

MANIFESTATIONS OF GOD'S UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

In the book of Hosea we have an unveiling of what God's love is really like. And the way the Lord unveils His love is by telling Hosea to go marry a wife of harlotry, a woman whose name is Gomer. Gomer symbolizes the *nature* of what God's love went after—failing, corrupt, spoiled humanity. And Hosea's taking Gomer for his wife demonstrates the *nature* of God's love toward us.

Hosea's name means "salvation." Thus, when Hosea married Gomer, "salvation" married "failure." This was God's design — that salvation would love failure and deliver her. These two were joined to demonstrate the nature of God's love. Gomer, the unfaithful wife whose affections were in another direction, was continuously loved by her faithful husband Hosea. The Lord likened Hosea's love toward Gomer to His love toward Israel.

Gomer did not meet any condition to deserve Hosea's love. She did quite the opposite. Humanly speaking, she disqualified herself from being an object of her husband's love. In the same way, we would think we have disqualified ourselves from being an object of God's love. After all, we are nothing but Gomers. We are spoiled by sin, the flesh, and the devil. Yet, God loves us and demonstrated that love. Romans 5:8 says, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners" — while we were Gomers — "Christ died for us." So, we have become the objects of the love of God. Not only as sinners are we the objects of His love, but also as believers. Even after we have already received Christ, and have a deep-rooted back-

sliding record — we are still the objects of His love. Having a history full of failure as a believer causes us to feel somewhat alienated from the Lord in our experience. We may have taken a thought that we are "out of the race" because of so much failure as a believer. Then we conclude that God's love surely has to be diminished in our case. But the book of Hosea shows us that God's unconditional love is not diminished by any kind of failure; rather, His love continues to be solid and dependable. You can count on it. Even now, right in your condition, God's love is staring you in the face.

In previous issues of *the Christian*, we have seen the evil, corrupt condition of the objects of God's love and how much His love touches the uttermost negative condition. We are the objects of God's love because we have been put in Christ. We are locked up with Him. God involved us with Himself and we cannot get uninvolved. We may make a decision to give Him up, but He will never make a decision to give us up. In John 10:28 the Lord says, "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish." His seed is in us (1 John 3:9). We are born of God and we cannot get unborn. We were begotten of the Father (1 Pet. 1:3), so we have His life. Regardless of our condition, we are involved with His Son, and the Son is the object of the Father's love. Thus, wherever we go, we take Jesus with us. If we go into the mudhole, we take Christ into the mud with us. He goes with us because He is inside of us. He is there all the time in His unconditional love. So we can see the extent of God's love. Even if we make our bed in hell, His love will reach us there (Psa. 139:8).

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Relationship-changing Love

Let us look at the manifestations of God's unconditional love in the book of Hosea. These manifestations are detailed especially in the last section of the book. But also in chapter 2 we see the manifestation of His love. Hosea 2:16 says, "And it shall be, in that day, says the Lord, that you will call Me 'My Husband.'" Literally in Hebrew it means "My Man." This is more endearing and intimate than saying "My Husband." To say "He is my Man" means that I am joined to this One. Then, in verse 17 the Lord says, "for I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals, and they shall be remembered by their name no more."

The word "Baal" means a lord, or a ruler. It refers to a kind of tyranny over the people in their idolatry. Baal means that they had a relationship which was characterized by bondage, ruling, tyranny, and fear, rather than being characterized by love. But when the Lord reaches them in their idolatry, He says, "In that day, you will call Me 'My Man' [or 'My Husband']." This means that God's love is a relationship-changing love. He changes our entire relationship with Him from that of a ruler that we fear to a husband who loves us and with whom we are enjoying a wonderful fellowship.

Sometimes in our experience, our relationship with the Lord is characterized by fear as a result of being ruled in a wrong sense — in bondage, under the law. Paul describes the law's ruling over us in Romans 7:1: "Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion [rules] over a man as long as he lives?" Then he speaks of being married to the law — that hard, ruling husband that brings us into bondage and activates sin even more. At the same time, Paul tells us that as believers we are married to another, "even to Him who is raised from the dead" (7:4). So, we are joined to our resurrected Husband. Because He is now joined to our spirit, we are one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). Now, rather than being related to the law, we are related to a Person — our Lord Jesus Christ. And our relationship with the Lord is characterized by love, grace, mercy, and fellowship. In this kind of relationship with the Lord we enjoy an ease in coming to Him. We can approach Him without timidity and fear. We are not thinking that maybe now God has a different attitude toward us. No, when the love of God comes to us and we see His unconditional love, our whole relationship with the Lord is changed from fear to love. He brings us into this kind of enjoyment.

