

In Hosea, the relationship between Hosea and his wife Gomer is a living parable of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Ultimately, it's a picture of the relationship between God and his people.

Hosea's wife Gomer has worked as a temple prostitute in the worship of the god Baal, through which she received all manner of riches. Now, she is called an "adulteress" who is "loved by another man." In verse 2, she is purchased, which might indicate she has fallen into slavery.

Such is the path of sin. What promises (and delivers) profit for a time soon turns into a trap that promises to devour us and take our lives. This is where Israel is in the time of Hosea. And this is where each of us is in our sin and rebellion. The wages of sin is death, and we cannot save ourselves.

Perhaps you feel like Gomer this morning. You are caught in a snare of sin from which you cannot free yourself. This sin—whether porn or sexual immorality, gossip or cowardice, bitterness or unforgiveness, greed or addiction, laziness or gluttony, self-righteousness or perfectionism or one of a thousand other things—at first delivered you pleasure and power. But now, it has ensnared you. It is killing you. You feel ashamed to even sit in church. You feel no hope of approaching God.

Look at Hosea 3. Find hope in a God whose faithfulness to his people is greater than their unfaithfulness.

1) The Lord loves his people. In verse one, the Lord commands Hosea to **"Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress..."** She is called "a woman" and not "your wife" because she has broken the marriage covenant. She is an "adulteress." She has no claim on Hosea or his love. Hosea has every right to divorce her and no obligation to love her.

The Lord gives his reason for this command. Hosea's action is a sign of the love Yahweh has for Israel—**"even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins."**

"Cakes of raisins" were likely viewed as an aphrodisiac and used in their worship of false gods. Like Gomer, Israel has turned away from her husband, Yahweh, and joined herself to other gods. Having broken the covenant, Israel has no right to the love of Yahweh. He has every right to send her away.

So it is with us. We have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We deserve to be cast into hell to suffer beneath the wrath of God forever. But this chapter reminds us of an astonishing fact: **the Lord loves his (unfaithful, adulterous, whoring, idolatrous) people.** He sees his people, enslaved in their sins, following Satan, dead in spirit and flesh—and he has compassion on them.

It is this love that is at the center of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As John writes, "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."¹ That is the main point of this chapter: **God loves his sinful people through Jesus Christ.**

Here are two central applications: First, believe that God loves you and redeems through Christ. Second, learn from God what it means to love.

¹ 1 John 4:10

2) Therefore, he pursues his people. The Lord's command for Hosea to love Gomer begins with the word "Go." It is not "wait for her to come back to you. Once she has returned, start to love her." No, Hosea is to make the first move. He is to go find Hosea, purchase her redemption, and draw her into a relationship of mutual love and faithfulness. This is a picture and a promise to unfaithful Israel of God's love. He will pursue Israel and save her.

This is how God loves us. He makes the first move. Again, 1 John 4:10—"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." He loved us first, and made the first move—he sent his Son.

A word here about marriage. This chapter paints a picture of what it means to be a husband. Genesis 2 records God's creation of human beings. Listen to the culmination of that chapter:

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.²

They are one flesh—naked and not ashamed. The proper culmination of marriage is a mutually benevolent union. *Unity* is the goal. We see this throughout the Bible, as God promised to come and dwell with his people. We see this in the Gospel as Christ is *united* to his Bride, the church. We see this at the end of the Bible, as God's people reign with him.

Notice how that unity happens—"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Interesting, given that in the Ancient Near East it was the woman who left her family to become part of her husband's family. Why write it like this?

The first picture of marriage shows us that the role of the husband is to make the sacrifice to pursue a benevolent union with his bride. He leaves his family to pursue and be united to her.

We see this throughout scripture. When Israel was enslaved, the Lord came to them and rescued them. The Son of God left his Father's side to pursue his bride and bring her to himself.

Husbands, are you pursuing unity with your wife by being the first to sacrifice, to lay aside your own interests to pursue her in a way that results in mutual love and unity?

