

## Unity And Our Responsibilities

To Change Ourselves

John W. Ritenbaugh

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I think that all of you know that our recent conference stressed unity, and this sermonette is a spinoff on that subject.

I want you to turn to Amos the 3rd chapter, verses 1 through 7. The actual purpose of this sermonette involves unity and personal responsibility. I am going to read this from the Moffett translation, and it begins in verse 1 in this way.

**Amos 3:1-7** (Moffett) Listen to this charge of the Eternal against you, sons of Israel, against the whole race that I brought up from the land of Egypt: You alone, of all men, have I cared for; therefore, I will punish you for all your misdeeds. Do two men travel together unless they have planned it? Does a lion in the jungle roar, unless he has some prey? Does a young lion growl in his lair, unless he is made a capture? Does a bird drop into the trap, unless the trap has been baited? Does the trap spring up, unless there is something to catch? Do not town folk tremble, when the alarm is blown? Can trouble befall a town, unless the Eternal is at work? The Lord Eternal never does anything without telling His servants the prophets.

Now this series of scriptures, and especially verse 3, is almost surely in every church member's memory banks. It came to mind once again not long ago while Evelyn and I were talking about a possible subject for the conference that we just had. So I decided to look at it more thoroughly once again so that I could understand it better within its context. And what I found, I think, will be helpful to your understanding.

But these verses that we just read are the beginning of a section of the book of Amos that does not end until at least the end of chapter 5. And it contains some pretty dreadful descriptions of events to happen unless the Israelites changed.

Now are you aware that it is Amos who coined the phrase the Day of the Lord? Nobody had used it before Amos introduced it in his preaching to the Israelites around Samaria. Look at chapter 5 and verses 18 through 20. He says to these Israelites in Samaria,

**Amos 5:18-20** (Moffett) For you long for the day of the Eternal [There it is, the day of the Eternal.] Ah, what will that avail you, so eager to avert the evil day, so keen upon injustice? A man runs from the lion, and a bear springs up at him; he hides indoors, and resting his hand on the wall, a serpent bites him—is not that day, is not that the day of the Eternal, danger, not safety, pitch dark, and not a way of light?

Well, there it is right there. That phrase was coined about 700 years before Christ was born.

A bit of a background on Amos. Amos was a Jew. He was a citizen of the southern kingdom. He was not an Israelite of the northern kingdom. However, God sent him, a Jew, to preach to the northerners. Almost needless to say that he was not a popular man there. First, because he was a Jew. And second, because the message that he brought to those people from God is very accusative of the northerners' attitudes and conduct.

Now chapter 3, verses 1 and 2, established the foundation for the accusations by showing the very privileged and intimate relationship between God and the Israelites. And it follows then because of the privilege God freely gave to them as a gift that He has every right to make the accusations, and because of the intimacy of their relationship, He is justified in making them. In other words, He expected a lot better reaction from them.

Now verse 3 is as far as I want to go here. But it contains the first of a string of seven questions that any Israelite could easily answer because they address things that they were familiar with.

Well, they were designed to get their attention and thus their thinking pointed in a desired direction by God. In that direction, He intended to help them, that is, each and every Israelite, to admit a measure of responsibility for Israel's condition.

The sense of those seven questions is that one thing will lead to another. That is, there is a cause and effect. A bird does not go to a snare unless the snare is put there. And the completion of that has to be advanced by putting something in the snare to trap them.

Obviously, as we begin to read through the book, the Israelites were doing things that were going to bring the Day of the Lord upon them. Now unless they would admit their responsibility in the way the conditions were in Israel, nothing would ever change. And so the message was repent or else. See, now there is nothing difficult to understand about what repent means. It simply means to change one's mind. In biblical usage, it means to change one's mind in relation to God and His way of life.

Repentance, though, is invariably preceded by something else. And this something else is usually a deeply felt sense of concern arising from guilt that one has done something wrong. Or it could come from fear for one's life, or that one's reputation is going to be destroyed. Or even sorrow of the terrible mess that one has created.

But we must always understand that the concern, that is, the sense of unease, the fear, the guilt, or sorrow is not repentance. However, those feelings, those concerns do *lead* to repentance. They lead to the change of mind, the resolve to never let whatever it was that made one feel uncomfortable in relation to God to happen again.