As we have seen, one of the manifestations of God's unconditional love to His people is that they will call Him "My Man, My Husband." Then the Lord says in Hosea 2:17, "I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals, and they shall be remembered by their name no more." This indicates that in our relationship with the

Lord in love, He will remove all remembrance of being under bondage to the law. Our relationship with Him will be altogether characterized by intimacy and love. Relating to Him in any other way will not even come to our thought. So, the unconditional love of God radically changes our relationship with the Lord.

Some of us need this radical change in our relationship with the Lord, because we base God's love toward us absolutely on how we feel and on our record of failures or successes. We imagine that God either loves us or does not love us according to whether or not we have had "a good day" or "a good week." But Hosea reveals that God's love is unmistakably unconditional.

In Jeremiah 31:3 the Lord says to Israel, "I have loved you with an everlasting love." And in Ezekiel 16, He tells her that He saw her in her nativity. Verse 6 says, "And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, Live! Yes, I said to you in your blood, Live!" And He made them alive and caused them to thrive and mature, and He shepherded them. This was their condition — they were in their blood. This means they were wallowing in their misery, in their death. And He said, "I saw you." He found them in their blood. Has He ever caught you in that condition? One day you were in your blood, wallowing in your misery and your failure. When you deserved a spanking, He said, "I love you. I demonstrated it. Your sins are on My Son. He bore them once and for all. Now just come to Me. Come and be loved." This is relationship-changing love in Hosea 2.

Healing Love

Let us see more of the manifestations of God's unconditional love in Hosea 6. Verses 1-3 say, ¹ "Come, and let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. ² After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight. ³ Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth." This is the way the Lord comes to us.

These verses in Hosea 6 are based upon Deuteronomy 32:39, when the Lord spoke through Moses saying, "Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; nor is there any who can deliver from My hand." This is a revelation of God's sovereignty over us. "I kill and I make alive. I wound and I heal." He is involved in all of it. Hosea reflects this same word in chapter 6, verse 1: "Come, and let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up." And then he says in verse 2, "After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us

up, that we may live in His sight.” All this signifies healing love.

Love in the Realm of Resurrection

God’s sovereign love has a pattern in all of our experiences — the pattern of death and resurrection. This pattern begins with our going into death and passing through death, where our natural life is tested. The testing has the effect of wounding, striking, and ultimately weakening our natural strength. Passing through these environments we are “delivered to death,” as Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 4:11. In these situations we have little feeling or sensation of God. It is a kind of death. This is a part of the pattern of God’s sovereign love. Then the Lord revives us, and on the third day He raises us up in order that we may experience life out of death. This is another part of the pattern of His sovereign love — resurrection life out of death. “He has torn, but He will heal us. He has stricken, but He will bind us up.” This means that He will bring us forth in resurrection.

Sovereign Love

God’s unconditional love is a sovereign love. This sovereign love embraces the totality of our living — all our circumstances, both inward circumstances, such as how we feel, how we react, how we relate, as well as our outward circumstances, which are things that happen to us that cause us to react. God is wonderfully sovereign in His ways over us. He knows how our heart is prone to wander from Him. Because He knows exactly where our heart is at any given moment, He allows whatever circumstance He allows. Thus, like Paul in Romans 9:20, we simply need to come under the sovereign love of God: “But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, Why have you made me like this?” Who can say to the Potter, “Why have You made me like this?” In other words, who can say, “Why did this happen to me?” Paul continues to challenge our reasoning mind in Romans 9:21a: “Does not the potter have power over the clay?” It is the Potter’s choice to fashion this lump of clay in whatever way He desires. And if the clay is marred in His hand, He takes it off the potter’s wheel and reshapes it again, as it seems good to Him. Praise the Lord, our lives are altogether under His sovereignty.

