

Turn to God
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Amos 4:1-13

Here's a ridiculous idea to make a point. What if you went home today and found your most flattering photograph of yourself, made copies, and glued them over all the mirrors in your house? Every time you gazed in the mirror, your best image of yourself would be smiling back. In essence, Israel had done that in Amos' time.

Last week we said the Old Testament prophets (like Amos) acted as "warning lights in the dashboard" for God's people Israel. We talked about the danger of ignoring the "warning lights" God gives His people today in scripture. We said the God's word is like a "mirror" that shows us what we really look like (where we fall short of God's standard) and to help us improve the picture by making changes based on what the mirror reveals (obedience to God.) To make those changes, after we see where we fall short in the mirror of scripture, we need to turn and look at Christ as our model for true obedience to God the Father.

In chapter four of Amos, we learn what was distracting the people of Israel (God's people) from obedience to Him. Not only were they ignoring the warning lights, they had covered over their mirrors with pictures of themselves they had created. Instead of a mirror that revealed reality, when they looked at the picture they admired what they saw and had no motivation for changing anything.

Here's the point: You can't correct a problem you refuse to see. Sometimes God's people deceive ourselves by thinking, "*I'm not so bad.*" God's standard for obedience isn't "not so bad" but striving to imitate Christ. We don't have to live like the devil to be disobedient to God; disobedience is refusing to strive to live like Christ.

So, what was distracting Israel from obedience to God? How was God going to get their attention? Let's look at Amos 4 beginning in verse one to find out.

Amos 4:1–13 (NLT) — 1 Listen to me, you fat cows living in Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy, and who are always calling to your husbands, “Bring us another drink!” **2** The Sovereign Lord has sworn this by his holiness: “The time will come when you will be led away with hooks in your noses. Every last one of you will be dragged away like a fish on a hook! **3** You will be led out through the ruins of the wall; you will be thrown from your fortresses,” says the Lord.

- You know it’s going to be a bad day at church when the preacher begins the message by calling the women “fat cows.”
- He wasn’t referring to their physical appearance. We have a saying, “fat and happy.” What does that mean? How does it speak to self-perception?
- Bashan near Samaria was “cattle country.” Amos used the cows as a jarring illustration for the “fat and happy” people headed for slaughter.
- Why was he picking on the women? His message was for all of Israel but he started with the “mobster wives” of Samaria who lived for luxury.
- They didn’t care that their husbands paid for the “good life” by “extortion, exploitation, and manipulation of the poor,” they just wanted the stuff!
- Amos warned of God’s punishment. “One day your life of luxury from ill-gotten gain will end when you are caught like a “fish on a hook.”
- In 722 BC, the Assyrians destroyed Samaria and took the people captive.
- Being wealthy is not a sin. If you’re materially blessed, the questions are: Did you earn it honestly? Is it an idol? Do you use it for God’s glory?
- Israel couldn’t answer YES to any of those.
- Paul wrote to Timothy: **1 Timothy 6:17–19 (NLT) — 17** Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. **18** Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. **19** By doing this they will be storing up

their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life.

- By the way, you don't have to be wealthy to be addicted to stuff.
- Sin #1 – Luxury: They stole it, they worshiped it, and they squandered it.
- Sin #2 – Religious hypocrisy. Look at verse four.

4 “Go ahead and offer sacrifices to the idols at Bethel. Keep on disobeying at Gilgal. Offer sacrifices each morning, and bring your tithes every three days. **5** Present your bread made with yeast as an offering of thanksgiving. Then give your extra voluntary offerings so you can brag about it everywhere! This is the kind of thing you Israelites love to do,” says the Sovereign Lord.

- God's prophet said, *“The more you go to church, the more you sin!”* What?
- *“Israel, you are crooks and thieves during the week and act like saints on the Sabbath. Your “religion” is all for show! Worse yet, you have convinced yourself you are right with God by with your hypocrisy.”*
- **Matthew 7:21 (NLT) — 21** “Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter.
- Warren Wiersbe wrote, *“The test of a spiritual experience is not “Do I feel good?” or “Did we have a big crowd and a good time?” The real test is “Do I know God better and am I more like Jesus Christ?” The people in Amos's day didn't return home determined to help the poor, feed the hungry, and care for the widows and orphans. They went home with the same selfish hearts that they had when they left home, because their “worship” was only an empty ritual.”*
- Sin #3 – Ignoring God's warnings and refusing to turn to Him.
- Amos listed the warnings they were ignoring. Look for a repeated phrase.

