

Amos (Part Ten)

Amos 5 & 6

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 17-May-88; Sermon #BS-AM10

Let us get back into the book of Amos, and we will continue through chapter 5 and go on into chapter 6 this evening.

Now, one of the things that we never want to forget is not to leave ourselves out of the book of Amos because it is written to Israel, and Israel was the covenant people. They were the ones that were redeemed out of Egypt and they were the type of what today is the church of God. In Galatians 6:16, we are called the Israel of God. We are not called that by name in Romans, the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters, but it is certainly brought out in Romans the ninth chapter, that salvation goes to the elect, and the elect are not those who are physically descended from Abraham, but those who are chosen of God to be spiritual sons of Abraham.

And as I mentioned to you before, the book of Amos is to those covenant people, and we are the spiritual covenant people, and therefore we cannot leave ourselves out of it. As I mentioned to you once before, I believe that this book is written to the end-time church. It is detailing the general spiritual and physical conditions within the nation of Israel today and the reason is to warn the church not to allow themselves to fall into the same condition that the nation is in. Now it could come into the church. There is just no doubt about it. If we are surrounded by it and we are attracted by it, and I think a number of people are going to be attracted by it. They are going to fail to take the heed, and they are going to be caught in it.

And I think I can say that with confidence because of what it says in Luke 21, where Jesus warned in verses 34 through 36 to "watch and pray always." And He mentioned there about being overcome by surfeiting and drunkenness and just being distracted by the conditions that are in the world.

We were just beginning to get into the section that began in verse 21. And up until this point, Amos was looking at a people who were quite religious. He

saw very clearly that they professed that they had salvation, but they exhibited a total lack of evidence that they really were possessors of salvation. And so their profession was not credible, at least from his perspective. So they had, as far as he was concerned, groundless confidence, and their confidence, as we can see very clearly in the New Testament, was in their natural descent from Abraham rather than a *spiritual* descent from Abraham.

Now, beginning in verse 21, this section concentrates on Gilgal. Remember the three cities: Bethel, Beersheba, and Gilgal. Each one of them was the site of a shrine. Each one had something to do with religion, but a little bit different perspective at each one of the places.

Bethel, of course, means the house of God. And it was there that Jacob had encountered God, and it was there that Jacob's life took a very sudden and dramatic change. And so Bethel became associated with meeting God and being transformed as a result of that meeting with God. Now, that is what *should have* happened to the people. However, they were not transformed after their pilgrimage to Bethel; they went back, and they were totally unchanged. It was business as usual. And so the pilgrimage to Bethel made no difference in their life.

And there was Beersheba, and this was the place associated with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And it had to do with God saying, "I will be with you," meaning that He would be walking with them in their life. It was also associated with Joseph. And it is so very clear that God was with Joseph. We quoted you some scriptures from out of the book of Genesis. Regardless of whether Joseph was in prison, or working for Potiphar, or being elevated to the second highest position in the nation, God was with him regardless of circumstance.

However, the question to Amos was, was the pilgrimage to Bethel or to Beersheba showing any of the fruits of God being with these people? Well, the answer to him was no. Was God really walking with them? And again, he could not see any evidence. Would it not show in their life? Could their claim be real that they were walking with God? Well, he says no; there is no reality there.

On Gilgal, the association is with possession of the land. Well, that has much to do with you and me in regard to possession of an eternal inheritance in the Kingdom of God. Now, do we really have eternal inheritance in the Kingdom of God? Is there fruit to show that we do? How can a person be sure that they have eternal possession? I mean, right now, is it possible to be sure that we have it?

Well, the answer to that is yes; it is possible because there will be evidence that will be shown, and we will see that Amos details that evidence, and it is very similar to what we saw in the other two sections: that they did not show the evidence that he felt ought to be there.

Amos 5:21-27 "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream. Did you offer Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? You also carried Sikkuth your king and Chiun, your idols, the star of your gods, which you made for yourselves. And therefore I will send you into captivity beyond Damascus," says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts.

I think that you would agree that God is indicating that they had a wealth of religion: festival, sacrifice, music. Does that sound like religious services? Certainly it does. There is also an indication that they took these things very seriously, almost as if they were commanded by law. Is it possible that some of these people were keeping these things on God's holy days?

Well, I really think not from what we see in that section; we will possibly mention that as we go back over it. And from what we know that Jeroboam I did and that he inserted holy days that were different from the ones that were celebrated in Jerusalem because he did not want the people to go down to Jerusalem. So they had different holy days. But whatever the holy days were, they religiously kept them; they were zealous about their pursuit of what god they were worshipping. They were wholehearted, and I think that they were sincere, but it is very evident that they did not impress God positively.

