Hardness of Heart
Isaiah 9:8-10:4

AMAZING

Those of us who are pastors stand amazed and heart-broken at the hardness which can be exhibited by people who profess Christ. Many times we do everything except name names (maybe we should, but it sure is hard to bring ourselves to do so, 3 John 9), yet it appears that the people are totally oblivious to what is taking place. It would seem that the facts are as obvious as anything can possibly be, yet the blindness is astounding.

We have a message with which God has burdened our heart. We spend the hours in prayer pleading with God to send His Holy Spirit to make His word effective, then we deliver it with all the love and meekness we can claim by the grace of God, all to no avail. The people sit and look at us like a calf staring at a new gate, or worse yet, they are thinking about how much so-and-so needed this. "Too bad they are not here to hear this."

As usual, the word of God has the answer to every problem which we as pastors or as people encounter, including the obvious and discouraging hardness that is so evident.

HARDNESS OF HEART

Isaiah 9:8 tells us that this prophecy is for the northern kingdom of Israel. Isaiah is speaking from the southern kingdom, Judah, but the principle contained here are obviously for God's people of all times.

The four divisions of this prophecy are easily defined, with the third one our goal.

In this prophecy the Lord identifies four types of sin, then identifies the just judgment against each of the four, closing each with the statement, For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. V. 7 points out that King Jesus' rule and judgment is always just, and their sin is going to cause their destruction.

I. Vs. 9-12. The first thing Isaiah does is to identify the basic sin of the people of God which is leading to their destruction, pride and stoutness of heart. Stoutness would be stubborn, stubborn in having their own way.

V. 10, the evidence of the results of their stubbornness is all around them. The decay is obvious, but they refused to admit that the reason for this decay was their turning from God and obedience to His word. Instead, their plan was to build an even stronger kingdom without the Lord.

Today, the evidence of decay in our lives, homes and families, education system, labor force, society in general, is all around us. But sinful man, either as an individual or as a group, refuses to admit that the cause of this decay is his turning from the Lord God of the Scriptures and not doing what God would have him to do.

V. 11, 12. The judgment of the Lord is identified as an invasion of the land by the Syrians and the Philistines. This judgment will be without mercy, yet even this invasion does not cause them to return to the Lord.

It is significant that this pride and stoutness of heart of the general population of the people of God is mentioned first. This shows us that the root of the sin is in the people. The evil leaders of the next group in v. 16, who led the people away from God and to destruction, were able to do this because the people WANTED to be lead away from God.

Thus, the next three evils which Isaiah mentions stem from this basic evil, and cannot be corrected until this is corrected. Any change in society must result from a change in the heart of the general population of God's people, 2 Chronicles 7:14.

The people are corrupted, therefore easily led away from the Lord. The only hope is to deal with the corruption, and this is the promise of the new Covenant made in the Messiah, Jeremiah 31:33.

The indifference of the people of God is leading to their destruction, but we have a promise that because of the Messiah, the hearts will be changed according to His Spirit's working. Our Lord clearly refers to this promise when He promised to send back the Spirit of God, John 16:7-14. Without this promise there would be no hope in our service of the Lord. When this reproving of the Spirit is missing in an individual, church or society, judgment is burning and destruction is on its way.

Even in the midst of Isaiah's hopeless situation, he found this promise worth praising the Lord over, Isaiah 12.

II. Vs. 13-17. The next point here is that the people willingly follow their ungodly leaders away from God. Their leaders, both civil and religious, cause them to err. Instead of leading them in the path of life (the ways of the Lord), they lead them to destruction.

The reason they are able to do this is because the people love to have it so, Jeremiah 5:31. We must not forget this point. We have rule going to the highest bidder because the people want it that way. Until there is a change in the heart...
of the people, they will cast their vote to the highest bidder, and those bidders will be thieves and robbers.

The result will be JEHOVAH cutting off the highest and lowest of the chief men of the nation, vs. 14, 15, 17. V. 17. Keep in mind that this is directed to Israel where Samaria was capital. Here, many years previously, Jeroboam had set up his false worship when the ten tribes split from the two who remained true to the line of David. Thereafter the two were called Judah, Jerusalem was their capital and Ahaz was their present king.

The true temple worship had been kept alive in Judah, and those who wanted to worship the Lord properly, could (and did) go south to Judah. Therefore, the ones who continued in the false worship at Samaria, did so because they wanted to remain in the false worship.

This brings us back to the fact that people have the kind of leaders they want.

These people who remained in the northern kingdom could proclaim loudly how much they loved the Lord, how broken-hearted they were over the apostasy of the nation and how much they were broken over the corruption, but the fact remained, they stayed in Israel when they could have gone south to Judah and Jerusalem. Therefore, every mouth speaketh folly. Their proclaiming of their stand against evil was hypocrisy. If they were against the present evil, they would have done something about it.

We will have to say this is as true today as it was for Isaiah. God’s people stay in apostasy because they want to. They stay in sin because they want to stay in sin. Then if the preacher happens to speak out against that area of rebellion in their life, they will find another preacher and a reason to justify that rebellion.

