

Spiritual Drift

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Key verses: Hosea 2:1-13

Introduction

The reigning metaphor of Hosea's marriage to an adulterous wife is meant to portray God's faithfulness to us, even when we've been unfaithful. The main lesson of Hosea is the intensely personal nature of sin that we might become more aware of the relational effect our sin has on our relationship to God. The Lord wants to relate to us as a loyal husband relates to his loyal wife.

Idolatry is a major theme throughout all of scripture and it is not just an ancient practice, but a condition of our hearts. We may not worship statues of Vishnu and pray to the altar of Buddha, but we do have thousands of little idols we rely on functionally throughout the day.

“What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give. . . A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living. An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart, “If I have that, then I’ll feel my life has meaning, then I’ll know I have value, then I’ll feel significant and secure.” There are many ways to describe that kind of relationship to something, but perhaps the best one is worship.”

Tim Keller, Counterfeit Gods

This passage (Hosea 2:1-13) tracks Israel's drift away from the Lord.

Through a series of three “calls” and “responses”, we will see Israel progressively transfer their trust from the Lord onto Baal and foreign alliances. Israel's idolatry had two underlining causes:

- They forgot the source of their past blessings;

- They misunderstood the source of their present blessings.

The main idea

Spiritual drift happens slowly through small compromises. It is the Lord's mercy that frustrates us in our sins, so we might remember He is the source of our past and present blessings.

Idolatry and Sanctification: The three tenses of salvation

Every one of us is prone towards idolatry, this is the sinful, fallen nature, in which we find ourselves, right now, in the present, and while we await the redemption of our bodies.

In the New Testament, there are three tenses attributed to the concept of salvation: **we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved.**

- **we have been saved:** this means we have been justified by grace alone and through faith. Although we are sinful, we are declared righteous on account of Jesus.
- **we are being saved:** we are being sanctified, which means this first fruit of the holy spirit is transforming us into the image of the Son, from one degree of glory to the next.
- **we will be saved:** we will be glorified, this is the reception of our bodies at the resurrection, where we will rise pure and without a blemish as the Spirit and the Lord wash us clean.

God has forgiven every sin we have ever committed, are committing, and will commit in the future.

So, salvation is a process that has three tenses:

- **We have been saved:** Justification
Eph. 2:8–9
- **We are being saved:** Sanctification
1 Cor. 1:18; 2 Cor. 2:15
- **We will be saved:** Glorification
Rom. 5:9

In this present time, between justification and glorification, we are in the season of



sanctification, God is making us into a bride pure and without blemish for when he returns. He is tearing down the idols we have erected in our hearts.

Like Joshua leading the conquest of the promised land, the Holy Spirit is marching even deeper into our hearts tearing down our high places.

There is only one salvation and one way of salvation. What occurred in our past, works itself out in the present, and comes to consummation in the future is all of a piece. Justification now leads to glorification then (Rom. 8:29-30).

Derek Thomas

Questions of application:

1. *Can you recall a time when you fell into a spiritual drift?*
2. *What are a few of your default idols and false saviours (we all have them)?*
3. *How does understanding the progressive nature of salvation (past, present and future), help you fight sin now?*

Israel's rejection to God and his spiritual adultery

In Hosea 2:5-13 we can see Israel's unfaithfulness to God (by looking to Canaanite fertility religion and not to the Lord to provide the necessities of life) and God's response to their unfaithfulness.

The Israelites had these three questions in their heart and mind:

- Who will provide for a felt need?
- Who will provide reliability and security?
- What is good for me?

The use of Hosea's marriage is meant to help us understand why God removes his blessing from Israel and allows them to experience the consequences of their unfaithfulness, and later on how he redeems them.

God is not cruel, rather he is loyal, and good but also fair, He is a jealous and just God. He can not tolerate idolatry.

We see how with every step Israel takes away from the Lord, the Lord responds by frustrating their attempts to flee from Him. It is by God's grace that we are unhappy and empty in our sin. The best way to understand this idea is by following Israel's decline to God into three stages.