But you have to ask the question: if there is a religious zeal and yet it does not impress God, what good is it? Well, I think the answer to that is self-evident. It is no good at all. But we know historically that these people did not turn from what they were doing; they continued to go in the direction that they had always, let us say, "gone in," and that the preaching of Amos, at least at that time, had no apparent effect in turning the people away from the direction that they were going in. And yet all their sincerity and all their wholeheartedness, all of the zeal did not profit them. It actually produced an animosity in the God that they were supposed to be worshipping.

Now where did it fail? And where it failed has something to do with the answer to whether or not we can know whether we now possess eternal inheritance in the Kingdom of God, I mean, right here and now. Well, I mentioned this to you the last time that there is a play on words here, that Amos is actually making a pun on the name Gilgal. The answer is in verse 24, or let us say the beginning of the answer, the skeleton of it. See the word "but" that directly connects it with what precedes it. It is put in opposition to what precedes it. They were not doing this: *But* let justice run down like water. Now what was missing in their religiosity was justice. We will get to that in just a little bit so that we can define what Amos meant by justice. Justice was missing.

The word Gilgal appears in that sentence. It is in the words of my translation: run down. Your Bible may have roll. Now, this is mentioned in Joshua 5:9, that Gilgal got its name from the circumcision that took place as they were entering into the land out of the wilderness. They encamped at Gilgal, and there Joshua ordered the circumcision of all of the males born after they got into the wilderness, you know, those all of those males who were not circumcised while they were either in Egypt or in the wilderness. And so God then said that on this occasion, that is, the circumcision, "I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt." And thus Gilgal was named rolled away. See, that is what it means in English: rolled away. The reproach of Egypt was rolled away through the circumcision.

Now you have got to think about that; that circumcision indicates repentance. When a person repents, his sins are rolled away, and the reproach of those sins are rolled away. God is one who says He circumcises

the heart. You see, He rolls away, as it were, the hardness of heart. There He says, "Let justice roll down like water."

What He was saying is this: that all of their religiosity, all of these pilgrimages to the shrine, all of the festivities, all of the songs, you know, all of the stringed instruments, all of the wholeheartedness, all of the costliness of the sacrifices, that none of that was going anywhere in a practical way. It was entertainment. I do not know how else to put it. It had no practical outlet to it. They went to Gilgal to get religious, and when they returned home, they left it behind. You see, it stayed there at Gilgal.

The pilgrims rolled into Gilgal, if we can put it that way, but justice did not roll back into the cities and towns and villages and countrysides that they came from. It did not roll back into life.

Let us look at verse 22. In verse 21, "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them."

You might recall back in Ephesians 5, and it is around verse 1 or 2, Paul talks about the sacrifice of our life being a sweet savor to God. It is as though a fragrant odor is ascending before God, and He loves it. You see, He smells it, and it looks good, and He appreciates the sacrifice of our lives. But He does not appreciate the sacrifice that these people are making. So obviously, their sacrifice to Him is a stench. Their religion stank.

Well, that is quite a contrast to what you see in other parts of the Bible. Whenever Noah got off the ark (you can read this in Genesis 8:21), one of the first things that he did was offer a sacrifice to God. And it says so plainly there that the odor was well-pleasing to God, meaning that it was accepted before Him, and He acknowledged the religion, if I can put it that way, of Noah. But He rejected the religion of these people. So Noah's religion, as represented in the sacrifice that ascended before God, was acceptable and well-pleasing. These people offered the same kind of sacrifices, and God hated it.

Now, you have to, I think, come to the logical conclusion that though they were offering the same sacrifices, there was a difference, and the difference

must have been in the people. It was not the sacrifice; it was the difference between Noah and the people of Amos' day.

So what is justice? Now back in verse 7 of this same chapter, he mentioned justice here.

Amos 5:7 You who turn justice to wormwood, . . .

And in verse 15, this is connected to the same basic section.

Amos 5:15 Hate evil, love good; establish justice in the gate.

There is a connection there between hating evil and loving good that establishes justice in the gate. Now, these people were turning justice into wormwood, just the opposite of what was supposed to be done. Now, connecting that with verse 15, then you have to come to the obvious conclusion that loving evil and hating good produces wormwood rather than justice, but hating evil and loving good, just the opposite, produces justice. Loving good then leads to the establishment of justice.

Now we can begin to arrive at a decision as to what justice is that he is talking about, the kind of justice that he is talking about here. And he is not directly talking about justice in the courts; that would be involved, but it is not directly involved. It is a secondary issue. He is talking about right behavior in relation to people. We will show that a little bit clearer here in a moment. Justice in this sense is being fair. Now, courts are supposed to be fair and evenhanded in the administration of the law. We recognize that. But what about, let us say, in more practical aspects of our relationships with people—in our homes, on the streets, in business? You see, in the world of commerce. Should not the average citizen be just as interested in justice there as in justice in the courts?

