

Amos 5:18-6:14

'The sin that God hates'

Hatred and loathing

Some of you will know that at the moment in Western Australia there is a debate about the introduction of racial and religious vilification laws.

Such laws have been introduced in various parts of the world and in some States of Australia.

The general purpose of such laws is general to make it unlawful for a person to engage in any conduct that incites hatred against, serious contempt for, or revulsion of, any other person or class of persons.

The wording of these laws is critical.

You see, underneath them is a view that prizes tolerance and that therefore views hatred as something very negative.

Hatred is linked with revulsion or contempt.

It is a very negative emotion.

And those of us who have been hated or who have hated someone else know just how negative hatred is.

To hate something is to regard it as evil.

It is to have a very intense dislike for something.

It is linked with words such as enmity, animosity, malevolence, rancour, malignity, detestation, loathing, abhorrence, repugnance, antipathy, and intolerance.

We in the modern world know that hatred destroys relationships.

We cannot see anything positive about hatred.

It is something to be shunned.

Something to protect people from.

And something we need to strive to get rid of in our lives and our society.

We view hatred as something evil.

There is nothing positive about it.

And this makes it very strange that the Bible sometimes talks about hatred in a positive sense.

In fact, the Bible sometimes talks about God hating both people and things.

In Isaiah 61:8 God tells us that he hates robbery and iniquity.

In Psalm 5:5 we are told that God hates all who do wrong.

In Proverbs 6:16 we are given a long list of things God hates.

Listen to Proverbs 6:16-18:

¹⁶*There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him:*

¹⁷*haughty eyes,*

a lying tongue,

hands that shed innocent blood,

¹⁸*a heart that devises wicked schemes,*

feet that are quick to rush into evil,

¹⁹*a false witness who pours out lies*

and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers. [Proverbs 6:16-19, NIV]

Can you see what is going on here?

The Bible generally agrees with our modern view that hatred is something very negative.

It is something powerful and destructive.

However, there is a good hatred, a positive hatred.
Positive hatred can be seen in God's holy revulsion at sin and sinners.
Positive hatred can be seen in God's intolerance of evil.
God finds evil odious.
It revolts him, and angers him.
He loathes it, finds it repugnant, detests it, and finds it repugnant.
God hates sin.

The sin God hates

But Proverbs 8:13 tells us that there is a particular sin that God finds particularly repugnant.
There is one sin that God particularly hates.
And that sin is pride.
Listen to what God says in his word in the second half of Proverbs 8:13:
I hate pride and arrogance... [Proverbs 8:13, NIV]
And the rest of the Bible agrees.
Pride is the sin that Adam and Eve were guilty of when they thought they knew better than God.
Pride is the sin that characterises the devil and his cohorts.
And pride is the main sin of some of the great sinners of the Bible.
God hates the sin of pride.
He hates the arrogant.

The place where it hides

Now, I've started today's talk by talking about God's hatred of sin and his hatred of pride because Amos talks about these things in Amos 5 and 6.
In Amos 5:21 we are told that God hates and despises Israel's religious feasts and cannot stand their assemblies.
In fact, the original Hebrew of Amos 5:21-23 refers to God's sense of smell, sight, and hearing.
He has a severe dislike of what he smells, sees, and hears amongst his people.
Then, in Amos 6:8, we are told that God abhors the pride of Jacob and detests the fortresses that they take pride in and place their confidence in.
I think that Amos 5 and 6 are therefore about God's hatred of sin amongst his people.
And I think that they are particularly about God's hatred of the sin of pride.
So, with this in mind, let's take a closer look at these verses.
And as we do, I want to show you the places where the sin of pride often hides.
I want to show you the camouflage that pride often uses and the characteristic environment in which it lives.

Amos 5:20-27

So, first let's turn to Amos 5:20-27.
These verses are about the religious practices of Israel.
God takes a good hard look at the whole religious practice of the people of Israel.
He examines their religious holidays, their feasts, their sacrifices and all the surrounding hymns, songs, and musical practices.
And he finds that they are very religious people.
And their religion is lavish and full.
They sacrifice great sacrifices.
They throw great festivals.
They sing great songs.
But justice and righteousness are absent.
But I want you to notice something else about these verses.

Notice the constant repetition of the word 'your'.