Who can add one cubit to his stature? (Matt. 6:27). Who can control tomorrow? Who can predict what will happen next week? (James 4:13-15). We are under God’s sovereign, unconditional love. In Deuteronomy 33:27a, He assures us that He is carrying us in His arms: “The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” His arms are underneath us. Thus,

if we are torn, if we are stricken, that is part of the process of death and resurrection, in order that the life of Christ might be exhibited through us and in us. In 2 Corinthians 4:11 Paul says, “For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” Here the phrase “for Jesus’ sake” should be literally translated “because of Jesus.” So, it is because of Jesus that we are handed over to environments of perplexity and confusion. The word “perplexed” used by Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:8 comes from a Greek word ἀπορέω. The prefix means “no,” and the root means “way.” Thus, it is rendered “no way” or “at a loss for a way.” You have no way. You have no answers.

Many times God’s sovereign love designs that you have no answer. You are in front of a wall. You cannot go over it, around it, or under it. There is no way that you can penetrate it. There is no answer. You just kneel in front of the wall and say, “O Lord Jesus. Hallelujah, I am in Your hands.” In this kind of death situation — whatever it is — He will revive you. And on the third day, He will raise you up in resurrection. That means, God needs a little time to prove that it is not your deliverance. After a few days there in death, you begin to stink; you begin to realize that there is no ability in you. But then, seemingly out of nowhere, there is an inner surge, an inner welling up of life. Then your mind begins to see things differently. God is sovereign over all. He has torn and He is going to heal. He is healing you now. He has stricken you and He will bandage you up.

Thus, God’s sovereign love comes to us in a pattern: death and resurrection, death and resurrection. And this cycle is repeated over and over again in our experience. Just as the Lord Jesus passed through death and resurrection, we follow in His pattern. This is how Paul wanted to know the Lord. And Hosea 6:1-3 speaks of our “following on to know the Lord” in this way (KJV). Do you want to know the Lord? The way to know the Lord is to know Him in death and in resurrection. In Philippians 3:10-11 Paul said, ¹⁰ “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, ¹¹ if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” This is how we know the Lord — not according to our thought, but according to His thought.

You may want to shout from the mountaintops, “Hallelujah for His sovereign love!” The period of death that you are passing through may be a little longer than you would have expected. But, oh, the resurrection — the life coming out of death, which expresses Him. This is the unconditional love of God. It is God’s sovereign love as well as His relationship-changing love from Hosea chapter 6.

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THE PEOPLE OF GOD

I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” This is a recurring statement heard again and again from the pages of the Bible. From the time of Moses until the time of the New Jerusalem, it is a statement that keeps proceeding from the mouth of God. We find it sprinkled through the Old Testament’s Pentateuch, historical books, and major and minor prophets, as well as through the New Testament. Moses uttered it on behalf of God. So did David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Zechariah, Paul, Peter, and John. It seems that throughout the ages God’s desire has never changed. From the beginning to this day, He has wanted a people who belong exclusively to Him!

We know from the book of Genesis that the establishing of God’s people began with Abraham. Prior to the time of Abraham, God did not have a corporate people. He only had individuals such as Seth, Enoch, and Noah. But with the calling of Abraham, God began to establish a people for Himself. He made a promise to Abraham that he and his descendants would be given the land of Canaan and that He would be their God (Gen. 17:8). Of course, the descendants of Abraham became the nation of Israel, and it was to Israel that the phrase “My people” referred. But then through the prophet Hosea, God declared that in the future His people would include not only the children of Israel, but also certain ones who were not His people (Hosea 1:10; 2:23). The apostle Paul tells us that through the salvation of Christ it was the Gentiles of whom Hosea spoke (Rom. 9:24-26). So in the New Testament age, both Jew and Gentile comprise God’s people. That is, all who believe in Christ, regardless of nationality or race, constitute His people. And what is the name of that corporate group of people? The New Testament simply calls it “the church.” Hence, today when we read the phrase “I shall be their God, and they shall be My people,” that people of whom God speaks is the church.

A Corporate Entity

Although it may seem obvious, we must understand that when we read the phrase “My people,” it is a *corporate people* to whom God refers. It is not merely the sum of numerous, yet scattered, individuals. Nor is it comprised of a few outstanding spiritual giants. Admittedly, the lives of certain individual men and women throughout biblical times and church history have provided for us many inspiring and helpful biographies that we read today. This is wonderful, but it comes short of God’s desire. What God wants is a people — a corporate people. Yes, God raises up spiritual giants. But we must ask,

for what purpose? For instance, we know God raised up Moses. But why did He raise up Moses? Was it just to have a spiritual giant on earth? No. It is clearly evident from the Bible that God raised up Moses to be a vessel through whom He could obtain a people for Himself. Moses was not the goal. He was merely a tool used by God to reach the goal. The goal was a people. If God had not called a people out of Egypt, Moses would never have been raised up by God. Thus, God raises up certain individuals not as ends in themselves, but as vessels to aid in the establishing of God’s people.