What is he talking about here? What he is talking about is the Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have others do unto you. Everybody wants to be treated fairly; everybody wants to be treated well, good. They want to be pleased by others. When a person does that, he is loving good. He is hating

evil. It is not fair to treat people evilly. See, it is not justice to treat people evilly. It is fair. It is justice to treat people in the same way that you would like to be treated—with respect, with honesty, with integrity, with fairness.

In chapter 6, verse 12, which we will eventually get to tonight, he shows something else here:

Amos 6:12 Do horses run on rocks? Does one plow there with oxen? Yet you have turned justice into gall [or into wormwood, a poison], and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.

Now, those two phrases there regarding justice are connected. It is a common Hebrew way of emphasizing something. The fruit of righteousness is justice. Justice is something that is produced by righteousness. We are getting to the root here of a major portion of their problem with God.

Back to chapter 5 again, in verse 7:

Amos 5:7 You who turn justice to wormwood, and lay righteousness to rest in the earth!

Now, righteousness and justice are not exactly the same things. We just saw in chapter 6, verse 12 that justice was produced by righteousness. It is the fruit. It is an effect of righteousness. Now, we define justice as being something that is done in a practical way. You see, it is fair treatment, not just in courts, but it is fair treatment and fair dealing in every aspect of life, but it is the fruit of righteousness.

In verse 7, that last phrase, "and lay righteousness to rest in the earth" gives us an indication of what righteousness is. Let me explain something here. The picture that he is drawing here in regard to righteousness, on that last phrase of verse 7, is as though it is something that is thrown down. Now, my New King James kind of softens it by saying it was laid to rest. The righteousness is laid to rest. The Hebrew though is a little bit stronger. It is that it really is better that righteousness is *thrown down*.

What he is telling you here is he is describing righteousness as though it was a standard, a flag, a banner, something of that nature that is thrown to the

earth. Now, what are we talking about here when we put it into moral and spiritual things? Justice is correct moral practice. It is the practical application. Righteousness is the cultivation. You see, cultivation means the attending to something in order to produce growth, you know, like the ground is cultivated in order for seeds to germinate and produce fruit.

Righteousness is the cultivation of correct moral principle. You see, it is the principle upon which justice is founded. Now it becomes very clear when you add to this Psalm 119, verse 172:

Psalm 119:172 For all Your commandments are righteousness.

Now what was he saying there in Amos 5:7? In verse 7, he was saying that the standards are being thrown to the ground. You see, the commandments, all of the moral principles upon which a nation should operate, they were not being cultivated. Instead, some kind of specious code of living apart from the Word of God—the Torah, the law of God, the teaching of God—those things were thrown aside, and instead what they were doing was practicing what we would call today a situation ethic. You see, where a person allows his conscience to be his guide or whatever happened to feel good at the moment seemed right at the moment.

But you see, the right moral principles were not being cultivated and as a result, there was no justice. People were not being treated fairly; business practices were corrupt; ethical values were just thrown out the window. It was practically anything goes. You see, you get yours while the getting is good. That is what was going on.

Now, what good was it for them to go to Gilgal and sing and maybe dance, have a good time; leave the place emotionally lifted, having enjoyed it to the hilt. But then go back home, and it was the same old way of life. Because, you see, just like in Bethel, there was no transformation; just like in Beersheba, they gave every evidence that God was not with them because there was no repentance; there was no change taking place in these people's lives.

So justice is *outward* in practice. It is fairness; it is doing unto others as you would have others do unto you. Now, we tend to think of that maybe just in

terms of law. You cannot stop there. It has to do with such things as being neat, orderly. Have you ever seen the sides of our roads, our garbage dumps? Is that fair? I wonder how much it costs us every year to clean up the sides of the highways.

It means being considerate, such things as the attitude you drive in and the conduct in which you drive in. Maybe there is no law of God directly involved in your driving. But is it not fair? Is it not justice to be considerate of others? Certainly. It has to do with being thoughtful. It has to do with being gracious. It has to do with being tactful and discreet.

It begins to envelop all of these things that have to do with doing unto others as you would have others do unto you because they are all founded on the righteous principles of God's law. That once those things stop being cultivated in order that they might grow, then justice begins to lapse, and there is no fairness.

So justice is outward; righteousness is inward. And that righteousness, of course, means what is right with God. You see, all Your commandments are righteousness. And so if there is righteousness with God, then what Amos is saying is that it will flow right into practice in society.

And so there is the proof that these people do not have eternal inheritance of the land because their contact with God is not producing justice in the streets. They are not walking with God. They have not been transformed by God.

