

2 Timothy 3-4, Session #7

Chapter 3

“Religion in the last days”

2 Tim 3:1 But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. (2) For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, (3) unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, (4) treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

When Paul makes a list like this, it is likely not intended that we see that everyone was doing all of these various sins, but to simply point out that these become prevalent or prominent sins of a degenerating culture. It is as though they have taken over the culture rather than being isolated practices from the norm.

Now the last trait (The nineteenth trait) is religious in nature:

2 Tim 3:5 “Holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power.

Also here Paul is not likely intending that the readers should understand that everyone in the “last days” holds a form of religion, but that such a culture will give rise to this fake form of religious piety, where it is the case that many make a claim for religious piety, while at the same time rejecting the righteous standards that the gospel actually requires. In other words, they will hold to a form of religion, but reject God’s righteous standards for their own standards of righteousness.

Therefore, a degenerate culture will bring about a form of piety or religious agreement that will at the same time, deny the real power of godliness. Paul does not explain what he means by “denying its power,” but it no doubt involves sinful living that denies the holiness of Christ’s standards in the gospel. For the power of godliness is found in faithfulness to the word of God as it is lived out in the saving work of Jesus Christ (2 Tim 1:13). The church goes amuck when it endorses the standards of the world, while at the same time claiming that God accepts such standards too!

Although Paul makes the point in verse 9 that such religious apostasy will not succeed for long, he does make the point that such religious movements go the direction of progressively worse. He points out, concerning these religious leaders:

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2 Tim 3:13 But evil men and impostors [*gōēs*, “swindlers,” “a cheat”] **will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.**

Those who lead this form of godliness are not “good men,” but “evil men.” And Paul adds to their description by calling them “impostors.” They are the epitome of fake when it comes to religious claims. And they will continue down the path of deception to greater deception. If you think what people believe now is absurd, just wait! The spin of a fallen society gets more absurd and so does the church that follows it, as it moves along. In the end, the religion becomes so devoid of truth that it finally collapses under its own folly, as Paul alludes to in verse 9.

**“Like people, like priest”
Hosea 4:1-10**

Like Paul, Hosea also writes at a time when Israel was moving toward catastrophic collapse. The nation was also in its “last days,” having continued down a course of rebellion against the Law of God. Therefore, Hosea announces in Hosea 4 that God is bringing a lawsuit against the people,¹ and to judge it and destroy it.

I. The condition of Israel (vs. 1-3)

Hosea 4:1 Listen to the word of the LORD, O sons of Israel, for the LORD has a case [a legal and covenantal case] **against the inhabitants of the land,**

Notice the *spiritual condition* that are described here.

Hosea 4:1 ...because there is no faithfulness or kindness or knowledge of God in the land. (2) There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing and adultery. They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed.

First Hosea describes what is lacking in the nation as far as proper behavior. He lists three qualities:

- (1) “**Because there is no “faithfulness”** or truth among the people; integrity is lost.
- (2) “**No...kindness”** among the people. Thus, they are no longer a compassionate people to a needy neighbor.

¹ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea*, in *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 31, p. 73.

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(3) **“No...knowledge of God”** in the land; not just as seen by the lack of integrity and kindness, but a lack of the knowledge of His Law. This, of course, was by deliberate choice.

Instead of exhibiting the kind of behavior that builds a good society, verse 2 describes those behaviors that were prevalent that should not be taking place. When the knowledge of God is removed, then corruption is sure to follow.

Verse 2 reads: **“There is swearing** (2nd commandment), **deception** (9th commandment), **murder** (6th commandment), **stealing** (8th commandment) **and adultery** (7th commandment). And he says, **“They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed.”** There is such an increase of violence where one act of murder just follows another. Therefore, the whole nation reels from an increase in violent crimes and corruption.

Swearing (or **“cursing”**): This is not the same as what we call “swearing” today when we apply it to any cuss word. But swearing has to do with using the LORD’S name in an unworthy manner, which is a violation of the 2nd commandment: **“You shall not use the LORD’S name in vain.”** His name is not to be used in vain speech, such as in a profane or trivial or inconsiderate way; nor is His name used in false testimony. The name of the LORD or His person is to be treated as Holy and with deep respect at all times. But this came at a time when the people really didn’t care how they used His name.

The physical condition of the land (v. 3)

These violations were the cause of various distresses:

Hosea 1:3 Therefore the land mourns [that is, the land experiences a decline in fruitfulness; so to speak, it mourns for rain], **and everyone** [everything] **who lives in it languishes** [or “pines away”] **along with the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky, and also the fish of the sea disappear.**

God had warned that flagrant violations of the Law would bring a full range of judgments to overtake the people, not the least of the curses was the severe droughts. Here the fruitful abundance that the land had once experienced under Jeroboam II was already falling into decline. The land was no longer producing its abundance as before, and everything was starting to die off, including wildlife and fish (likely due to rivers and streams drying up).

