drive them to the word. Rather, the word drives their duty and desire to be a blessing.

Now I have no doubt that this list does NOT describe many if any of us. So are we condemned? Is there no hope? Listen again to the glorious message of the gospel! Because Christ bore the curse of the Law in our place, a list like this does NOT condemn us! For He bore the punishment for our failure! Accordingly, there is therefore now no condemnation! Knowing the grace of Christ, this list inspires us unto:

- Greater service and devotion to the Lord.
- Doing God’s work in God’s way.
- To take our focus off of the results, and place them on the souls of the people entrusted to our care!

We are going to close by examining the stated consequences of God’s people’s sin, Hosea 4:9, 10. Yet as we do so, I remind you that the sting of sin has been removed in Christ. Accordingly, we can look at these verses and not fear, but understand and affirm that irresponsibility in our service in God’s Kingdom will have results. And so as physicians of the soul, let us consider the following consequences as the symptoms of illness in the soul of a believer.

### The Leadership Judged

Hosea 4:9b-10b, “so I will punish them for their ways, and repay them for their deeds: this occurred in 722 B.C. when the Northern Kingdom was taken into exile and the false shepherd was removed from the land.”

Do we have grounds to think that such a curse awaits us if we prove unfaithful as shepherds? Absolutely not! For the curse mentioned has been met out in Christ. Again, our failure as a shepherd brought Christ to the cross! May we therefore:

- NOT take this message lightly (Christ spilt His blood on account of our sin). Yet let us also...
- NOT take this message personally, “There is therefore no condemnation in Christ!”

### Leanness of Soul

Hosea 4:10a, “and they will eat, but not have enough.”

This properly has been identified as “leanness of soul.” It is that horrible time in the life of a believer when they get what they want, but the covenant presence of God is removed from them such that their soul dries up. In the words of the Psalmist:

Psalms 106:15, “And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.” (KJV)

More than any prior generation, today as a church we struggle with joy and contentment. Don’t we? Is it possible that the “leanness of soul” with which we struggle is the result of faithlessness on our

parts as shepherds and so keepers of each other's souls? Listen, if we find ourselves struggling with such heaviness in our walks, the answer is NOT to despair, BUT to confess our sins to the Lord, do the work He has given us in His way, and then trust Him for the results.

## **Fruitlessness**

Hosea 4:10b, "they will play the harlot, but not increase."

The reason temple prostitution was adopted by the people of God in Hosea's day was so to ensure a good harvest. That's the point of Baalism. It was a fertility cult. Well, God here has gone on record to say, "When the child of God abandons their love for Christ and the ministry to which He calls in order to gain the temporal results of bodies, bucks, and buildings, they may get the temporary results, but they will lack true increase." In the words of Jeremiah, we are endeavoring to build cisterns which can hold not water (Jeremiah 2:13)! In such a case, what ought we to do? Confess our sin, turn from it, and then glean from the Word of God "the food which endures to eternal life" (John 6:27)!

## **VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO**

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on August 7, 2011. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.