



Daily Verse and Comment

Hosea 10:1-2

(1) Israel was a spreading vine;
he brought forth fruit for himself.
As his fruit increased,
he built more altars;
as his land prospered,
he adorned his sacred stones. (2) Their heart is deceitful,
and now they must bear their guilt.
The LORD will demolish their altars
and destroy their sacred stones.

New International Version

We can observe a connection between prosperity and the increase of altars and the Laodicean's making a poor judgment of his spiritual condition. The Revised Standard Version translates these phrases in [Hosea 10:1](#) as, "The more his fruit increased the more altars he built; as his country improved he improved his pillars."

Both altars and pillars are references to religion - specifically, pagan religion. The plural terms reflect a typically carnal conclusion that numerical increase indicates growth and of a sort that is good because [God](#) must surely approve. Growth in the number of places of worship would convince most that religion is flourishing.

Religion, though, is different from secular pursuits. The greatest Teacher and Pastor who ever graced this earth preached to tens of thousands of people, yet ended His ministry with only 120 converts. Moreover, He calls the church a "little flock," signifying that it would never grow large ([Luke 12:32](#)). Using numbers as the standard, [Jesus](#) was an outright failure! Any large Billy Graham evangelistic campaign produces more "conversions" each night than Jesus had during His entire ministry.

Many comparisons are elusive and easily manipulated, not deserving to be depended upon as true evaluations of quality. For instance, Americans tend to rate the greatness of a city by the size of its population. But is New York City really the greatest American city? Does it really deserve to be called "the Big Apple"? In the public mind, the strength of a commercial business is measured by its income. If a business does a million dollars more business this year than last, then it is considered to be flourishing. Evaluating in this manner is one thing that gets the Laodicean in trouble. Religion, however, is not that sort of commodity at all; it is spirit.

We sometimes say, "So and so is a big man." What do we mean by this? The person may not be physically impressive, but we suggest the greatness of his influence. [Isaiah 53:2](#) says of Jesus, "He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him." Likewise, according to tradition, the apostle Paul was not a physically impressive man. The spirituality of these men made them great, but this quality cannot be measured numerically because spirit involves many intangibles. Thus, the ultimate measure of a Christian is qualitative not quantitative. It is not a question of how many but of what sort.

[Hosea 10:1-2](#) is an almost perfect foundation for understanding the erroneous judgment the Laodicean makes - and thus the substance of his spiritual problem. An additional historical reference in Amos adds perspective to this condition. Amos approaches Israel's spiritual problems from a somewhat different angle than Hosea. He shows the people as having all the forms of the true religion, yet because it lacks substance, they are well off but almost totally lacking in social justice. They take care of themselves but not their relationship with God or with their neighbors.

Hosea says that Israel "brings forth fruit for himself." In Revelation 3, Laodicea is contrasted to Philadelphia. The Philadelphian loves God and his brother, but the Laodicean loves himself as exhibited by what he spends his time doing. The Laodicean carries the name "Christian," but he is not serving the Lord Christ except in a most passive manner. He serves himself, which is why he says he needs nothing. He does not need even God! [Laodiceanism](#) is perhaps the most subtle of all forms of idolatry.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

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