

A Mighty Fortress

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IS OUR GOD

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Are We A Peculiar People?

Amos 2:4-5

By Joe Graber

Thus says the Lord:

For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept His commandments. Their lies led them astray, Lies which their fathers followed. But I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.

Amos 2:4-5 NKJV

This passage is a transitional passage for the prophet Amos, as he builds a case for God's impending judgment against the nation of Israel. Incidentally, that pronouncement of judgment upon Israel takes place in the succeeding verses.

Amos begins by proclaiming God's judgment upon the heathen nations surrounding Israel, and in each case God's judgment is plainly a judgment based upon His own law word. In each case God mentions a multitude of sins in the form of "*for three transgressions... and for four...*" but in each case the Sovereign states a specific, particularly heinous sin that the judgment is based upon. These sins are all violations of God's word. The point here is that God is not an arbitrary and capricious God. He judges each nation, from Syria to Gaza to Ekron to Tyre as well as his own people, according to His law.

God judges all men according to His law word. How can God justifiably judge those who were not given His law physically by His law? Paul tells us in Romans chapters 1 and 2 that not only does every single person who has ever existed or will ever exist know inherently that God exists and even the truth of the trinity, but they each have God's law written or inscribed in every detail upon their hearts. So Amos pronounces God's righteous and just judgment upon these heathen nations and sets that stage for the judgment of God's chosen people.

John Calvin asks the following: "When God spared not others who through ignorance [i.e., God had not physically delivered the law to these heathen nations] sinned, what was to become of the people of Israel, who had been taught the law? For a servant, knowing his master's will, and doing it not, is worthy of many stripes, (Luke 12:47)."

You see, Amos has set the stage for the judgment that God is placing upon his people for violating His law word, and God is showing that He is not a respecter of persons. He judges all according to His

perfect law of liberty. It is at this point that we come to the final transition from the heathen nations to the Southern Kingdom of God's chosen people, Amos' own homeland. Likely this was the most difficult of all the pronouncements that Amos makes in his prophetic ministry as it was against his own homeland.

Judah's Sin

In his declaration of God's wrath against the people of Judah, Amos charges the Jews with apostasy. They had cast aside the law of God in favor of doing what was right in their own eyes. They became their own arbiters of right and wrong. They lived life as the heathen, but make no mistake, they were not pagans. The Jews were not participating in the open pagan practices as Israel was. In fact, these Jews were participating in some of the most elaborate and heart wrenching worship services ever. You or I have never seen worship as consuming and as joyful or as overpowering as these people practiced. It was a magnificent act and display before the Lord. Isaiah describes in the first chapters of his prophetic book how majestic the praises and worship really was. But even with all this praise and show of submission before the Lord, God was wroth and rejected it all.

Amos, Hosea and Isaiah are all unanimous in their pronouncements of Judah's transgressions. Judah's worship and praise was not accepted by God because they were flagrantly breaking God's law and they despised God's law. They would enter into the places of worship and extol all kinds of praise upon God. They would raise hands before the Lord. From the account of Isaiah, one can imagine that they danced, wept, knelt in humble adoration, and experienced an incredible emotional catharsis in these services. They made the most incredible sacrifices both of praise and of wealth... they brought the most excellent animals. But as these people walked out of the door of the place of worship, they took off the very visible cloak of humble submission to their God, dropped it in the dust and stepped on it as they raised their heads, stretched out their necks and led their own lives as they saw fit. For this, God's anger was upon them.

These people were really hot in their worship to God. They were on fire! But these people were really cold toward God in their daily lives. When they were hot they were hot, and when they were not they were not. What was the result? What happens when you mix hot water and cold water? You get warm water. In Revelation 3:15 and 16 God addresses people who act like these Jews acted. *"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth."*

How often do we think of this passage meaning a lack of zeal before the Lord when it really deals with us keeping God's law word on a daily and consistent basis? As you read the rest of the passage in Revelation, it is clear that this passage is about people who have a form of godliness (i.e., they offer up incredible worship, might heal the sick or even raise the dead) but deny the power thereof (i.e., they don't recognize God's authority to govern every aspect of their lives) as 2 Timothy 3:5 tells us. Charismatics often think of this verse as applying to those who deny God's supernatural workings today, but the verse really deals with those who may accept God's wonderful miracles and blessings but deny his righteous reign over their lives.

Idolatry and Worship of False Gods

Our text (Amos 2:4-5) next indicates that these people were following their fathers in an idolatrous false worship of false gods. The phrase *"Their lies have lead them astray, Lies which their fathers followed"* in the Hebrew is a phrase that connotes a false religion or the worshipping of man-made false Gods. So God is really saying that as these people think that they are worshipping the one true God, they are really worship-

ping their own gods constructed in their own minds. How do we know that this is what they were doing?