6 “I brought hunger to every city and famine to every town. But still you would not return to me,” says the Lord. **7** “I kept the rain from falling when your crops needed it the most. I sent rain on one town but withheld it from another. Rain fell on one field, while another field

withered away. **8** People staggered from town to town looking for water, but there was never enough. But still you would not return to me,” says the Lord. **9** “I struck your farms and vineyards with blight and mildew. Locusts devoured all your fig and olive trees. But still you would not return to me,” says the Lord. **10** “I sent plagues on you like the plagues I sent on Egypt long ago. I killed your young men in war and led all your horses away. The stench of death filled the air! But still you would not return to me,” says the Lord. **11** “I destroyed some of your cities, as I destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Those of you who survived were like charred sticks pulled from a fire. But still you would not return to me,” says the Lord.

- Famine (v.6), drought (vv 7-8), destruction of crops (v 9), sicknesses (v 10a), defeat in war (v. 10b). How could they not get the message?
- Five times God said, *“But still you would not return to me.”*
- Think about our world today. God is so patient and yet people refuse to turn to Him. Worse than that, HIS OWN people often refuse to look in the mirror to see our own disobedience to His commands in scripture.
- With hard hearts and deceived minds Israel was headed to real disaster.

12 “Therefore, I will bring upon you all the disasters I have announced. Prepare to meet your God in judgment, you people of Israel!”

- We read this passage, shake our heads and say, “Those bad Israelites!”
- Let’s not be quick to judge Israel in that day when we look at OUR day.
- Ruth Graham once said to Billy, *“If God doesn’t punish America, He’ll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah.”*ⁱⁱ Sad but true.
- Before we get too smug, let’s peel the perfect picture off our own mirror.
- Let me share an illustration I call the “Spectrum of Disobedience to God.”

Imitate Christ
(Totally obedient
To God)

Live like the Devil
(Hates God and the
Things of God)

X -----X

- On one end is imitating Christ our model for total obedience to the Father.
- The other end is the extreme opposite of living like the devil – hating God.
- Many people believe disobedience to God means living like the devil. *“I’m not disobedient to God, I don’t live like the devil like some folks!”*
- Disobedience to God doesn’t require living like the devil.
- Disobedience to God begins way on the other end of that spectrum.
- Disobedience to God occurs when we stop striving to live like Christ.
- Let me repeat that: God’s design is that we STRIVE to imitate Christ. We don’t have to ‘live like the devil’ to be disobedient to God. The devil is satisfied if just don’t imitate Christ.
- Sometimes God’s people deceive ourselves by thinking, *“I’m not so bad.”* God’s standard isn’t “I’m not so bad” but striving to imitate Christ.
- *“But I can’t live up to Christ’s perfect sinless standard!”*
- The good news of the gospel is that if we’ve trusted Christ, GRACE fills the gap between our disobedience and God’s standard. All we have to do is turn to Christ asking Him to help us be obedient to God.
- The people of Israel should have felt drawn to obey God because He had been so good to them and delivered them time after time.
- Obedience should have come out of love for God. Same for us today.
- Even if they didn’t obey out of love, Amos reminded them in verse 13:

13 For the Lord is the one who shaped the mountains, stirs up the winds, and reveals his thoughts to mankind. He turns the light of

dawn into darkness and treads on the heights of the earth. The Lord God of Heaven's Armies is his name!

- We should obey God out of love, but for sure, because of Who He is.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- You can't correct a problem you refuse to see.
- Israel refused to respond to God's warnings. They also refused to look in the mirror of His word to see how far short they were from God's standard.
- It was like they had covered their mirrors with a satisfying self-portrait.
- They were smug, self-sufficient, and addicted to luxury.
- Even worse, they were hypocrites who practiced a "fake" religion.
- We may not be as rebellious to God as they were, but we DO need a clear view of the mirror of His word to see where we fall short of His standard.
- We need to be looking at Jesus (revealed in God's word) as our model.
- Let's not deceive ourselves by thinking, "*I'm not so bad.*" God's standard for obedience isn't "not so bad" but striving to imitate Christ.
- Let's remember, we don't have to live like the devil to be disobedient to God; disobedience is when we stop STRIVING to live like Christ.
- Perhaps we need to ask God to help us peel some pictures off OUR mirrors.

ⁱ THE WIERSBE BIBLE COMMENTARY: OLD TESTAMENT © 2007 Warren W.

Wiersbe <https://billygraham.org/story/billy-graham-my-heart-aches-for-america/>

ⁱⁱ <https://billygraham.org/story/billy-graham-my-heart-aches-for-america/>