Now turn with me to II Corinthians chapter 7, verses 9 through 11. Paul wrote to those people,

**II Corinthians 7:9-11** Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of this world produces death. [Why? Because no change in relation to God occurs.] For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

What Paul did that made them sorry, what made them sorrow, what made them feel pain was that he gave them a good chewing out. Now the idea, the process, is this: that sorrow leads to repentance, and the repentance leads to a change of mind in relation to God and in turn produces a change in conduct. Because we will set our will to never let this thing happen again. Now if one changes his mind in relation to God, then a change of attitude and conduct will follow. But sorrow, that is, pain comes first. Repentance follows and opens the door to make the change of attitude and conduct possible.

Now we have to consider something here. There are always a number of factors that work to make one fail to feel the sense of responsibility for the mess or the conditions around him.

The first one is this. The person just does not get it. Not yet anyway. Because sometimes it takes a while for the understanding that by our own conduct we are shooting ourselves in the foot and hurting our loved ones besides. And so in this area there is always a tendency to blame somebody else. Well, it was my parents' fault. Or it was society's fault or whatever.

The second thing is sometimes, brethren, we are just so unfeeling, so unconcerned, so self-centered, we just do not care. So we brush it off. Now this attitude is dangerously destructive. In fact, biblically suicidal. And this very frequently happens to people who are in the grip of a drug, whether it be alcohol, a chemical like heroin or cocaine, or the nicotine in a cigarette. The person has become a slave of their addiction, and they do not care. They would rather be a slave than make a change.

Now there is a third reason more difficult to grasp that is at the foundation of much failure to repent and change. And that is that we cannot seem to get it through our minds that what we, little old me, do. It is because we have a tendency to think of ourselves as nothing. Are we not only one of 6 billion people on earth? Are we not only one of 300 million Americans or one of one million people in a city or even just a tiny speck in a family?

Now there is a careless but nonetheless strong tendency to believe that, how can anything that I do have any effect whatsoever on the improvement of life for anybody else? Now, do you understand that almost everybody else feels exactly the same way and that the result is nothing ever changes? And so the whole family or the nation continues its violent, heartbreaking pell-mell rush into the pits of oblivion.

It was that very attitude, or let us say, those three attitudes that confronted Amos as he preached to those people in Israel 700 years before Christ was born.

But he was not alone. It also confronted Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and all of the prophets. It confronted Jesus and the apostles, so that Isaiah lamented with all of his heart, "Lord, who has believed our report?" And to this day it remains the ministry's challenge.

Now this, brethren, is where our relationship with God becomes so very important to the quality of our life. We cannot afford to let ourselves be lulled into thinking in our attitudes that our conduct and attitude does not matter and so therefore we are contributing to the mess that the world is in.

Well, this present drought is giving us an interesting picture in this regard. In 2001, Charlotte experienced a drought similar to this one. So voluntary restrictions were imposed, and this produced a 23% decrease in water consumption.

In 2007, the second worst drought in Charlotte's history, voluntary restrictions were again imposed. But this time it produced a modest increase. 30% savings was the result.

Now surveys by the water company and Duke Energy show that 50% of the water drawn from the lakes around here is for home consumption. So why was not the percentage of water saved larger, greater, since most of the water is still being used by home consumption? Well, I think that it largely comes down to the attitude in human nature that says what I do does not matter.

Well, let me tell you something, to the Christian, it *does* matter!

Now why? Because watching our response to government and circumstances, in so doing, God has established that it is in the overall sense maybe the one factor that He is watching most closely. He wants to see in our life whether we really do perceive Him as being sovereign over His creation and therefore in charge of the drought, if I can put it that way, and by faith submit to Him.

He wants to see whether we will look beyond human government, look beyond what everybody else is doing, look beyond our own cynicism and distrust, and in spite of our feelings say in ourselves it really does matter what I do. Because I fear God, and He is watching. Yes, it does matter spiritually to God and to our ultimate destiny. It matters very much because then we are living life by faith, not by sight, focused on what the human government is doing or what our neighbors are doing.

Now the Israelites that Amos preached to did not repent. And perhaps did not even feel a small measure of guilt for the way things were in their nation. We know this: that nothing changed and thus what God planned was that Israel was defeated by the Assyrians.

They were taken into captivity and they seemingly disappeared from the pages of history, all because each individual Israelite thought that what he did did not matter. Unity, Israel's unity, was thus destroyed because it did not matter to the individual.