If you and I were to take a sheet of paper and divide it down the middle, we could write on one half all of our professed beliefs. We could write that we believe in a sovereign God who is Lord over all. We could write that we exist and have all things that we have because of Him. The list would go on and on. Then on the other side we could take an honest look at how we act on a daily basis. How do we act when no Christians are around? How do we act when we're not in church? How do we act around our co-workers? My next question would be: Which of those two sides of the paper indicate what we really, truly believe in our hearts? God knows the answer. James was so right when he wrote in James 2:18 *"Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works."*

The point is that our profession of faith in word and in deed (before our church brothers here in the church) is meaningless. It is how we live outside of here that shows our faith, love and devotion to God. Even more importantly, our profession before the world of knowing God through our church attendance, praises and offerings while we are transgressing God's law in our day to day life makes us a liar. 1 John 2:4 tells us that *"He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him."*

Contemporary Christianity's Hatred of God's Law

Let us turn our attention from the Jews of Amos' and Isaiah's day to the Church and Christians of today. Just as the Jews had erected false Gods, not of stone but of doctrine, so too the church today has done the same. We hear the church today preach about how the law of God has passed away, and we are under grace now. We no longer are under the law. We hear from the pulpit that God is a God of unconditional love although that contradicts every fiber and word in scripture. We hear from the pulpit that we must be loving, tolerant and accepting to those who thumb their noses at God. churches today preach a false God who is nothing like the one and true God. God is power, righteousness, goodness, love, just, vengeful, a consuming fire, a strong tower, the source of all things...

The church today preaches a salvation which is a pleasant release from the guilt and consequences of our sin of "missing the mark" but which has no concrete requirements for living our life outside of being sincere or outside of following our heart (which, incidentally, Jeremiah says is above all things most wicked – Jer. 17:9).

The church today not only preaches a gospel which is a hatred for God's law, but the church transgresses God's law on a regular basis. The church refuses to act as God's redemptive institution here on earth, and it harbors in love those who hate God. We have a powerful example of how a church is to act as a redemptive institution in 1 Corinthians 5. Here a man claiming to be a Christian is unrepentant and steadfast in his commitment of a clear violation of God's law word. Paul tells the church to turn him out of the church and deliver him to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. This sounds like a harsh action, but it is truly an act of love. To the Christian the destruction of the flesh is nothing, but the salvation of the spirit is glorious.

The church helps the sinner feel comfortable just as they are...the accepting and tolerant church holds the sinner's hand and strokes it lovingly as they both sink slowly into the depths of hell.

Today, churches are afraid to turn a flagrant sinner out of the church to be delivered unto Satan because they want to be able to help and assist the person. What usually happens is that the church works with people to get them to the point of being spiritually and physically comfortable and keep them there. This is a

heinous and despicable crime. By not turning unrepentant sinners over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, the church condemns these people to hell. The church helps the sinner feel comfortable just as they are...the accepting and tolerant church holds the sinner's hand and strokes it lovingly as they both sink slowly into the depths of hell.

"Do you have proof?" you ask. Let me ask when the last time was that you heard of someone being excommunicated. Churches are loathe to express disapproval over actions of attendees or members because what is church all about these days? Numbers. Crowds. The gate and the take... that's what church has come to mean. We market to the people and we tickle their ears, but God sits in the heavens and grows weary of our affront to Him just like he did with the Jews in Amos' day.

Sin in the Camp

We too often forget that we as Christians are at war with the principalities, powers, and rulers of this dark world (Ephesians 6:12). This refers not to a magical or mystical battle with demons and spirits, but it refers to our ethically taking dominion over the earth for Christ. As warriors dressed in armor and ready to war in the battle of ideas, we gather at the church of armed camp. The church is the gathering place for Christ's army, but what we often forget is that not only must the war be a just war but also the combatants must be just people. God would not tolerate sin in the camp of the Israelites. God gave specific instructions to the Israelites on keeping the armed camp pure and holy, and when this was not done God intervened to purify the camp himself.

Ask the Israelites what it is like for God to cause their defeat at Ai because of Achan's sin in the camp, and ask Achan's family what it is like to be purified by fire. Ask David what it is like to have his infant son killed explicitly by God as a judgment for bringing sin into the camp of his people. Ask Jehoshaphat what happens when you go into battle as allies with those who exalt themselves against God. God said that since Jehoshaphat loved those who hate the Lord that the wrath of the Lord was upon him (2 Chronicles 19:1-3). We can't afford to harbor sin in the camp, it must be purged or God himself will purge it with a judgment as He did to the Jews through the prophecy of Amos.