This isn't just a word for husbands: this is what all love looks like. Love takes the first step, sacrificing its own interests for the good of others, to pursue loving unity with others. Is there someone in your life, perhaps in this congregation, against whom you are nursing a grievance? Who is it that you feel division with, who you are bitter at, who you are unwilling to take the first step to be unified with? Are you content to have had God pursue you when you were his enemy but feel justified in refusing to take the first step to reconcile with the one who has offended you?

3) Therefore, he redeems his people. Hosea tells us, "**So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley.**" We don't know the exact circumstances in this instance, but it seems Gomer fell into some kind of slavery, possibly through debt.

Hosea buys her freedom for fifteen shekels of silver. The price is not excessive, half the price of a female slave in the Law.³ Barley is inexpensive. A homer and a lethech is around 5-10 bushels. The

² Genesis 2:24–25

³ Exodus 21:32

added grain may represent haggling over the price. All-in-all, she is not expensive—a half-price slave with some cereal thrown in for good measure. This highlights her desperate condition.

Think of how humiliating it must have been for Hosea to go to find Gomer, approach her lover (or *owner*), and explain that he wants her back as his wife. Then, he must haggle over a price.

Again, we see a picture of God's love. Our Lord is a humble God in the sense that he condescends to rescue his people. We see this most clearly in the Gospel.

Jesus is the bridegroom. We, his rebellious people, were the wayward bride. Jesus leaves his Father's side to pursue his bride in a remarkable way. Fully God, he humbles himself and takes on human nature. He lives the lives we, his bride, failed to live—perfect, faithful, spotless, holy.

Then, most remarkably, Jesus purchases us by paying the debt we owed—death beneath the wrath of God. Paul writes, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”⁴ On the cross, he became in God's eyes the most wretched adulteress, vile murdered, hardened criminal, and self-righteous bigot, the worst sinner that ever lived, for all our sin was placed on him. And God's wrath was poured out until that sin was paid for.

Rising from the dead, he proved his sacrifice was accepted. We were set free from sin, death, and the power of the devil. All who repent and trust in him are counted as righteous with his perfection.

Our first application must be to trust Jesus. To see ourselves as the true and greater Gomer, and Christ as the true and better Hosea. We cannot gain our freedom; we are only free by Jesus' work.

In his love, we learn what it means to love one another. Listen to Paul's instructions to husbands: Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.⁵

In Paul's day, the task of bathing a young woman was the work of a slave. Notice the radically countercultural nature of this command. Paul is giving slave-work to the husband. A husband is to humble himself, taking the form of a slave, to serve his wife. Husbands, are you loving your wives after the pattern of Jesus who dressed as a slave and washed the feet of his disciples?

This does not apply only to husbands. After washing his disciples' feet, our Lord said: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”⁶ Are there those in your life with whom you are not at peace, who have offended you, but you are unwilling to lay aside your rights to self-sacrificially love to restore the relationship?

4) Therefore, he disciplines his people. After redeeming Gomer, Hosea gives her strange instructions (3:3): “**You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you.**” She is no longer to be a prostitute or adulteress, she is not to engage in sexual relations. Her old habits of disobedience are to be ended. She is to live as his, not only because he bought her freedom, but because she is his wife.

Most commentators understand “so will I also be to you” to mean that Hosea will refrain from

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁵ Ephesians 5:25–27

⁶ John 13:34

sexual relations with Gomer, despite her being his wife. For some undefined period, they will live faithfully as husband and wife but without enjoying the full intimacy of marriage.

This strange arrangement points to what is in the future for Israel, as is explained in verse 4: **“For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods.”** For “many days”—an undefined period—the Lord will take away a list of items from Israel. The list of pairings points to Israel’s old patterns of sin—a syncretistic mixing of Old Covenant worship and paganism.

“**King**” speaks of Israel’s government. Israel’s national sovereignty and social structures would be destroyed as they are taken into exile. They would no longer have a king to unite their hearts to worship Yahweh. “**Prince**” may refer to the alliances they made with foreign nations.

“**Sacrifice**” refers to Levitical sacrifices in the temple. In exile, they would no longer be able to sacrifice and worship in the temple. “**Pillar**” likely refers to the stone pillars set up in pagan worship, which were forbidden by the Law.⁷

“**Ephod**” refers to the priestly vestments worn in the temple. “**Household gods**” refer to the idols used in pagan divination.