I saw an interesting little cliché in this regard. Let us go to Jeremiah 7, connect it to a scripture. What we are reading about in Amos just kept getting repeated generation after generation. And finally, it just got to the place where the land could not stand it any longer, and the land vomited the inhabitants out. In Jeremiah, we see a picture just at a later date. If Amos was prophesying about 760-762 BC, Jeremiah came along between roughly 625 BC. That was about 140 years later. And he lasted, of course, until Judah went into captivity. But in Jeremiah 7, verse 11, notice this complaint that God has:

Jeremiah 7:11 "Has this house [meaning the Temple in Jerusalem], which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," says the Lord.

Now what is a den of thieves? What is a den? If you think of it in terms of an animal, that is where the animal lives. That is where he goes for peace and security. He gets away from his enemies there, and that is where he has his little family or whatever. Well, a den of thieves would be a place where thieves go for companionship, fellowship, and security. He said, "You've turned the Temple into a den of thieves."

You know what was happening here? A little bit of a play on words here: that these people were going to the Temple to pray, and then they left the Temple and they *preyed* on the people. They went to the Temple and prayed, and then they left the Temple and preyed. That is what Amos is saying here: no justice. Well, that is the way it was with Gilgal.

So it begins to become abundantly clear that God is looking for people who will turn their energies to Him. You see, they will turn their energies to Him abundantly and perpetually all the time. The end of verse 24, "Let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream," like a mountain stream rushing from the cold waters of a glacier on the top, melting away, meaning abundantly and perpetually running, never running dry. So we could let righteousness and justice do that. It is the responsibility of God's people always to cultivate right principle in order that justice can flow or roll down.

That is the responsibility of the church: to make sure that we are teaching the people right principle, that we are cultivating right principle in order that justice—fairness, equity, doing unto others as you would have others do unto you—so that there will be right social and moral practice. Otherwise, religion is pointless. And that is why God was rejecting this. It was an exercise in futility. Now, the Gilgalites, they kept their religion in a box, and the box was in Gilgal. So they went up, and they came back, but the religion stayed there in Gilgal, and it did not come back into society.

So verse 24 is actually an appeal to these people to repent: But let justice run down. He is giving them an opportunity. If you will repent—we do not want to ever get too far from the idea that is running through here. He is introducing the Day of the Lord. It is going to come on these people.

Now let us go back to verse 22 and pick up something there, actually, something that is missing, and this will give you some sort of an idea of what was wrong. It really begins to clarify it though.

Amos 5:22 "Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings."

Can you see anything that is missing there? There is no mention of the sin offering. Now that teaches us something. The absence of the sin offering indicates that they were not in contact with God. Because if God had been there in their lives, He surely would have pointed out to them where they were wrong, and they would have repented.

Now, it is entirely possible, I do not think that it is going to be too accusatory to say, but even the offerings that they were making should have brought them into contact with God if they were done with any kind of insight into the reality of God. Because what does the burnt offering teach you and me? It teaches complete, total devotion to the Creator. Completely burned up, completely devoted to God.

What does the cereal offering, the grain offering, the meal offering, the meat offering it is called in the old King James, teach? It teaches you total dedication and service of man, sacrificing yourself there.

And then the peace offering talks about fellowship upward to God and outward to man. Because God, the priest, and the person giving the offering all shared in a common meal. So here was fellowship that was going up to God and also out to our fellow mankind.

Now, surely if they had understood those things, it would have resulted in contact with God if they had followed through with what the commandments were teaching them. But you can see they were not devoted to God in the

keeping of the first four commandments. They were not devoted to fellow man in the keeping of the sixth commandment.

They were not in true fellowship with either God or man as shown in the peace offering. And therefore, they could not see their sins. They were not viewing the holiness of God and comparing themselves to it. If they had, they would have seen that they needed to make changes. But instead they were judging themselves against other men and as a result, there was no need of repentance. So again, you see their religion was pointless. "I will not accept them."

Amos 5:25 "Did you offer Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?"

Now, I am sure that as that question was asked, when Amos stood there in Samaria, they nodded their heads yes. And maybe some of the bolder of them said yes out loud because Israel did offer sacrifice in the wilderness. But there must have been more to Amos's question there, more than just appears on the surface. Think about this: was Amos just willing to make a straight swap here that if these people would give up their religion for a right ethic, that everything would be all right? No, I do not think that that is really what he had in mind.

Israel did sacrifice in the wilderness. But is this all they did, or was there more connected to the sacrifices than just that? Now Mount Sinai; I do not want you to think of just the mountain, I want you to think of what happened at Mount Sinai. That was not just a casual stop on the way toward the Promised Land. What happened at Mount Sinai was the climax of the Exodus. The Exodus was not the climax. What happened at Mount Sinai was the climax.

Now Passover was the moment and the means of their redemption. What happened at Passover? They killed a lamb, and they put the blood on their doorposts. And the effect of that was that when the death angel passed through and slew the firstborn, everywhere the blood was the people were spared. God was saving; He was redeeming; He was buying back His people. And so Passover was the moment and the means of their redemption—being kept safe by the blood of the lamb.

