

Laodiceanism and Being There Next Year

Seeking God

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We are going to begin this sermon by turning to Romans 5:12-14.

Romans 5:12-14 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.

Early in the Feast I stated that the relationship with God established by Christ's sacrifice and our faith and repentance / *S* salvation. At the conclusion of my sermon on the Last Great Day I stated that I had given you the solution for coming out of Babylon and Laodiceanism. The solution is that we must diligently seek God. Both of these are true statements for the following reasons:

1. The relationship provides the only matrix for salvation.

Recall that a matrix is an environment in which a substance or a thing is developed. An almost perfect synonym for a matrix is a womb. If we have no access to God, there can be no relationship with Him who is the source of everything that is needed for salvation. Our relationship with God *is* the spiritual womb in which we are being created to become like God and share in His glory. This is true, and is illustrated by a simple word-picture that is true.

Consider when God created Adam and Eve. He placed them in an environment He created for their *further* spiritual development. That environment was the Garden of Eden in which there were two trees. It was in this environment they were to have a relationship with God, aided and abetted by the Tree of Life, which they were invited to freely partake of. Instead, under temptation, they took of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and were expelled from the Garden, and the relationship ended.

An angel, with a flaming sword guarding the Garden was placed there so that there would be no doubt the relationship had ended. The relationship was ended and they also died without being readmitted to the Garden. Without access to God and the Tree of life, their further spiritual development came to a crashing halt.

Adam and Eve represented all of mankind. God's judgment, as we just read here in Romans 5, was that what they did would be repeated endlessly by all who followed, even though they did not sin in exactly the same way. Thus God's judgment was shown to be correct. Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Because of sin, it thus means that

all have been cut off from God because of their sins.

God knew full well we were all going to sin, and so He provided a means by which a relationship with Him could be re-established by Adam and Eve's progeny even though the environment for the relationship would not be in the Garden of Eden.

2. The second reason focuses on our present spiritual position.

Since the Garden of Eden no longer exists, but we nonetheless have access to God, we spiritually stand at a crossroads that demands we make a choice of direction with our lives. We either make little or no effort and become re-absorbed into the world and its ways that we know so well and are comfortable with, *or* we strive and make efforts to go against the stream of our natural inclinations, seeking strongly and consistently to strengthen the relationship that God has opened up to us.

God commands that we are to live by faith. He commands that we come out of Babylon. We are commanded to choose life. We cannot stay neutral in this position. We either seek God, or we die the second death. The means that opens this choice before us is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:1-2 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, ...

Remember I told you we stand at a crossroads. In addition to standing here, we ...

Romans 5:2 ...rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Romans 5:8-10 But God commends his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

Notice it says, "We *shall* be saved." This is *future*. Thus we now have access to the Father, to the Tree of Life, and a relationship to build upon which should lead to everlasting life. But God has willed that our development must take place *within the world*, not the Garden of Eden.

Part of God's solution clears us of guilt of past sins and is referred to in the Bible as "justification." Justification by faith in Christ's blood is only a partial solution, because it neither changes the nature nor the character that is the cause of needing justification through Christ's blood. It does clear us of indebtedness due to sin, and that in itself is a *major* blessing—an enormous gift; but all by itself it does not change the behavior that was responsible for us being indebted in the first place. However, it does open the door to that change, and that is why verse 10 says, "We shall be saved by His life." That phrase implies *help* to enable us to be saved. Help is available to fulfill our part, because Christ is alive to assist us.

Romans 5:2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace

wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

I said earlier that having access to God *should* lead to everlasting life. It will, but only if we make the effort to fulfill our part in the New Covenant.

We are going to go to Hebrews 5 to notice something of critical importance to this issue. Remember that the book of Hebrews was written to a group of unspecified Hebrews, and these people were drifting with the tide, so to speak. They had lost their first love, as it were, and they needed to be stirred up.