If we could enter into the very depths of God, we would find a deep desire, an intense burden, for “My people.” By the constant resounding of this phrase’s chord throughout the Bible, it is evident that His people is what pulsates within the heart of God. And yet, it is not only its repetition which convinces us of this fact. It is also the certainty and resoluteness with which He declares it. All of this discloses how deeply His desire for the church reverberates within His Being. He does not want legions of angels. Nor does He want solar systems or galaxies. He does not want animal life or plant life. He already has all of these. What God wants is a corporate people! This is the eternal desire and purpose of our God. And this is the unmistakable revelation of the Bible.

The Kind of People

What kind of people does God want? This is a crucial question, because we have often considered that, in relation to God’s people, quantity is all-important. That is, the emphasis in many Christian circles has been on the preaching of the gospel. We rejoice in hearing of large crowds responding to the good news of Christ. And rejoice we should! It is a monumental event when just one sinner turns to Jesus. However, our emphasis on numbers has often inadvertently resulted in the neglect of the *kind* of people God desires. We must ask, does the quality of His people mean anything to God? Or do sheer numbers satisfy God? Let us allow the Word of God to answer this question. In his letter to Titus, the apostle Paul states:

Christ Jesus . . . gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:14).

Then the apostle Peter declares:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

These passages indicate that God desires a certain *kind* of people. Paul and Peter enumerate some of the features that characterize the kind of people He wants. It is a people that have been purified, that are no longer in darkness or lawlessness, that are holy and kingly, that proclaim the excellencies of God. All of this implies that it is not just a matter of numbers. His people, the church, must be of a certain inward nature and have a certain outward expression.

My People

If then we were asked to concisely describe the kind of people God desires, what would we say? Apart from producing a long list of characteristics, how would we describe the quality of God's people? "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" is the phrase which God uses to describe it. This phrase captures, in a most succinct way, the kind of people He desires to secure. Thus, if we are to understand the kind of people God is after, we must understand the meaning of this phrase.

Let us first consider the last half of the phrase "they shall be My people." The possessive pronoun "My" expresses what God desires — a people who are *His* people. That is, a people who belong exclusively to Him. As the two passages above state, they are "a people for His own possession." These words have also been translated from the original Greek text as "a peculiar people" or "His own special people." This refers to something that is specially selected for one's own. Thus, it is a private and special possession peculiar to a person. This is how God considers His people — exclusively His own. They are His special possession, as He declared in Isaiah: "The people *whom I formed for Myself* will declare My praise" (Isa. 43:21).

Moreover, we must see that God's people were not formed to be just *partially* His. That is, we are not to belong partially to the world and partially to God. Rather, we are to belong *wholly* to God. Indeed, the Bible reveals that God has purchased the church. We all have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, and no longer belong to anyone or anything but Him (Acts 20:28). He paid the price and is now our sole owner. Hence, we legally belong to Him. Not only so — God even took it one step further. The Bible reveals that He sealed us with the Holy Spirit as a mark of His ownership (Eph. 1:13-14). Upon us is an invisible stamp of the Spirit that signifies to Whom we belong. And finally, the Bible tells us that we are God's inheritance (Deut. 9:26, 29; 32:9). So often we think only in terms of our inheritance, of us being the heirs of God. But the other side of the truth is that God will one day inherit us! When? At the second coming of Christ. When Jesus comes again, God will fully possess what He has legally purchased and sealed (Eph. 1:14).

Thus, we have been purchased and sealed by Him. This is a legal fact in the spiritual realm. However, God is not satisfied with just legal fact. He wants practical reality as well. In other words, He wants a people who have willingly given their whole life to Him because of Who He is. They have seen God. They have tasted His glory. They have known the surpassing excellency of Jesus Christ. And as a result, all other items have become trivial and worthless. The things and pleasures of this world — which are the idols of others' hearts — are discarded. These people only want God. They are seekers and lovers and pursuers of God. He has won their whole heart and complete affection. This is the kind of people God is after.