Now back to verse 25: Did Israel sacrifice in the wilderness? Yes, they did. What Amos is reconfirming is that sacrifice—the offering of blood, the shedding of blood—is a foundational necessity for a relationship with God. They were sacrificing. But is that all that they did? See, he is implying here that the Israelites in Amos' day were sacrificing, but something was missing. And that is the importance of Mount Sinai because Mount Sinai added the other portion of the equation.

Redemption by the blood of a lamb, all by itself, is not sufficient to secure salvation. Mount Sinai adds the other factor. Israel came there after being redeemed; they heard the law; they assented to the law. The law was given to show the pattern of life—those principles of righteousness. The law was given to show a pattern of life for the redeemed. So on the one side, there is redemption; on the other side, law and obedience. And these two are harmonious; they cannot be separated.

Did Israel sacrifice in the wilderness? Yes, they did. But was that all they did is the unasked question. Now, if we would go back to Exodus 29, there God is telling Israel, beginning in verse 43, that He is going to dwell in the Tabernacle, and specifically the Holy of Holies is going to be His home. That is where He is going to live. Now, what is in the Holy of Holies? It is important to understand this symbolism.

The most important piece or instrument, furniture, whatever you want to call it, that was inside the Holy of Holies was the Mercy Seat. The Mercy Seat was nothing more than a chest and it had a lid on the top of it. The lid was the seat. When you opened up the lid and you looked, what was inside the ark? What would you have seen? You would have seen the two tables of stone. It is as if God was sitting on His law, and that was the basis of His judgment.

Whenever a person sins, he begins to separate himself from communion and fellowship with God. It is as though the relationship, you see, is being broken; the person is no longer permitted, as it were, to come into the Holy of Holies there. Now, what means has God provided to heal the broken relationship in order that the fellowship can continue? Leviticus 16—the Day of Atonement. One time a year, the curtain was drawn back, and the high

priest went into the Holy of Holies with blood, and that blood was then sprinkled on the Mercy Seat.

And the intention of that symbol, of that ritual, that ceremony, was to show the people that their transgressions against that basic law were healed, covered by the blood. In that way, the redeemed were once again in fellowship with God.

So you see, there are two parts, two absolutely essential parts to the maintenance of the fellowship with God, to the maintenance of the walk together, to the maintenance of the contact with God that produces transformation: blood for redemption, blood for the covering of transgressions, and law symbolizing moral obedience in order to maintain the correct relationship with God.

Now in Leviticus 19, the law is permanent. It is God's statute that is spelled out in precepts so that we can understand it more clearly. Obedience to that law is a perpetual requirement with blood available to cover the occasional transgressions. Now turn with me to I John chapter 2, verse 1. Here is the New Testament explanation of what I just explained.

I John 2:1-2 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation [the appeasing force] for our sins, and not ours only but also for the whole world.

So on the one hand, we have blood to pay for the transgressions, but we have law to spell out for us the perpetual requirement of obedience to God. God wants sacrifice and obedience, not a religious game. These people were playing, as far as God is concerned, nothing more than a game. A purely ceremonial religion will never safeguard the truth. That is a key thing. It was all ceremony and sincerity, but truth had gone by the boards.

Back to Amos 5, verse 26:

Amos 5:26 "You also carried Sikkuth your king and Chiun, your idols, the star of your gods, which you made for yourselves."

Amos is really sticking the sword right in them. There he is accusing them of being equally punctilious with pagan idols as they were in making sacrifices to God. He is telling you there what they were actually worshipping at Bethel, Beersheba, and Gilgal. That is what they were worshipping. It was not God, the Creator. It was this Sikkuth and Chiun, gods that they made for themselves. God said they had exchanged the Creator God for man-made deities. So the ritual of the shrine was completely divorced from the truth. It is no wonder that God would not accept it. God will not be mocked. We cannot fool Him. He will not accept that kind of worship.

This is how you know whether or not you have eternal inheritance of the land, whether you have eternal life. The evidence of true religion is that it will reach out, and it will touch, and it will purify every area of life because God is faithful in correcting, in mercy, His children. And He will correct His children with great pain if they will not turn—because He loves them. But if we are really in contact with the true God, change will take place. When God is in a person's life, He makes a difference. And that takes place gradually because we grow.

And so the evidence of true holiness is obedience to His Word.

So there are two factors involved in knowing whether you have eternal life. 1) are you covered by the blood of Jesus Christ? 2) are you obeying God's to the best of your understanding? None of us ever obey to the extent of our knowledge because our knowledge is always outrunning our ability. It is always that the knowledge comes first, and the ability to do it comes later. And so that always puts us on a little bit of a guilt trip because we know we are not living up to what we know.