The author (who I think is the Apostle Paul) does this by showing them and reasoning with them about what a tremendous privilege (gift) has been given to them—being part of Christ, knowing Christ, and knowing God's plan of salvation, gives them an edge in life they never had before. He shows that Christ is so much greater than Moses, for example, that there is no comparison. Moses did not even make it into the Promised Land. Christ is already there, and He has powers Moses only dreamed of that will enable us to be helped. Notice though what he says to those who have the truth, but are stalled along the way, as it were.

Hebrews 5:14 But strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Hebrews 6:1 Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.

I am going to change some words here into better English synonyms—synonyms that are used in some modern Bibles. "But strong meat belongs to them that are mature." The *King James* says "of full age." But does not that indicate growth from immaturity to maturity, and that strong meat belongs to those who have *grown* to the place where they are mature? In other words, the Christian cannot stand still. He is supposed to move from dead center, and if he does not move he is going to swept away by the current.

"Even those, who by reason of *practice*..." [Practice! Practice! Practice! That means *application* of what they have learned in the past.] "...who have their senses *trained*."

You can see here the steps in a process of preparation for something that lies beyond. Paul is clearly indicating that the Christian cannot stand still. He has got to do something with what he has been given.

Hebrews 6:1 Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection."

Do not stand still!

Access to God is clearly only the beginning of a process, and what follows is termed in the Bible

as "sanctification," during which the relationship and salvation are brought to full maturity. God is not in the business of saving people just for the sake of saving them. He is in the business of saving *and* creating His character in us. This is where my final sermon of the Feast comes back into the picture, because our responsibility in this process of becoming one with God is to *seek* God.

We cannot seek God standing still. Seeking God is pretty much accomplished by means of turning our backs on this world, and instead seek God by studying His word, by frequent daily prayer, by meditation to sort out and give understanding, and by occasional fasting and humble submissive obedience. Humbly and faithfully doing these will work to convert us from conformation to this world to conformation to God and His way, but to accomplish them takes sacrifice.

The process of sanctification is greatly supported, indeed driven, by gratitude for the gifts already given—the hope (which Paul mentions in Romans 5: 2) of promises to be fulfilled, and the desire to please and to glorify God. It is in light of these things that the appealing dangers of Babylon and Laodiceanism become clearly seen for what they are. They are an ever-present reality attracting our attention from seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Because of God's calling, our priorities in life have changed.

We are going to touch bases once again with one of the word-pictures describing peoples' relationship with Babylon.

Revelation 17:2 With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.

Those caught up with Babylon become drunk—spiritually drunk—as the result of imbibing its way of life. Figuratively, wine has significant spiritual meaning.

Proverbs 20:1 Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

That is quite a warning. God stops short of forbidding wine. In fact, it says in Judges 9: 13 that wine cheers the heart of both God and man.

What we are being warned of in Proverbs 20: 1 is that wine initially has a pleasant lifting energizing effect; however, it is deceptive in that it has a depressing secondary effect that ensnares those who allow themselves too much. In other words, wine can make a person drunk. Remember Revelation 18: 2: "For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

A drunk's mind becomes dizzy, fuzzy, and unfocused. His perception of reality changes. It becomes distorted and uncertain. His body staggers under the effect of the drug, not reacting normally as the drinker commands it to act. At the same time he is deluded into thinking he actually has greater powers than he had before becoming drunk. The reality is that he has made

himself a helpless victim, and is dangerous to himself and others.

The wine in this word-picture of Revelation 17: 2 is Babylon's way of life. In Revelation 18: 2, the wrath is the penalty that comes down upon its hapless victims as they practice the sins of their unfaithfulness to God in their conduct. Fornication figuratively portrays faithlessness, such as one would experience within a covenant relationship such as marriage.

We are going to carry these thoughts into one of the Old Testament prophecies—one of the Minor Prophets who really is not *minor* at all, except in the length of what he wrote. (Think about Revelation 17: 2 as we read Hosea 4.)

Hosea 4:11 Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.

Notice that. It cannot get much clearer.

Hosea 4:12 My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declares unto them: for the spirit of whoredoms has caused them to err, and they have gone a whoring from under their God.

One of the major keys very important to understanding the application to us, to both Hosea and Amos, is that they prophesied in Israel (the ten northern tribes) at a time similar to that in which we now live—that is, in the last generation before *amajor* national calamity fell on them, sort of like a *time of the end*.