Regrettably, even as believers, we sometimes allow other little gods to have place within our hearts. We may not have literal idols made of wood or stone, as the children of Israel did in the Old Testament. But we often have inward idols — things which rob our affections. It could be a certain relationship, a career, a goal or aspiration, money, a form of entertainment such as sports or TV, or a possession. Of course, the biggest idol of all is the self. But regardless of what it is, the basic principle of an idol is that it wins a part of our heart. This is not to say it wins our whole heart. No, we may still love God with part of our affections, and perhaps with most of our affections — but not all of our affections. Some other object has been allowed to intrude and is now "sharing space" with God within our affections.

So God desires to purify for Himself a people for His own possession. Not partial possession. But total and exclusive possession. Idols, whatever they are, must be evicted in order that God's possession might be complete. Then God will have a people of whom He can truly say, "They are My people." We can see a picture of this in Israel's experience in the Old Testament. Although God purchased them, called them out of Egypt, gave them the good land, and established the temple among them, eventually He was forced to go far away from them and to depart from His sanctuary (Ezek. 8). His glory left the temple (Ezek. 10:4, 18-19). Why? Because of Israel's idols. It was not that they had abandoned God completely. They had just allowed idols to come in alongside of God, so that God was forced to share space with the idols among His people. Finally, God had to remove Himself from their midst.

Thus, to obtain a people God must purify us. Thank God that the purifying process is His work and not ours (Titus 2:14; Eph. 5:26-27). It is His task to evict all the idols within our heart. Left to ourselves, we would never be purified! But God is able. And how does He do it? He does it by the infusion of His glory. When we see Him and touch His glory, we cannot but abandon every idol. His beauty alone dispels the delusive attraction of idols. Praise Him! What then is our part? Our

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Handling Love

Hosea 11:2a says, “As they called them [the prophets, God’s servants], so they went from them.” This means that God’s speaking came to His people, Israel, but they ran from His speaking. Verse 2 continues, “they sacrificed to the Baals, and burned incense to carved images.” This shows them continuing in their rebellion. Then verse 3 says, “I taught Ephraim to walk.” Ephraim, one of the tribes in the north, refers to Israel. So Ephraim represents God’s people. Of Ephraim, God says, ³ “I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms; but they did not know that I healed them. ⁴ I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love, and I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them.”

This love is “handling love.” It is the way God handles us in our rebellion. Here in Hosea 11:2 there is rebellion. God sent His servants to His people, and they went from them. They went back to their Baals and they sacrificed. Do you know what God’s unconditional love does in that state? He says, “I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms; but they did not know that I healed them.” This describes the tenderness with which the Lord handled His people. Then in verse 4 He amplifies on how He handled them: “I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love.” Here, “gentle cords” and “bands of love” are in apposition to one another; so they are referring to the same thing. The gentle cords are the bands of love.

In these verses Ephraim is pictured as a stubborn, rebellious heifer. Usually, stubborn heifers would be handled with great ropes to control their rebellion. But God does not do that with us. He does not throw those heavy ropes over our rebellion and try, so to speak, to force us to the ground, and then draw us like a beast. He does not handle us in that way. Even when we are rebellious, He is so delicate and so gentle. He draws us with gentle cords — cords of a man, not cords of a beast. Using these thin gentle cords, He tugs slightly and draws until our rebellion begins to be subdued.

This is the way He has handled us. In our rebellion and stubbornness, we may have even tried at times to get away from the Lord. Yet He did not subdue us by any strength. But He came gently and drew us with bands of love, melting our heart. We have a song we enjoy singing about our stubborn will:

*Dear Lord Jesus, precious Jesus,
How can I still stubborn be?
At Thy feet cast all my hard’nings,
And return with songs and singings;
'Tis my love to be Thy bondslave,
'Tis my joy to Thee obey.*

How can we be stubborn any longer, when His love overwhelms us and draws us? This is God’s handling love.

Some years ago I was burdened for a person who was not making progress in the Lord. They were rebellious, and steeped in their rebellion. So I prayed with this verse every morning: “The goodness of God [the kindness of God] leads you to repentance” (Rom. 2:4). I prayed, “Lord, by Your kindness lead this one to repentance.” And then I watched what happened in their environment — how God came, not in a direct way to reveal Himself as God, but indirectly, in a way that caught their attention and won their interest. So God came to them, mellowed them, and broke them, drawing them with His kindness.

This is more of God’s hedging-up love and His walling-in love. When you are going after your lovers, you need to pray, “Lord, hedge me up with a path of thorns and wall me in. And also, Lord, grant Your kindness to lead me to repentance.” Oh, God is so tender. His love is so thoughtful. He knows just how to handle us and how to touch the right place in our heart.