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II. Another trait: No one accepts correction (v. 4)

Despite that the conditions were getting worse due to the hand of God against the people, we read:

Hosea 4:4 Yet let no one find fault, and let none offer reproof; for your people are like those who contend with the priest.

Hosea's point is that no one spoke out against the sins of the day. No reproof is offered. And the reason why is because the people were like "**priest-strivers**" (literal translation). A "priest-striver" is one who, when a priest instructs in the Law or corrects another according to the law, the person would "contend" (*rib*) "strive," "argue" against the priest and instead, "fault" the priest for his insinuations. The priest who corrects is the bad guy. So the conditions were that no one would dare raise a peep against the people's evil behavior for fear of a backlash!

What a turnaround from what the Law required. Moses wrote that a man who acted presumptuously against the priest was to be put to death (Deut 1:12). That is not the case anymore. In the time of Hosea, the people of Israel had become as those whom Moses warned against, who quarreled against the observance of the Law.

Admittedly, in Israel's day, there were no true priests administering the Law. But God would send prophets, such as Hosea, to give the true condition of the nation. But the true prophets were not accepted at all. And the nation had their own false prophets and false priesthood that they relied upon. In short, the whole nation become like priest-strivers, who held God's laws in disdain.

III. Judgment announced (v. 5)

Now because no reproof was raised, the land was going to be destroyed.

Hosea 4:5 So you will stumble by day, and the prophet also will stumble with you by night; and I will destroy your mother.

The mother refers to Samaria, the capital city. That it would be destroyed indicates that the whole nation would be destroyed with her. Hosea uses a Hebrew poetic style which means essentially that the people and the prophet would both stumble by day and night. There would be no relief, but the struggles and calamities were to continue until the whole nation collapsed.

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IV. The cause of judgment and the compliance of the priesthood (vs. 6-10)

Hosea 4:6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you [you priests] have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have [willfully and deliberately] forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

The knowledge that has been rejected is the knowledge of God and His ways as presented through His word. And whereas the priest should have been reminding the people of the Law of God, here we find that the priesthood wasn't using the law to teach the people at all! "To forget" is an expression often used, which does not mean that they actually forgot, but that it had become considered so unnecessary that it by choice is no longer used and they do not think about using the Law any more to instruct them.

In verses 7-8 the LORD promises to destroy both priest and people. Then v. 9:

Hosea 4:9 And it will be, like people, like priest; [since priest and people behave alike and believe alike] I will punish them for their ways and repay them for their deeds.

How culpable was the priesthood and the prophets in the contribution to the destruction of the nation! They are the one's whom God held primarily responsible for the decay of the nation. For they did not make the word of God known to the people.

Paul's final admonition to Timothy

Turning back to Timothy, we find that Paul's advice to Timothy in a day that may be called, "the last days," is the same solution. There has to be a proclamation of the word of God that calls people to repentance. For even though the difficult days come, and people are into "self-love," "materialism" and corruption of nearly every kind, Timothy must keep the word of God at the center of His ministry.

2 Tim 3:14 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, (15) and that from childhood [*brephos*, "infancy"] you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

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Timothy was taught the sacred writings since he was an infant. He learned them in the lap of his mother and grandmother. He was ripe when Paul came along to snare him for the ministry. Paul then emphasizes the value of the Scriptures:

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is inspired [“God breathed”; only here; likely coined by Paul] **by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; (17) so that the man of God may be adequate** [*artios*, “now ready”; “prepared”], **equipped** [*exartizó*, strengthened form; thus “fully equipped”] **for every good work.**

The Scriptures prepare and fully equip a person for spiritual strength and direction into every work that God deems as good. We lack nothing as far as having a source for insight on how to live and please God. The Scriptures prepares us and fully equip us for life. Peter also said,

2 Peter 1:2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; (3) seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

If I have everything that pertains to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him, then what do I lack?

2 Tim 4:1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: (2) preach the word; be ready in season and out of season [no fixed hours, no appointed times; when it’s convenient, when it’s not convenient; all hours at all times]; **reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. (3) For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, (4) and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.** [When culture becomes corrupt, channeled by a desire for “self-love” and “self-interest,” then people will not prefer a strong Bible centered preaching. They will demand for that which meets their needs” “what makes them feel good” or “keeps their interest.” In a spiritually dysfunctional culture, the church is tempted to give the world what it wants to hear, rather than what God wants them to hear] **(5) But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.**