Through all this, we see the heart of Israel's sin. They claimed to be the Lord's in temple worship, and yet they joined themselves to other gods in pagan worship. The Lord is a jealous God; he demands the full and complete faithfulness of his people.

So, out of love, he will purify Israel through many days in exile. They will be God's people, but they will not enjoy full intimacy with him. Through discipline, the Lord will painfully put to death the things that enslaved them, so that he can bring true holiness to life.

The author of Hebrews writes that Jesus, the son of God, learned obedience and was made perfect through suffering.⁸ He assures us that God disciplines us as sons: “...the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”⁹ It is because he loves us that he trains us to walk in righteousness. The Lord is willing to inflict pain on us to loosen our grip on sin and to teach us to enjoy his perfect love.

A word of caution: We must be careful with our analogies; every analogy breaks down. The Lord mixes his metaphors throughout Hosea. How do we think about “discipline” in marriage?

We see parents given the responsibility to discipline their children. Church members are given the responsibility to discipline wayward members. The state is given the sword to punish evildoers. But there is *no* corresponding command for a husband to discipline his wife. The command to wives to submit to the loving, self-sacrificing headship of her husband is given to *her*. The husband is not commanded to “make her submit.” The first man and woman were created to exercise dominion over the earth and its creatures *together*. They were not designed to exercise dominion over each other. A husband's headship is the imitation of Christ, humbling himself to serve and pursue unity with her.

That said, God’s actions toward Israel do model what love looks like. Love does not allow another to dwell in sin. One of the reasons that Jesus gives us parents, government, and the local

⁷ Deuteronomy 16:22

⁸ Hebrews 2:10; 5:8

⁹ Hebrews 12:6

church is to discipline us when we stray from him. In the church, we are commanded to confront particularly grievous sin and, if repentance is not seen, to remove the person from church membership, from enjoying intimacy with the body of Christ.¹⁰ This act of “handing them over to Satan” is a loving act, designed to teach them to return to the one who bought them.¹¹

5) Therefore, they shall love him. In verse five, we see the result of the Lord’s love. After this undefined period, **“the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.”** The painful discipline will be successful. Israel *shall* return and *shall* seek the Lord. They will desire him again and want to live as his people. They will seek "David their king." The divided nation will be unified under the rule of the promised descendant of David, who would reign forever. They will come in fear to him and "his goodness." The pain of discipline will teach them how good the Lord truly is. They will no longer long for or go after another.

All this will happen "in the latter days." Those “latter days” find their fulfillment in Jesus. In his sermon at Pentecost in Acts 2, Peter says the gift of the Holy Spirit marks the arrival of “the last days.” Jesus ascended into heaven to sit at God’s right hand in glory. He is Son of David, the King, who now pours his Spirit into our hearts, dwelling intimately with those who are united to him through faith.

Through his pursuit and self-sacrificing redemption of us, we are now united with Christ, our Bridegroom. This blessed union has been inaugurated—and we await its glorious consumption when Jesus raises us from the dead to reign with him in glory. We now enjoy what Israel heard in promise. Through Jesus, we have come to God and tasted his goodness.

Perhaps you are feeling the sting of discipline as God lovingly seeks to draw you out of your sin and back to himself. Would you leave your sin and come to him?

Perhaps you are groaning with creation—your spirit loves the Lord, but your body groans with the world under a curse. Perhaps you think that God has abandoned you to your sin or to your suffering. Let this passage encourage you that God’s pursuit of his people is always successful. His people “shall return..., and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness.”

The Lord’s love for you is greater than your love for sin. The Lord’s grace toward you is greater than your guilt. The Lord’s faithfulness to you is greater than your unfaithfulness to him. The Lord’s desire to bring you to himself is greater than your desire to wander from him.

Trust in Jesus. He loves you. He pursued you. He redeemed you. He is sanctifying you. He will bring you to himself in a glorious, eternal, union of love.

¹⁰ Matthew 18:15-20

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 5:5