But I will tell you, that kind of guilt is not wrong. It is only when we become neurotic about it. If it was not for guilt, we would not change. Guilt is good, and do not let anybody tell you that it is not good. Guilt makes us change. It is only when guilt becomes neurotic that it becomes bad and destructive. Today, they are trying to take the guilt out of everything. Well, I will tell you, that is a sure sign of complacency—anything goes, no need to feel guilty, live it up. Why have any hang-ups about things? But when God is around, He is going to make you feel guilty. And when you stop to think

about it, this was a major factor in why they killed Christ. They could not stand to be in His presence. He made them feel guilty because He was moral; He was righteous, and they did not like it.

Now chapter 6, a little bit of a preface here as we go into this. One of the major problems that we have to overcome in Bible study is a failure to see a pattern or an overall whole in a book. And partly this is because even the way we preach, very seldom in a sermon do we go through a whole book. Most of the time, what we are doing is we are just extracting a verse here and extracting two or three verses there. And we are (by we, I mean the ministry) stringing things together by topic or subject rather than what we are doing here in going through a Bible study.

The bad effect of this is that we tend to look at the Bible as isolated bits and pieces rather than a whole. We also tend to look at individual books this way as well. So we learn a verse or two out of the book of Amos. Almost everybody knows Amos 3:7 [3?]. And so that might be the only thing we remember in Amos is one isolated verse. And so we tend to look, you see, at the whole Bible as nothing more than isolated verses.

But it was not written that way. The Bible was written in an unusual way, different from what most men would do. But each book has a flow to it. It has a story that it is telling, and once you begin to see it, they are very logically, beautifully organized all together. I think partly one of the reasons we have trouble with that is because it was translated from another language into English. And the other language is a language that is no longer used. And so its cadences and its reasoning processes are different from ours. And so we have difficulty, in a way, even though we are reading English; it is almost like reading another language. Well, there are reasons.

Now was the prophet, was Amos conscious of having a message from God? I think he was. Now, would you not think that a man conscious of having a message would also be striving to put things in order that would make that message have as powerful an impact as possible? I think that he would. He would not want it to be vague. He would be a man driven to make his point as clear as he possibly could because he would want to get the totality of the truth that had been entrusted to him out to these people so that they would have an opportunity to repent.

What we are going to do here is we are going to go back just a little bit in Amos. We are not going to go into a great deal of detail but we are going to go back as far as we need to because chapter 6 is the end of a section, not the end of a book, but it is the conclusion. It is the climax of a section. This section began back in chapter 3. We are going to go back a little bit further than that because even at the end of the first section he was beginning to lay the groundwork for the next section.

So let us go all the way back to the beginning. From the beginning, chapter 1 up until chapter 2 and in verse 3, he began laying the groundwork by showing the sins of the nations surrounding Israel. And he undoubtedly got the Israelites' attention by doing that because they could begin to point, you see, at these terrible heathens who are out there doing those awful things. Then beginning in chapter 2, verse 4 there and on up to chapter 3, verse 8 he shows Israel's sins, and we find that in principle they are exactly the same as the heathen sins. In actual practice, it was somewhat different, but in reality it was based on the same principle of sin.

Now he should have them by the neck, and they are beginning to get angry, if they are understanding at all what he is saying that they are no better than the heathen. In fact, they are worse off than the heathen because these are the redeemed of God. They are the covenant people, and they should know better.

And in chapter 3 and in verse 9 through verse 15 (shorten this down a little bit) that is the introduction to the theme, or we might say the characteristic theme of this section, and that is, an invading foe is coming.

Now he shows in verses 9 through 11 what it is being caused by. We see tumults, oppression; "they do not know to do right?" They "store up violence and robbery in their palaces." We see social problems. In verse 12, he talks about personal problems. In verses 13 through 15, he talks about the religious conditions. See, that is where the first mention of Bethel came in, verse 14. He talks about the altar.

Then beginning in chapter 4, he moves a little bit further into the heart of the problem. He begins to show that the inner motivation of self-pleasing—they

only wanted to please themselves—made them what they were socially and personally and religiously. That is, what we see on the outside was being generated from the inside, and what it was that they wanted was to please themselves. And then he went on to show that what they were socially, personally, and religiously was exposing them to God's wholehearted opposition.

Each of these last two sections, chapter 3, verses 14 and 15, and chapter 4, verses 4 and 5, climax on the question of religion: Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba. Now, what could be more incredible to a religious people than to tell them that it was their religion that was earning them God's hearty disapproval? That would not go over very well.

Now, in chapter 4, beginning in verses 6 through 13, Amos explains that any religion that is organized for pleasing the self is going to be defective—toward God because there is no repentance, and toward man, that is, there will be no justice. He expounds on that a little further in chapter 5, verses 7 through 15, and then also verse 24.