Hosea and Amos were among the last prophets God sent to Israel so that there would be no excuse on Israel's part *ever*, (including the time when they will be resurrected) that God did not care enough to give them a chance. He gave them an overwhelming number of chances to repent. In their case, their time was just before Israel fell to the invading Assyrian armies. They were then removed from their homeland and scattered to the four winds, never to return to their homeland.

Historical records and archeological findings show that Israel was quite prosperous during the time of Amos and Hosea, and was considered to be a major power in the world. But at the same time, the nation was rotten to the core morally, and social injustice was the order of the day throughout the land.

I have no doubt that these people were getting literally drunk, since Amos reports in one place of them drinking wine by the bowls; not cups, but bowls. Ephraim is directly called in this book of Hosea, "the drunkards of Ephraim."

In addition to this, they were involved in their ritual harlotry of the pagan religion they had adopted. But the lesson for us is spiritual. God is saying that at the end-time it is as though a demonical power has seized the nation and is destroying loyalty to God.

Drugs destroy one's capacity to think clearly, and they break down resistance to evil. They cloud the mind so that one becomes morally stupid and incapable of thinking straight. In like manner so does the spiritual drunkenness that results from over-imbibing in Babylon.

Please understand the parallel. In Revelation 17 the people are reported as being "*drunk on the wine of her fornication.*" It is a spiritual drunkenness, not a physical drunkenness. Hosea is talking about *both*. This drunkenness is an escape into the fantasies of this world's attitudes and conduct. It deprives people of their understanding. It takes away the heart. It removes inhibitions. Why? Because people want to join in on the excitement that everybody else is having.

This drunkenness breaks down inhibitions and it fills one with a false confidence. They say, "*Oh, this is going to be all right.*" "*Everything is going to work out.*" "*You do not have to worry about AIDS.*" "*You do not have to worry about any of those other sexual diseases.*" This is false confidence; even bravado—"I am the man!" It plays havoc with modesty. Look at the way our women are dressing. Do you notice how short the skirts are, and how tight the blouses are? They are imbibing in Babylon. It plays havoc with modesty and restraint. It destroys loyalty within relationships.

In Hosea 10 there are some really interesting verses.

Hosea 10:1-2 Israel is an empty vine, he brings forth fruit unto himself: according to the multitude of his fruit he has increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images. Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty: he shall break down their altars, he shall spoil their images.

Here the problem between God and Israel is clearly exposed. He describes Israel as a luxuriant grapevine sending runners in every direction, giving indications of producing a bountiful crop. It indeed does produce a bountiful crop. Great prosperity is produced; however, it is consumed through gorging in self-indulgence.

God is showing that Israel used and abused its prosperity. It was prosperous, but it used its prosperity for the purposes of idolatry. God is indicating that its prosperity played a part in corrupting their heart. That is why the deceitful divided disloyal heart is mentioned in context with the multitude of its fruit.

Much of the world's appeal is that it appears to offer financial security. However, God shows there is possibly a bad secondary effect, in that as people become financially secure their attention is diverted from His purpose to things that are vain and corrupting.

We are going to go back to Deuteronomy 8, and we are going to read a pretty good portion of this, beginning in verse 7, because it is so clear what prosperity has the power to do. You have probably heard the story that Satan asked three of his deputies to give suggestions as to how he can corrupt man. They each gave a suggestion, but the suggestion he accepted was, "Make them prosperous. Give them what they want and they will destroy themselves with little or no work." God warned of this in Deuteronomy 8.

Deuteronomy 8:7-9 For the LORD your God brings you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills: A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig

trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive and honey: A land wherein you shall eat bread without scarceness, you shall not lack anything in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you may dig brass.

Does that not sound like He is there describing the United States? Brethren, all of Israel is like this, and not just the United States. We are familiar with it here, but all of Israel is this way.