When I was a young man in high school, I was consumed with the dream of playing professional football. I was going my way, and I had my goal. I was not seeking God. But I walked into a classroom in my sophomore year, and saw a girl sitting on the front row. She really caught my attention. Little did I know that at that moment God was drawing me with cords of love. He was coming to me through what He knew would be meaningful to me and would attract me.

Through that young girl, who later became my wife, I found the Lord, and I knew He was real. Then He came and handled me in such a wonderful way. I had played varsity baseball for three years, but I had never had a high batting average. But in my senior year when I found the Lord, something amazing happened. The sky was bluer, the grass was greener. I heard the birds singing. Confidence filled me. God was alive. I got up to the plate and hit nine straight singles in a row. This was all God’s way of drawing me with cords of love. He came to me in my little concepts and views — in my little world — and made Himself so real.

This is God’s delicate way of handling us. It is just like a mother handles her naughty child. She knows the child is naughty, but she also knows his disposition is of such a nature that if she reprimands him too strongly, he will lose heart and his whole being will inwardly give up. A wise mother will evaluate how to deal with the child’s naughtiness, handling him according to his capacity to hear and receive.

This is how God’s love came to rebellious Israel, who was like a kicking, stubborn heifer. Instead of throwing a noose around her neck with a big rope and forcing her to the ground, He drew her gently, tugging

with strings of love. This is the love of God in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit, touching us and being manifested to us. He even touches our hearts through love coming from others. Oh, this is glorious. This is God's handling love.

Relieving Love

Now let us enjoy another aspect of God's love in Hosea 11:4b: "And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them." Israel is pictured here as an animal under a heavy yoke. Then the Lord comes and takes the yoke from her neck. And because she had been in that position, under that kind of yoke for so long, He did not tell her to stand up erect to be fed. Instead, with one hand He took the yoke off; and with the other hand, He stooped down and fed her. This is God's relieving love. He takes the yoke off and He stoops and He feeds.

Intrinsic Love

Hosea 11:7-9 shows us yet more of God's heart of love toward us. Verse 7 says, "My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they call to the Most High, none at all exalt Him." In other words, they mouth the words, but they do not mean what they say. They do not really exalt Him. They are bent on backsliding. Then the Lord says in verse 8, "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim?" As we mentioned earlier, these two cities are associated negatively with Sodom and Gomorrah in Deuteronomy 29:23. When God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, He included these two cities also. So here He is saying to Israel, "How can I do that?"

In a sense, judicially, we deserved that kind of judgment because of our rebellion. But listen to God's intrinsic love, the love that is part of His very being. He is talking in a way that tells us that He cannot help Himself. He loves us. But you ask, Why? There is no reason. It is electing love. It is because God chose to love you. God decided to make you an object of His love. So regardless of where you are — in blood, in death, in rebellion, in sin, in the world — you are an object of the love of God, and you are a victim of that love. And one day you will come face to face with the fact that God loves you. This is how God's heart was toward Israel. He said, "My heart churns within Me. My sympathy is stirred." This is the love of God toward His rebellious people — even His heart churns and His sympathy is stirred.

A New Testament counterpart for Hosea 11:8 is Hebrews 4:14-16: ¹⁴ "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus

the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." The Lord is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. This reveals more of His intrinsic love. This sympathetic love comes from the One who has been tried and tempted in all points as we are.

In the Greek language there is the aorist tense, which defines something that happened at a point of time in the past, but does not necessarily have a continuing effect in the present. In the Greek there is also the perfect tense, describing something that happened at a point of time in the past and has a continuing effect in the present. So the perfect tense defines a present state or reality that is based upon a past action.

The perfect tense is used in Hebrews 4:15 for the word "tempted" or "tried." Thus the Lord as our High Priest is able to sympathize with our weaknesses as One who "was tempted in all points as we are" and continues to know and feel the pressures and agonies that we pass through in being tempted. He passed through it. He was tempted in all points yet without sin. It is not that He was tried two thousand years ago and now He no longer feels the effects of what He passed through. He knows presently all the pressures and the problems that we sinful human beings pass through in our trials. And He is able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses.