Now we are up to chapter 6 and he moves toward the conclusion about the incoming foe. And in chapter 6, we are going to see what the real problem is. What we are seeing is Amos moving from the outside in. It is really cleverly written. See, he began all the way outside of Israel. Then the next step was to move inside the borders and show the social and personal conditions and religious conditions within the nation. And he showed that they were the same as the heathens.

Then he takes one step inside the people. And he says your problem is that all of these things—society, the justice system, business, commerce, banking, education—everything is built on the basis of pleasing the self. Now he is going to take one step further inside, and he is going to show them where the real problem is. We know, of course, that it has something to do with God. And once you see the answer, it is so plain, and it is something that, of course, we need to examine ourselves about too. This is written to the covenant people. So chapter 6 is the final reminder for this section of the fearful significance of religious error. And what was their error? Very important to you and me.

Let us go back to the book of Romans in chapter 10. Paul writes:

Romans 10:1-3 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. [That is important: not according to knowledge.] For they being ignorant of God's righteousness [Remember, we were talking about the standards not being cultivated.], and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

Israel was and is zealously religious. Now, their error in Amos's day, I do not think it is so much that today, but I would have to say that this is part of religion in America. But their error was that they isolated two components that are indeed necessary for religion, but they isolated them away. And they made a religion based on these two things. They acted as if nothing else mattered.

Now those two factors are sincerity—they have a zeal for God—and ceremony. They attended the services. They went through the ritual; they did the sacrifice; they went through the motions. Now, we saw from chapter 5 that they had the sacrifices down pretty well. They were probably about 99% correct. They were doing the burnt offering, the meal offering, and they were doing the peace offering, and they undoubtedly were doing it right. I do not think that we should doubt their sincerity because here is the Bible telling that the Israelites in Paul's day were zealously religious.

And I think that Paul was implying that they were sincere. The apostle Paul said that about himself in Philippians, the third chapter, where he said that I was "a Hebrew of the Hebrews," and as far as the law concerned, he was righteous. He was a zealous man. And I think his fellow Pharisees were the same way. And so were the Sadducees in their way as well. We look back in Amos' day; the indication is those people were flocking to the shrines. We look in the United States, and we find a fairly religious people, there are many churches, not as well attended as they used to be. Nonetheless, there is a great deal of religion.

Let us go to John, the fourth chapter, verse 21.

John 4:21-24 Jesus said to her [the woman at the well], "Believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know [I think we could say the same thing for the Israelites. Their worship is not according to knowledge; they are not cultivating the righteousness of God.]; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth."

Now, the truth part of it is very evident to us, at least in terms of understanding what that is. Spirit can mean two basic things here: that is, we worship Him by—through, by means of—the Spirit of God; that our worship of Him is spiritual. It should also include though the aspect of sincerity, having to do with the heart, the enthusiasm, the zeal. We say, that team has spirit. So, we are saying at least basically, or at least partially, what Jesus is intending there: that those who worship God are going to have to do it in sincerity, with enthusiasm and zeal, by the Spirit of God, by means of it, *and* truth.

Now, Psalm 51, putting pieces together here. And it almost looks to me by the clock that we are not going to get to Israel's real problem. I will let you study that. And by the time you come back next week, we will see if you have the answer. In Psalm 51, verse 16, David, at the end of his prayer, says:

Psalm 51:16-17 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it [Now, we know that God commanded the sacrifices. What is the problem? These people were giving sacrifices, and God was not pleased with them.]; You do not delight in burnt offering. [Well, yes, He does. But let us understand David's point.] The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit [there is that word spirit again], and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise.

And yet He despised their sacrifices. You are beginning to see it is not the sacrifices themselves. It is what is in the heart of the people.

These people in Amos' day made an *end* in the ceremonies rather than the ceremonies merely being a means. They should have gone through the ceremonies. It was part of the ritual; it was part of obedience to God. But what good is a sacrifice if the person making the sacrifice is a stench in God's nostrils? The sacrifice cannot make up for what the person is. It is acceptable to God *only* with the understanding—correct understanding, truth—of what the ceremony is intended for, and the person has adjusted his life to meet God's approval.

Now, let us go back to the book of Galatians, in chapter 3, verse 24.

Galatians 3:24 Therefore the law was our tutor [or schoolmaster] to bring us to Christ.

He is talking about the sacrificial law. See, this was the purpose; this was the end toward which this law was pointed. They made an end of the sacrifice. It was intended by God to be a means to produce something. It should have produced—as David said—a contrite spirit. It should have produced wholehearted obedience to God. It should have produced justice, fairness, doing unto others as you would have others do unto you. It *should* have produced those things. It was a schoolmaster, a tutor. It was supposed to teach them how to be Christ-like that we might be justified by faith. It was not doing that.