They stay under the false plan of Salvation because they want to. They seek for and stay in liberal, compromising churches because they want to. They keep ungodly and corrupt leaders because they want to. Then when they speak out against the corruption, compromise and false doctrine, they are hypocrites. They are not against this compromise or they would move to where the truth is taught and practiced. Or, if they were really against Socialism, corruption and ungodliness in Civil Government, they would work to correct it.

One of our men told of a trustee in the next county north of us, who lost the primary last spring. During the 20 years that he held this office, he tried to institute a ‘workfare’ program for those in need. ‘Urban Renewal’ led the war against him for this effort, headed up by a minister from a large Presbyterian Church. All under the name of Christ.

Again, God sends judgment against evil and hypocrisy with no mercy, v. 17. The natural man would like to find passages that speak of the greatness of the Lord’s mercy and try to lay claim to that mercy. This verse calls for judgments against the evildoer and the hypocrite and these judgments without mercy.

How is this reconciled with passages such as Psalms 136 (for his mercy endureth forever)? Really it’s quite simple.

Proverbs 28:13, 14, the mercy of God comes with repentance. When there is no sign of repentance on the part of the people, there is no sign of mercy from God.

FIRES OF WICKEDNESS

III. Vs. 18-21, which gives us the point we are looking for. This pronouncement is against the whole nation.

Here in Isaiah the nation is hot as an oven, aflame with evil desires and wickedness, as the people seek to devour all they can to satisfy their lusts. Hosea 7:6 speaks of the same thing in the same nation as does Isaiah. In Jeremiah 5:7-9 the whole nation is burning with lust, adultery and wickedness, as each person seeks to devour their neighbor’s spouse [wives and husbands].

This is so applicable for our day that it is sad. Everything is designed to cause the population to burn with lust. Everywhere we look this is prevalent; a large portion of advertising is directed this way, the style of dress on both men and women encourages this, the co-ed work force almost forces this to come to pass.

It is with a purpose; to cause lust to burn and destroy every vestige of Christianity. Obviously the high divorce rate, even among God’s people, shows that these efforts are effective.

We must keep in mind, this fire of wickedness is easily kindled because the people want it this way. Therefore, it will continue until there is a change in the people, brought about by the Lord.

This flame starts to burn in the lower classes of the population (the briers and thorns) and spread to the higher (in the thickets of the forest). This fire will spread until they are all consumed of their own lust, Isaiah 9:19-21. The people will consume themselves, self-destroy, v. 20. See James 1:12-16.

FIRES OF WRATH

V. 19 gives us the statement that we are looking for. Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts is the land darkened, and the people shall be as the fuel of the fire. Only the Spirit of God can stop this burning in the people, therefore, the land or nation.

The point that stands out here is that it is a sign of God’s wrath against a people (family, church, society, nation) when He does not stop this fire.

How does He stop it? By revealing sin and giving a spirit of repentance, Philippians 3:15. When God no longer reveals sin, destruction is close at hand.

SIGN OF MERCY

This fire will eat up the people who do not deal with sin. It is God’s grace and mercy that reveals sin and gives the desire to deal with that sin. It is those whom He has given over to destruction that He no longer reveals sin to. Therefore, conviction of sin by the Spirit of God is a sign
of His mercy and grace. The lack of conviction of sin is a sign of His wrath and judgment. (See Hebrews 10 and 12 for a further study here.)

It is the wrath of the Lord of hosts that leaves the land in the darkness of sin. Their consumption as fuel for the fire is the result.

This is what we have:

On the international (the forest), national and local (the briers and thorns) level: The lack of the light (Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts is the land darkened...), or the lack of any desire to return to the word of God by civil leaders, is a sign of God's wrath against the world system. The result will be self-destruction, Psalms 7:11-13; Proverbs 8:36. The international and national hatred of God and His law, is a sign that God has given the nations over to judgment and death.

Then the personal level; the church, home, or individual.

The lack of a pastor who will preach the law of God on a level, the people of God can understand, is a sign of the wrath of the Lord of hosts against the church and people.

The next step down is the lack of conviction over sin in the people when the word of God is read or heard. This is a sign of the wrath of the Lord of hosts against the people, either as a group of people (church), or as individuals.

The lack of conviction over sin in the lives of God's people is a sign of God's wrath against them. When there is no desire to bring the home, church or individual life into conformity with the principles of the word of God, judgment has set in. The individual, family or church which is left in darkness, is now fuel for the fire of the wrath of God, Isaiah 9:19.

The individual may not know how to deal with the revealed sin, and God may have to intervene to show him what to do, but the danger is that the person is unwilling to admit to, or is unspoken to about sin.

Therefore, the worse that can happen to a church is to get a pastor who will not preach the word of God in a manner which reveals sin, 1 John 3:4.

The worse that can happen is the individual lack of revelation of sin, no conviction over sin, or no desire to deal with sin as the word of God is proclaimed.

