

Listen to God
September 4, 2022
Allen Power

Amos 2:4-16

Let's talk about warning lights in the dashboard. Ever ignore a warning light? You get in the car, start the engine and there's a warning light: *"Good grief, I don't have time for this! It's probably nothing!"* Would you stop and deal with it or drive awhile to see if it goes away? [Illustration: Susan's truck battery – beware!]

Warning lights are in the dashboard for a reason and we shouldn't ignore them. Would you want to fly on a plane if the pilot announced, *"We've got a warning light in the cockpit but it's probably nothing. Since we're already late we think we'll chance it."* You and I would be running for the jet way!

God's prophets in Old Testament times were warning lights for the people. They warned the nations that ignoring God and His truth results in judgment. God's word is filled with warning lights that tell us when we are ignoring God and His commands. Christ-followers also have His Spirit living in us to activate the warning lights of scripture. We ignore those warnings at our own peril!

Today we begin a study in the Minor Prophets. We often have to consult our table of contents to find Jonah, Hosea, Micah, and Amos. These books are called minor because they are short in length; but they are strong on the truth we need.

Some context before the text: It was the time of the divided kingdoms of Israel to the north and Judah to the south. Amos was a southerner from Judah, a businessman God called to go north to Israel and preach a message of judgment. This was also a time of economic prosperity and military strength. Many people in Samaria (Israel's capital) had become wealthy. They thought, *"If life is good God must be pleased."* They were ignoring the warning lights of sin.

- Amos began by sharing God's message of judgment on six of the foreign nations surrounding Israel. He was calling out Israel's pagan enemies.
- These nations had done horrible things. Human trafficking, killing pregnant woman and their unborn children, burning the bones of enemies into lime. They committed the kinds of atrocities we associate with Nero, Hitler, Stalin, Saddam Hussein, and Vladimir Putin.
- We can imagine the people of Israel cheered Amos on as he stated that God would "not let them go unpunished!" *"You preach it Amos!"*
- How do we often make ourselves feel better about our own behavior?
- In verses four and five of chapter two Amos turns to the nation of Judah:

4 This is what the Lord says: "The people of Judah have sinned again and again, and I will not let them go unpunished! They have rejected the instruction of the

Lord, refusing to obey his decrees. They have been led astray by the same lies that deceived their ancestors. **5** So I will send down fire on Judah, and all the fortresses of Jerusalem will be destroyed.”

- Though the people of Judah were also God’s people, Israel hated them about as much as those pagan nations. [Think Democrats vs Republicans]
- Again, we can imagine the people of Israel cheering Amos on.
- Judah’s sins (rejecting God and His commands) weren’t as awful as the atrocities of the pagan nations but God still punished their rebellion.
- The Israelites were likely cheering Amos’ preaching judgment on OTHERS, then he went too far. Verse six:

6 This is what the Lord says: “The people of Israel have sinned again and again, and I will not let them go unpunished! They sell honorable people for silver and poor people for a pair of sandals. **7** They trample helpless people in the dust and shove the oppressed out of the way. Both father and son sleep with the same woman, corrupting my holy name. **8** At their religious festivals, they lounge in clothing their debtors put up as security. In the house of their gods, they drink wine bought with unjust fines.

- Israel was guilty of things like exploiting the poor and helpless, debt slavery, idolatry, sexual abuse of servants, and sexual immorality with temple prostitutes. They would commit these sins then they would go to the temple and act religious and sanctimonious.
- Their sins were bad but pretending to be fine, upstanding people of God while committing those sins (verse 7 says) “profaned” the Lord’s name.
- It is a picture of God’s people dishonoring His reputation with their sin.
- It’s bad enough for pagans to commit horrible sins but these were God’s chosen people. They showed up every sabbath and heard the word of God yet they ignored the “warning lights” of His commandments.
- God said He would not let them go unpunished! Verse 13:

13 “So I will make you groan like a wagon loaded down with sheaves of grain. **[What a picture of being loaded down with sin! God’s punishment was coming and even their great military couldn’t stop it:]** **14** Your fastest runners will not get away. The strongest among you will become weak. Even mighty warriors will be unable to save themselves. **15** The archers will not stand their ground. The swiftest runners won’t be fast enough to escape. Even those riding horses won’t be able to save themselves. **16** On that day the most courageous of your fighting men will drop their weapons and run for their lives,” says the Lord.

- Let’s apply this message of judgment on Judah and Israel to our lives.
- God’s word is filled with warning lights that tell us when we are ignoring God and His commands. We ignore those warnings at our own peril!
- Warning light #1: God’s people shouldn’t justify our sin by comparing ourselves to those who are “worse” than we are. We’re all sinners!

- It can be tempting to think, *“I’m not perfect but I’m not as bad as THEM!”*
- Warning light #2: Don’t confuse God’s patience with God’s approval.
- Israel was prosperous and militarily strong. Life was good! They interpreted God’s blessings as His approval. Their prosperity was a sign of God’s patience and mercy but that was about to run out!
- Flawed theology: If life is going well God must be pleased with me.
- If that were true, then if life is not going well, God must not be pleased.
- What proves those are flawed assumptions about God?
- What about godly people who suffer? Is God mad at them?
- [Illustration: “Warm fuzzies” jar – pom-poms given/taken in pre-K.]
- God blesses but doesn’t bribe. He disciplines but doesn’t condemn.
- We shouldn’t assume good or bad times as evidence of pleasing God.
- If “good times” or “bad times” are not an indication of pleasing/not pleasing God, what is the only way to know if my behavior is pleasing to God?

James 1:23–24 (ESV) — 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. **24** For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

- When I look at the sins of others I can feel pretty good about myself.
- When I look at my life in the “mirror” of God’s word it’s a different story.
- Comparing myself to God’s standard of perfect holiness shows me I can’t meet that standard. That is why we need grace. It is why we need Christ!
- Warning Light #3 – I need to compare my behavior to God’s word not other people and I need to pay attention to the “warning lights.”

Hebrews 4:12 (ESV) — 12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

- The “mirror” of God’s word is filled with “warning lights” I dare not ignore!
- Other thoughts?

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- When I compare my behavior with others I can always find someone who is “worse” than I am. I can also find people who are “better!”
- The truth is all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory (Rom. 3:23).
- Amos said to God’s people, don’t look at the pagans, look in the mirror!
- God’s Old Testament prophets were warning lights for the people. They warned the nations that ignoring God and His truth results in judgment.
- Today, we have God’s complete revelation for guidance and correction.
- God’s word is filled with warning lights that tell us when we are ignoring God and His commands. Christ-followers also have His Spirit living in us to activate the warning lights of scripture. We ignore those warnings at our own peril!

- We wouldn't stay on a plane about to fly with a "check engine" light and we likely wouldn't leave the house in the morning without looking at ourselves in the mirror.
- Let's strive to consistently look into the mirror of God's word and not ignore its warning lights that give us guidance and correction.