Now their religion did not arise from what God *is*. See, that is spelled out in words in the law; it tells us what God is, and that is foundational. You cannot take that away. You take away the law of God, and you remove the cultivation of righteousness. And so those people had no justice because there was no righteousness; there was nothing inward to provide right guidance in order for there to be justice. Now, the true religion is based on what God is, and the law spells that out.

Neither did their religion take into account what man is and what man can be. See, they used people to their own ends, to please themselves. Those who had the power to do so, they took advantage. They were not doing unto others; they were doing to others before the others did it to them. You see, because they took away the righteousness of God as described by the law,

they had no guidance. They were not cultivating right principle. And so their religion was not based on what God is or what man is, you see, a creation of God, or what man could be. He can be very God. Their religion was based on the same thing that their social system and their personal life was based on: they were pleasing themselves. Give me that old-time religion. It was good enough for daddy. It is good enough for me.

Now, the central theme of chapter 6 is retribution—getting paid back, earning their reward. And it is based on the "eye for an eye" principle. Now, many fail to understand this. They think that an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is cruel and barbaric and inhuman. And so they reject it. But brethren, it is a godly system. It is what God gave to the Israelites. It is His system of justice. Now, since they have no justice in the land, God is going to pay them back. There is going to be retribution to them in equal measure to the way they have treated others.

I bring this to your attention because God, if He is not merciful, can use the same system against us because again, remember, we are the covenant people. And if there is anybody who should know, it is us who know the truth of God.

Let us go back to Exodus 21, verse 23. Let us go back to verse 22 so that we can get a little bit better of the context.

Exodus 21:22-25 "If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no lasting harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. [that is important] But if any lasting harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe."

This is something coming from God. It is the way to administer justice in the courts. I want you to notice that this is His court justice system.

Leviticus 24:19-20 "If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him—fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him. [And it goes on then about animals.]

Deuteronomy 19:16-21 "If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing, then both men in the controversy shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days. And the judges shall make diligent inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so shall you put away the evil from among you. And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity: life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."

Now this is the basis for rendering court decisions or judgments. It is the safeguard of equal-handed, even justice: eye for eye, tooth for tooth. What it is saying is that crime and punishment must be equally balanced. Now, it is wrong to think that they literally gouged a person's eye out if that person indeed caused the loss of an eye in another person. That is not what they did. If somebody caused a person to break his leg, they did not put that person's leg over a stump and then whack it with a baseball bat and break his leg. They did not do that kind of thing.

They did basically the same things as we do in our courts. The judge made a decision based upon damage done that was equal to the damage done. That is, he fined the person, or he sentenced the person; he caused that person to have to pay a price or to be incarcerated, or whatever it was that they did. The person who was injured was compensated equal to what the judge felt the injury was worth.

Now, let us go back to Matthew. And I think that we will finish up here at least for this week. In Matthew 5 Jesus mentions the eye for an eye principle. In verse 38 He says:

Matthew 5:38-39 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also."

Some think that Jesus was doing away with the eye for an eye and a tooth for tooth principle. No, He was not. Look back in chapter 5, verse 17:

Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law and the Prophets."

We just read out of the law the eye for an eye and a tooth for tooth principle. Jesus was not coming to do away with that principle of even-handed justice. What He was doing here was correcting an abuse whereby the principle—the eye for an eye principle—was being advocated as a means of settling personal disputes, you know, within a relationship. In other words, they were not going to court; they were taking justice into their own hands.

Sometimes we become frustrated with the court system. And I think the court system today is a frustrating factor in our lives. We think that so frequently people get off far too easily than they should. And what happens when people become frustrated enough? They begin to take justice into their own hands, and they begin to inflict injury on one another apart from the courts. That is what He was correcting. No, you should not do that. He is saying that you should use the means that God has provided to do it with in the court system. That is what Jesus is advocating here.

The eye for an eye principle is for the court system. It is not something for you and me to take into our own hands and render a decision.

And now one more factor here. And that is this: that this principle is just that. It does not mean that a judge could not be merciful by evaluating circumstances and saying that because of thus and such and so and so, I render the following decision, you see, which may be more liberal than we would like it to be.

Remember, I mentioned God in relation to the eye for an eye and tooth for tooth principle, that He could use it against us. Yes, He could. But as a judge, He has basically decided to be merciful because of our ignorance. He has taken it into consideration because He could require our death spiritually, but He has not. And He has allowed the blood of Jesus Christ and our ignorance in considering the circumstance as a judge. He has decided to forego the eye for an eye and extend mercy.

So He has given the leeway to judges in the law. But nonetheless, the principle of judging has its foundation in equal justice as provided by equal payment for damage done. And that is called the eye for an eye principle, or I think the Romans called it the *lex talionis*. But God had it first; it came from Him.