Stage 1: basic needs

- **The Israelites:** verse 5b *"I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil, and my drink."*
- **God's Response:** verse 6-7 *"Therefore I will hedge up her[d] way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths. She shall pursue her lovers but not overtake them, and she shall seek them but shall not find them."*

Here we see Israel being lured away from trusting in the Lord by basic felt needs. Now, when the Lord brought Israel into the promised land, He made a covenant promise that He would provide for them if they trusted in him, and Israel grew wealthy, rich and comfortable but they forgot that it was the Lord who provided these basic things for them.

Questions of application:

1. *Do you see God as your only provider?*
2. *Have you ever been tempted to fulfill your necessities by yourself or by trusting someone else apart from God?*
3. *When Israel wandered she was lured away by basic, felt needs. How can we resist the natural temptations of our sinful nature to be unfaithful to the Lord?*

Stage 2: reliability and security

- **The Israelites:** verse 7b *"Then she shall say, I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me than now."*
- **God's Response:** verse 8-12a *"And she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who*

lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for Baal.

9 Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its seasons and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness.

10 Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand.

11 And I will put an end to all her mirth, her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths, and all her appointed feasts.

12 And I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees”

After our basic needs, then we begin to look for reliability, security and predictability. So, once Israel began to falsely attribute God’s provisions to Baal, then God began to strike them with famine and draught, he began to take back his blessing and protection.

He will allow us to experience trials, suffering and pain as a result to our misplaced trust and idolatry but also in his mercy He will not allow us to find joy, peace and contentment in our idolatry so we return to Him.

“God is more interested in our **eternal condition** than our present comfort. So he allows us to experience suffering, so that we might find that he is all-sufficient.”

Carsten Lotz

Questions of application:

1. *Discuss this Biblical truth: It is God’s grace that he makes us unhappy in our sin.*
2. *Have you experienced God frustrating you in your sin?*
3. *Our sinful habits and routines create stability and security for us because they are predictable. How might Paul’s idea of sanctification (from one degree of glory to the next) help us break sinful habits?*

Stage 3

- **The Israelites:** verse 12b “*of which she said, ‘These are my wages, which my lovers have given me.’”*
- **God’s Response:** verse 12b-13 “*I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall devour them.*
13 And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals when she burned offerings to them and adorned herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers and forgot me, declares the Lord.”

God is the giver of life. He has given us our talents, personalities, physical health, families, jobs, everything comes from Him. So when we take these blessings that HE bestows so graciously and freely and say “MINE” I can do whatever I want it is a clear and outright act of rebellion.

Questions of application:

1. Have you ever sinned against God by not recognizing that everything comes from him?
2. Do you feel complete and fulfilled in God?

The gospel

God pursues us although we pursue other lovers. He continues to woo us and allure us through the gospel message of grace and forgiveness.

The trajectory of our lives can change if we turn to Him, which means turning away from our idols because His grace is truly new every morning.

If we are his people there is nothing that can separate us from him, He will make us return to him, there is no idol strong enough to take us away from God, He will save us, justify us, and redeemed us for his glory.

The application of the Gospel:

Each one of us has a god-shaped void that can only be filled by God himself. Idolatry is when we try to fill that void, that first love space in our hearts with other things.



Israel said: 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.' but the reality is that the Lord is the one who provides for all our needs and gives us all that we have.

God is kind to us in that we don't find ultimate happiness in things that will ultimately destroy us. He has designed us to experience ultimate happiness in Him alone. Augustine famously writes this about God's design for us: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."- Augustine, Confessions

It's God's mercy that we experience pain and suffering as a consequence of our sinful decisions so that it is clear that He alone will make us happy and whole.

Jesus is enough, he is the all-sufficient one. Seek Him and your heart will be filled with joy and your soul will find rest. Seek first the kingdom of God and all these other things will be added unto you.

How can we fight our drift?

- Remember, the source of your past blessing is Jesus Christ who saved you while you were dead in your sins and you have done nothing to contribute to your salvation except sin.
- Understand the source of your present blessing, it is Jesus who sustains your faith and completes what he has started.

Other resources

The 3 tenses of Salvation:

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/3-tenses-gospel>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1VbYfkUo6Y>

Hosea:

<https://rb.gy/hpzq7>
<https://rb.gy/vscwg>

Idolatry:

<https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2008/june/1062308.html>

Gospel drift:

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/gospel-drift-and-how-to-avoid-it>

<https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/thoughts-on-why-people-drift-from-the-faith/>