According to the word of God as given to the Apostle in 1 John 1, there is not a sinless person in this world. Therefore, when any person reaches the point where the Lord does not reveal sin to them (through personal communion with God and study of His word, or through the preaching of the word of God), or where they are not willing to confess and forsake sin, Isaiah 9:19 tells us that the Lord in His wrath, has forsaken them and their families to the darkness. They are now fuel for the fires of judgment.

Many people seem to think that it is a sign of spirituality to be able to read the word of God, or to sit under the preaching of the word of God, unmoved over sin. The principle contained here is quite the opposite. This shows that these people are now set aside for judgment, Hebrews 10:26-31.

On the other hand, there is not a surer sign of the mercy and grace of the Lord than the sensitivity to the moving of the Spirit of God in pointing out sin. It is a sign of God's love, mercy and grace upon a people when they readily have sin revealed to them with the desire and courage to deal with it, Philippians 2:13.

The most terrifying thing that a person should dread is the removal of the convicting power of the spirit of God, leaving them in their darkness, John 16:7-14. It means that He has forsaken His people and is leaving them in the way that seemeth right to themselves, ending in death, Proverbs 14:12.

(What would have been the very worse thing that could have happened to King David over his sin with the woman? It would have been the Lord failing to point his sin out to him. Read Psalms 51.)

The word of God, and especially the Psalms, overflows with this principle. The Psalmist prays in chapter 80:3 that the Spirit of God would turn him back to the proper way. He compares this to the face of the Lord shining upon them.

There is not a person who can say that they are sinless, therefore, all of our prayers, as we study and hear God's word, should be Psalms 139:23, 24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting, then give me Your grace to deal with it." When the Lord no longer does this for a nation, a church, or an individual, it means the wrath and judgment of God has set in.

Thus, when parents remain unmoved by the word of God, it means that the judgment of God has set in on their families. When religious and civil leaders remain unmoved over the sin, judgment has set in.

Look at the sad results of this hardness of heart and abandonment by the convicting Spirit of God, Isaiah 9:20, 21. Not only their self-destruction as we mentioned, but JEHOVAH God will turn them over to their own lusts, turning brother against brother. Manasseh and Ephraim were brothers. They fought among themselves, and united to fight against others of God's people. The wrath of the Lord against their sin permitted this, and He allowed it to continue with no mercy from Him.

This lack of the convicting power of the Holy Spirit of God within the heart of His people results in anarchy and discord prevalent among them, as they devour one another, Galatians 5:13-16.

In this we see that people can cry out for God to send His Spirit of love all they want, but the fighting will continue among them. Why? The context of Isaiah 9:21 clearly tells us that this lack of love with the desire to devour one another (Christian brother against Christian brother), is a result of the unwillingness of the people to confront and deal with sin in their own lives.

Until there is a spirit present in the people of God of
wanting the Lord to reveal any sin that might be in their individual lives, there will be fighting and wars among them, James 4.

Again, the saddest thing in the world is for the Lord to leave His people in the grips of their personal lust, pride and sin of all kinds. The worse thing that the Lord can allow is for His people to be able to read the word of God, or to be able to sit under the preaching of the word of God and remain unmoved over sin in their lives. The person who says they have no sin has not the truth in him.

When the Spirit of God stops revealing sin, the fires of judgment have started burning.

Then the last division, which we will not develop.

IV. The prevalence of injustice, 10:1-4. In fact, here we have a Woe pronounced against the ones in authority who misuse their authority, 10:1, 2.

According to vs. 3, 4, they are removed from their place of authority and placed in captivity and servitude, as well as slain. Yet in all of this, they do not turn from their wickedness. There is no mercy to them because they refused to show mercy to those under them.

It is every man for himself, get all you can while you can. Do unto others before they do unto you. The ones in authority that should be guarding the ones who are defenseless (widows and orphans) are the ones who are stripping them of all that they can. Judgment and justice are perverted, and the defenseless ones are the victims. This would include not only the literal widows and orphans, but anyone who is helpless before the unjust judges and civil leaders.

The result? Vs. 3, 4, foreign invasion and captivity for the leaders who are ruling by unrighteous decrees. Then, the last of the 'without mercies,' v. 4.

God in His justice, rewards each group after their own ways. He returns their evil upon their own head as the oppressors are oppressed and robbed. Their evil has caught up, with no one to aid them.

As we mentioned at the start, all four have the concluding statement, For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. V. 13 tells us there was no repentance. Therefore, no repentance, no mercy. God gives us the illustration of this in action in 2 Kings 25.

The answer? Cry out to the Lord according to Psalms 139:23, 24 with a humble heart and repentant spirit and it may be that the Lord will see fit to give His good Spirit unto us, conviction of and turning from sin.

PLEASE NOTE

We have rearranged, edited and reprinted the little Salvation pamphlet. Hopefully it will now be easier to read, as well as more effective. Also, we are making mass mailings to the Southern Baptist Directory (around 30,000 addresses). If you would like to help with this project financially, the Lord would bless. In addition, if you would like a supply to mail or to use, let us know.

Pastor Ovid Need Jr.