

The Deadly Consequences of Prolonged Idolatry

Small Group Follow-up Study for Hosea 9:1-9

RE-READ

[1] Rejoice not, O Israel! Exult not like the peoples; for you have played the whore, forsaking your God. You have loved a prostitute's wages on all threshing floors. [2] Threshing floor and wine vat shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail them. [3] They shall not remain in the land of the LORD, but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean food in Assyria.

[4] They shall not pour drink offerings of wine to the LORD, and their sacrifices shall not please him. It shall be like mourners' bread to them; all who eat of it shall be defiled; for their bread shall be for their hunger only; it shall not come to the house of the LORD.

[5] What will you do on the day of the appointed festival, and on the day of the feast of the LORD? [6] For behold, they are going away from destruction; but Egypt shall gather them; Memphis shall bury them. Nettles shall possess their precious things of silver; thorns shall be in their tents.

[7] The days of punishment have come; the days of recompense have come; Israel shall know it. The prophet is a fool; the man of the spirit is mad, because of your great iniquity and great hatred. [8] The prophet is the watchman of Ephraim with my God; yet a fowler's snare is on all his ways, and hatred in the house of his God. [9] They have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah: he will remember their iniquity; he will punish their sins.

RECAP

Our text begins with what is, by now, a very familiar metaphor in our study of Hosea. Israel's idolatry is likened to the behaviour of an unfaithful spouse: "[Y]ou have played the whore, forsaking your God. You have loved a prostitute's wages on all threshing floors." This was idolatry at its worst. It was prolonged, joyful, syncretistic idolatry. I say prolonged because Israel is said, here, to "have loved a prostitute's wages on all threshing floors." All threshing floors! In other words, every year, when it was time to thresh the wheat, Israel forsook her exclusive relationship with God to run after false gods like Baal. How long had this been going on? The short answer is for centuries. In verse 10, we see God, through his prophet, reflect back on his finding Israel in the wilderness. Back then, finding Israel was like finding grapes or finding the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season. It was a good find. But then Israel came to Baal-peor, an event recounted for us in the book of Numbers chapter 25, and they consecrated themselves to Baal, the thing of shame, becoming detestable like the thing they loved. And now, by the time of Hosea's writing, that was between 650 and 700 years ago. Every year, for six hundred some odd years, Israel loved a prostitute's wages on the threshing floor. And, as anyone will tell you, prolonged exposure to anything has consequences.

- The first such consequence is that you will begin to joyfully participate in that which is detestable.
- The second consequence is that God will punish you for your sin.
- The third consequence is that God's word will seem foolish to you.

RESPOND

1. What caught your attention from Sunday's sermon? What are you still thinking about/mulling over? What questions did Sunday's sermon raise in your mind that you would like to discuss?
2. What cultural idols have we in North America worshipped for centuries? What effect has this prolonged idolatry had on us? What detestable things you see worshipped in the church? What deeper heart idols may be lying underneath such worship?
3. Have you ever experienced what was to your mind a clear example of God punishing you for your sin? What response(s) did that realization prompt?
4. Seeing that prolonged idolatry will lead us to regard God's word as foolish, it might help us to ask, "What evidence there is of profound wisdom in God's word?"
5. How do we plant a love for Christ in our hearts that will not permit idolatry to regain a foothold?
6. Given our discussion, what sort of things should we be praying for ourselves and for our church?