

“Return to the Lord Your God”  
By Trey Sullins

The Almighty God has many amazing qualities. Perhaps one of the greatest of these is His desire to see that all are saved. As proof of this, the Holy Spirit reveals in 2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” Because God wants all to be saved, He has tried since the beginning to get people to stay faithful and turn back to Him. A great example of this is in Hosea 14:1-9 where the prophet makes a plea for Israel to return to God. Within this passage we find a great example for how people can return to righteousness.

Hosea pleaded for the people to return back to their God. The Israelites had fallen far from where they once were. Hosea 4:1, 6 mention how they had a complete lack of knowledge: “There is no truth or mercy Or knowledge of God in the land.” They had spent many years turning away from knowledge of God and turning their dedication to false idols. Therefore, in order to return to Him the people needed to make a change in their lives by turning back to the Almighty. This change of heart is given words in Hosea 14:2: “And return to the LORD. Say to Him, ‘Take away all iniquity; Receive us graciously, For we will offer the sacrifices of our lips.’” These were the words that the people should say to God whenever they come back.

The command to return is one that we should heed as well. All throughout time God has instructed His people to come back to Him and our time period is no different. During a recounting of Paul’s conversion in Acts 26:18, Jesus says that the reason Paul was being sent to the Gentiles was to turn them from “the power of Satan to God.” The work of Paul and so many others led to the growth of the church and recording of God’s will in the New Testament. Even today we are affected by the word of God to turn from darkness to light! It is essential for those who have never known God to turn to Him and it is essential for those who have fallen away from God to return back to Him. However, just like those in the day of Hosea, we have to choose to make this change in our lives.

The question then must be asked how exactly should the Israelites in Hosea’s day return to God? This answer comes in verse two and three. In verse two the people’s words show two important things: they want their iniquity removed and they will correct their actions. When the people say “take away all iniquity” they are asking forgiveness from God. By offering the sacrifice of their lips they are correcting their sinful actions into righteous actions. This pattern continues in verse three which shows a turn away from false allies and gods. All of these actions show a picture of true repentance which is turning away from sin and turning to God.

Repentance is a necessary step in returning to God for us as well. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ washes us of our sins at baptism, but it is our responsibility to remain clean from sin. The way that we do that is exactly like these Israelites, through repentance. Consider Galatians 5:4 which says, “You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” Some of the Christian recipients of this letter had a big problem with trying to bring back pieces of the law of Moses into the law of Christ. By doing this the Holy Spirit condemns them in this verse. These were Christians who fell from the grace of God and no longer had salvation. What did they need to do? Repent! They needed to set aside this sin and once again do only the works which Christ brought. When we find ourselves in situations of sin in our lives, we

have to make this same determination to remove that sin and continue on only with righteous actions.

The love of God is truly incredible to think about. For thousands of years He has watched mankind turn away in sin and yet still always desires that they come back to Him in repentance. At any time in history when people find themselves caught up in the sins of this world, they needed to return to God with proper repentance. Praise be to God that we today have that amazing opportunity as well through the blood of Jesus Christ. The next time we find ourselves trapped in sin, let us turn back to our God and repent. When we do this then Hosea 14:4 can be God's response to us as well: "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, For My anger has turned away from him."