He is not just there on the throne objectively looking at us from afar. Because He lives within us, He is sympathizing in and with our own weaknesses. He feels them. His sympathetic love is within us because He Himself has been tried. He was tempted in His will. He was tempted in His mind. He was tempted in His emotions. He was tempted in His body. He was tempted in every point. He knows the struggle. He knows the pressures. He knows it all. He still feels it this moment. On the throne, the One who has been tried continues presently to feel with us what we are passing through. He is fully entering into our feelings — feeling our feelings with us, bearing what we bear. His sympathy is not merely an outward advising or instructing like we might receive from a counselor in the world. The Lord as our Counselor has a way, from within us, of feeling and sympathizing with our weaknesses. So this is the kind of love expressed in Hosea. This is intrinsically how the Lord feels toward us.*

* The above article, "Manifestations of God's Unconditional Love," is from chapter 4 of a new book entitled *God's Unconditional Love*, by Bill Freeman. The book is available for \$5.00, postpaid. You may order by writing to **Ministry Publications**, P.O. Box 12222, Scottsdale, AZ 85267, or by calling (602) 948-4050.

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part is simply to stay in intimate fellowship with the Lord. We cannot directly evict idols, but we can stay in direct touch with Him, enjoying His grace and beholding His beauty. We can daily abide in His Word for nourishment. And by such contact with the Lord, He does the purifying work. He evicts the idols. But when we neglect our fellowship with Him, as a well-known hymn says, our hearts are “prone to wander.” The natural inclination of our hearts and our flesh is away from God, not toward God. By merely neglecting contact with God, we find ourselves tolerating things that should have no place in us. But when we stay in regular fellowship with Him, both in our individual times with the Lord and in the corporate meetings of the church, our hearts are spontaneously kept single and pure. How we need the supply of the Spirit to keep our hearts pure! By such a supply, we automatically give Him all our affections, time, money, energy, future, aspirations, and goals. Everything we are and everything we have belongs exclusively to Him.

Their God

“I shall be their God, and they shall be My people.” We have seen thus far the second half of this phrase. But now let us return to the first half, which is “I shall be their God.” What does this mean? It means simply this: God fully gives Himself to us. As we fully give ourselves to Him to be His people, He fully gives Himself to us to be our God. We could call this a “mutual full-giving.” This is why God has purposed to have a people, the church. He wants a group of people to whom He can fully give Himself. What a wonderful, glorious, and awesome relationship to have with God. We, as His people, have the privilege of being the recipients of God’s full-giving.

This giving is not the mere giving of material or human blessings. It is not even the giving of heaven or a spiritual position or the ability to live forever. Of course, this is all included in what God gives to us. As Paul states, we have been blessed with “every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies” and God freely gives us “all things” (Eph. 1:3; Rom. 8:32). But more than all this, God has given *Himself* to us. His very Person, life, and nature have been fully given to His people. He dwells in our midst. He walks among us, speaks to us, and indwells us. So now we can say, “He is our God.” We possess Him. He belongs to us. *Belongs to us!* Have you ever considered that God belongs to you? He is ours! He is ours to love, enjoy, and participate in. Moreover, the Bible tells us that we will inherit God. On one hand, God will inherit us. But on the other hand, we will inherit Him. We are heirs of God and co-heirs of Christ (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29; 4:1-7; Eph. 1:11, 14).

This is a marvelous fact. And we must see that the more we allow God to purify us from all our idols, the more He will

dwell in our midst. This is clearly seen in 2 Corinthians 6. Here, we find Paul beseeching the saints at Corinth to purify themselves from all items and involvements that are incompatible with God. He asks them, “What partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols?” (vv. 14b-16). Such questions indicate that some of the believers in Corinth had permitted a number of these incompatible matters into their daily lives. As a result, God could not fully walk among them to be their God. So what does Paul do? He exhorts them to come out of and separate themselves from all such involvements. He implores them to cleanse themselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit (2 Cor. 6:17; 7:1). And by their doing this, Paul promises them that God will flood them with His presence. God will welcome them, walk among them, be a father to them, and manifestly dwell in their midst. Paul even quotes the Old Testament, saying: “I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate, says the Lord. And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:16b-18).

We can see from this that God’s presence — His dwelling in the midst of a people — is not an accidental matter. Certain spiritual laws govern where His manifest presence will reside. It has nothing to do with who we are. God is no respecter of persons. It is simply that whenever God is able to secure a group of people who allow Him to purify them from all idols and to single their hearts — *there* is where He will “presence” Himself. As He promised, “I will be their God.”

— Kirk Eland

the Christian

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