Our Attitude Toward God's Law

Not only are the church and the pulpit an affront unto God today, but so is the average Christian. Let us now bring this to a very personal level. God calls us to be a chosen generation a royal priesthood and a peculiar people who should show for the praises of him in 1 Peter 2:9. We are a peculiar people not in the sense that we are crazy, zany and bizarre, but we are a peculiar people because we show forth the praises of our Lord by living lives obedient to His law word. The question for you and me today on a very personal level is how do we act after we walk out of those doors downstairs. Do we break God's law? 1 John 3:4 tells us clearly what sin is. Sin is the transgression of God's law. Do we strive to keep God's law and put away sin or do we harbor sin within our lives.

Not only does our text address the question of us harboring sin in our lives, but also it addresses our attitude toward the law. Do we despise God's law? The charge of despising God's law goes far beyond the application of God's law in our own personal lives. Make no mistake there is no third way. Either we love God's law or we despise God's law. If we love God's law, we shun evil and we proclaim the truth. We refuse to be a party to clear transgressions of God's law. We are told over and over in scripture that we should shun or avoid or run from evil (Psalm 34:14, 97:10, Proverbs 14:10, 4:27, Romans 12:9, and 1 Thessalonians 5:22). We are clearly not to participate in sin and assist others in their sin against the Most High God. Despising God's law is clearly seen in our either lack of righteous indignation in the face of sin or, especially, in our willingness to assist those who are clearly in sin.

Let me give you an example of what I mean.

There is a group of pharmacists called “Pharmacists for Life International” with thousands of members. The members of this group have decided to stop participating and assisting evil and have instead begun to shun wickedness. These men and women have pledged to stop dispensing certain kinds of “birth control” which they claim have a potential to cause an abortion of a very recently conceived child. The target drugs are sometimes called “morning after” or “emergency” contraception. These people have taken a stand and said that as explicitly Christian pharmacists they are different from your average heathen pharmacist, and they will not stand by and blithely wink at sin. These are not perfect people, but they are taking a stand against sin in at least one small way. I should note that these Christians have come under the severe attack of Planned Parenthood and, interestingly enough, Wal-Mart.

Let me ask you, what does it mean to be an explicitly Christian pharmacist? At least these men and women are refusing to participate in sin and they are proclaiming truth to those who they interact with. They are giving letters which explain the moral sinfulness of the products to customers who ask for these particular products, and the customer who wishes to continue in the unethical behavior is free to have their prescription filled at another non-Christian pharmacy.

How about you? What about you makes you an explicitly Christian lawyer, psychologist, doctor, builder, homemaker, farmer or businessman? Do you assist people in their sin or even stand by in silence as they continue as an affront to God? Martin Luther writes in his Large Catechism that to see people in their sin and to say nothing is tantamount to watching a drowning person and taking no action. We know the answer. We know to do good. James 4:17 tells us that to know to do good and to not do it is sin.

If we truly love God's law, we stand up for it and against evil in every area of our life. We don't take off our Christianity in order to be an effective salesman or an effective banker. We are not businessmen or farmers or other professionals who happen to be Christians, but rather, we are Christians who have been called by God to worship Him in the profession that He has sovereignly placed us in.

If we walk out of the church and into the workplace, the home, the recreation center, or the market-place and leave our explicit Christianity in the church; then we are worthy of naught but destruction. We are worthy to be tread under the foot of men as Jesus says in Matthew 5. We are worthy of the same destruction that God judges Judah by because we prove by our actions that we despise His law.

There should be a striking difference between doing business with and interacting with Christian and non-Christian businessmen and professionals. There should be a striking difference between the tolerance and assistance of sin displayed by the non-Christian and the intolerance and abhorrence of sin displayed by the Christian.

Let us, by the grace of God, be a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation... a peculiar people. Otherwise, we are worthy of judgment.

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RECOMMENDED READING

Puritan Evangelism: A Biblical Approach

By: Dr. Joel Beeke

"If being saved is presented as nothing more than professing faith in Christ, and if regeneration can happen without corresponding evidence of holy living, then the church will soon be filled with people who deceive themselves and others about their true spiritual condition. Those who have not been slain by the law show little concern to keep the law once they believe they are Christians. And if they are taught that holiness isn't an essential part of being a Christian, they may live with that delusion the rest of their lives." Page 28

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