Deuteronomy 8:10-19 When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which he has given you. Beware that you forget not the LORD your God, in not keeping his commandments and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command you this day: Lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses and dwell therein: And when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied: Then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage: Who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought you forth water out of the rock of flint; Who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers knew not, that he might humble you, and that he might prove you, to do you good at your latter end; And you say in your heart, *My* power and the might of *my* hand has gotten me this wealth. But you shall remember the LORD your God: for it is he that gives you power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto your fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if you do at all forget the LORD your God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish.

There is no doubt that prosperity is good, but unless one is sufficiently focused in the right direction and disciplined enough, it can also be a demanding master because of its power to distract one into idolatry.

You might recall the prophecy in Deuteronomy 32:15 where He prophesied that when Israel was prospered, then he [Jeshurun] rebelled. That is exactly what happened.

Deuteronomy 32:15 But Jeshurun [Israel] waxed fat, and kicked: you are waxen fat, you are grown thick, you are covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.

This mention of wealth in Hosea 10 and God's warning in Deuteronomy 8 brings us back to the

curse of Laodiceanism, because in Hosea 10 God is literally showing what can happen spiritually as people are increased materially. That is, their judgment is in danger of being radically altered.

The Laodicean evaluated himself, saying "I am rich and increased with goods." And then he added, "and have need of nothing." That was a slap in the face to God. The Laodicean's judgment and analysis of himself is so bad that he has actually lifted himself up to the place of God. He needs nothing from God. He has already arrived. He has deceived himself into thinking that his material prosperity proved that God *approved* of his conduct and attitudes.

The Laodicean's overall conduct may not have been too bad, but his poor analysis of himself persuaded him to think that he had no urgent need to seek God any further, and he is now merely floating with the current. He is going backward. He is not aware of that yet. His opinion of his holiness, as compared with God, was so far off-base that it caused Jesus Christ to regurgitate him from being a part of His body.

Back in thought to Hosea 10:1, one would think that if altars are increased during this period of prosperity, as verse one states, then religion must be flourishing. Well, indeed religion is flourishing! Amos (Hosea's contemporary) clearly reports this in his book; however, it was not the religion God gave through Moses that was flourishing, it was idolatry. Notice in verse 2 God charges Israel that its heart is divided.

In studying these verses I found that commentaries have divided opinions over what the Hebrew word translated "divided" means. For the word "divided," most modern translators use either the word "false, deceitful, or faithless." After my inquiries into that verse, I do not believe any of them are wrong, including "divided," because the Hebrew word indicates "smoothness." It all depends on the context in which it is used, but it indicates "smoothness." It indicates "flattering." That ought to give you a clue. It indicates people who "talk the talk, but do not walk the walk."

I want to refer to one verse in Isaiah 29.

Isaiah 29:13 Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.

Believe it or not, Isaiah came just before Amos and Hosea; however, he was a prophet to Judah primarily, whereas those other two men were prophets to Israel—the ten northern tribes. But what Isaiah said here fits right in with what Hosea said. These people were flattering God with their tongue, but their heart was not really in what they were doing. So what this verse here in Isaiah 29:13 indicates is that reverence for God was merely an intellectual accommodation intended to appease Him. It is as if God could not see right through them! It shows how far off base they were in their carnal thinking.

They used the name of God frequently, and they undoubtedly said that they trusted Him, just like we do today. All of our coins say "In God We Trust." Our paper money says "In God We Trust." But you see, they filled the nation with lying, stealing, murder, adultery, fornication,

coveting, Sabbath breaking, and idolatry, all the while giving Him lip-service with the mouth—talking the talk, but not walking the walk. That is why He said, "Your heart is divided. Your heart is deceitful. You talk so smoothly, but your heart is false."

It was in II Kings 16 that God sent the people of Israel into their captivity. In II Kings 17 He reports on some of the things that occurred *after* this. One of the things was that apparently there was a period of time when the land was pretty much empty, and while the land was empty the animals multiplied. Among the animals that multiplied were lions, and lions were attacking and killing and eating people out in the country areas.

The people who were now living there, who had been transported into those areas, did not know what to do, except that they called to the king of Assyria and said, "Hey! Send one of those Israelitish priests back who used to be here so that we can know how to worship the god of this land, and maybe he will protect us from the lions." And so they did that.

By the time we get to II Kings 17: 33, God is showing the response of these people who were put into the land to take the place of the Israelites who were deported to Assyria.

II Kings 17:33 They feared the LORD, *and* served their own gods,
...[Is that not interesting?] ...after the manner of the nations whom
they carried away from thence.

That is pretty clear, but I will tell you the way Moffatt translates this verse. Moffatt says, "They worshipped the Eternal, and they also served their own gods."

There is a very interesting thing as the chapter goes along. It is these people who were pagan to the core, who feared the Lord, and worshipped their own gods. In this case, fear does not mean a healthy respect or reverence. It means they were *afraid* of Him, and so the only reason they were worshipping Him was out of fear and terror of what was happening in the land. They hoped to appease Him by making Him one of the whole pantheon of gods they brought with them from their original homeland. These people developed a syncretistic system. It was a blending of some of God's truth and sheer outright paganism.

The Jews of Jesus' day clearly recognized this putrid blend, and they despised the Samaritans for it. That is why they hated them. But what is so interesting for us is to understand that by the time the story gets to verses 35 and 36, a not-so-subtle change has taken place in whom God is addressing. Notice in verse 35 it begins to be addressed by saying, "With whom the LORD had made a covenant." That was Israel. The object of the subject is subtly shifting away from the pagans "who feared God and worshipped their own gods," to Israel, ...

II Kings 17:35-39 With whom the LORD had made a covenant,
and charged them saying, You shall not fear other gods, nor bow
yourselves to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them. But the
LORD, who brought *you* up out of the land of Egypt... [He did not bring
the pagans up out of the land of Egypt, He brought *Israel* up out of the
land of Egypt.] ...with great power and an outstretched arm, him shall

you fear, and him shall you worship, and to him shall you do sacrifice. And the statutes, and the ordinances, and the law, and the commandment which he wrote for you, you shall observe to do forevermore; and you shall not fear other gods. And the covenant that I have made with you you shall not forget; neither shall you fear other gods. But the LORD your God you shall fear: and he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies.

What does it mean? It means that He is now pointing out to Israel—"You are guilty of exactly what these pagans did. You blended my truth with outright paganism. You are guilty of what they did."

That is what He is saying in Hosea 10: 1-2, and brethren, it is urgent that we understand what is involved here. This is so important because it was the cause of God's anger against Israel, and thus their defeat and scattering. What we must understand is that our God is not what we say we worship, but what we serve! Our God is that which we give our life to.

Whenever we counsel people for baptism, we invariably go through Luke 14: 25-27 where Jesus said, "Any man who comes to me and does not love me more than father, mother, brother, sister, aunt or uncle, or anybody else, including himself, cannot be My disciple." He comes first, exclusive of all other possible gods that we might serve.

Israel's god was the one they served, because they took on virtually the whole pantheon of pagan gods and made them the ones they served. All the while they gave lip-service to God, used His name, and said "Our God is the Creator God." That is what they said, but they did not submit to and serve Him. They believed in the Creator God, but they worshipped Him at the shrine they erected to the Baals. All you have to do, brethren, is look at the American scene and you are seeing it all over again.

Even our money gives lip-service to the Creator God, and those who worship go off to the shrine of the pagan deities to worship. There is no correlation between what is said and what is done. So while they gave lip-service to the Creator, they adopted the entire Canaanitish religion with its lewd immorality. It was this that they patterned their lives after in actual practice, and in daily life they conformed to and reflected the Babylonish system, even as Israel does today. This is the very thing that we are warned to come out of, and the only way to come out of it is through the developing and the maturing of the relationship with God.

I want us to go back again to Hosea 10: 1. I want to return to the thought regarding prosperity and "increase of altars," because again it ties in with the Laodicean making poor judgment of his spiritual worth.

Hosea 10:1 According to the multitude of his fruit he has increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images.

The RSV translates that phrase "the more his fruit increased, the more altars he built; as his

country improved, he improved his pillars.&