The festivals and sacrifices and songs do not have God as their source and their centre.

The crunch comes in verse 26 where God says they are lifting up and worshipping a God of their own making.

In other words, at the centre of their religious life lies themselves.

God is not there.

And nor are his concerns.

Amos is exposing one of the most characteristic places in which human pride hides.

It hides in self-made religion.

In religion that has human interests and human glory.

In our day, such pride might find its place in a group of Christians who make sure that they have the most gifted preachers, or the straightest theology, or the liveliest music and most talented musicians but are empty of love and compassion and justice and righteousness.

You might find people who know about God but don't know God.

You might find people who love knowledge but don't love others.

You might find people who close their eyes to rapturous music but who don't have a place for obedience to God's word.

Such religion is despised by God.

He has no time for it.

And people who practice it are really not worshipping the real God but a God of their own making.

Amos 6:1-7

Let's now turn to Amos 6:1-7.

As I've indicated in previous talks, the time in which Amos was prophesying was the golden age of the northern kingdom of Israel.

It was a time of great economic expansion.

It was a time of military and territorial expansion.

It was therefore a time when the elite grew rich.

Their lives were lives of wealth and luxury.

And they thought that such wealth and luxury were signs of God's blessing.

God was pleased with them.

And so they were complacent.

They felt secure that God was favourably disposed toward them.

This is the focus of Amos 6:1-7.

Within these verses there are a number of wordplays that Amos uses that emphasise his criticism.

For example, in verse 1 the NIV uses the term 'foremost' nation.

The ESV is probably more helpful at this point.

It uses the term 'choicest of nations.'

The word 'choice' is then used throughout these verses.

These people think of themselves as the choicest of nations.

Verse 4 tells us that they lounge around on ivory couches and dine on the choicest of lambs.

Verse 6 tells us that they drink wine out of huge bowls rather than cups and they throw the choicest of oils and lotions over themselves.

The picture is a picture of huge luxury.

Great people, pampering themselves, lounging around in their wealth, eating the best food, drinking the best wine, singing songs of their own making that they think are as good as any of the songs of the great songwriter, King David.

But their complacency and security and their comparisons with David just show off their pride.

And verse 6 makes clear that they are unconcerned about the reality of the situation, about the fact that the nation is standing under judgment for its neglect of righteousness and compassion.

Can you see what is being said here?
You see, wealth and luxury often lead to pride.
And such pride often leads to apathy and complacency.
They lead to a false sense of security.
They often lead you to think that you and God are friends.
Or they often lead you to think that you don't need God.
Again, we can see this in our own day.
There are people in our day who are hugely wealthy and are therefore apathetic toward God.
We see it in our rich and lucky country that soaks in the benefits God has given it but pays lip service to God.
Or we see it in Christians who believe that prosperity is the sign of God's blessing but who neglect the poor and fail to be generous.
Such people have become proud.
They have not recognised that their wealth and prosperity are the gift of God and are to be used in the service of God.

Amos 6:11-14

Now let's move on to Amos 6:11-14.
These verses talk in various ways about the military strength of the nation.
You can see this most clearly in verse 13.
Here the people of Israel boast in their military conquests and think that it is in their own power that they have been able to be successful.
Again, you can see where pride hides.
Just as it often hides behind wealth and prosperity, so it hides behind might and power.
Might and power often inures you against God.
It often makes you think that God is unnecessary or that you are God.
And so in other parts of the Bible, the strong and the mighty often set themselves against God.
They often try to raise themselves above God.
And this is so in our own day.
For even in our own day the mighty and the powerful often seem to think that they can flout God's laws and act defiantly against God's wishes.
This is why the leaders of God's people are told not to lord it over others.
Pastors are not to lord it over their congregations.
Husbands are not to lord it over their wives.
Parents are not to domineer over their children.
You see, positions of power and might often mask pride and arrogance.

The signs of its presence

Can you see what I'm saying?
The signs of pride are clear.
They are glossy religious practices and ceremonies that are empty of God centredness, righteousness, justice, and compassion.
They are luxury and wealth that has no interest in using such wealth for God's purposes.
They are complacency and apathy about sin and its consequences.
They are might and power that thinks it is cut loose from God or not dependent upon God.

The fate that awaits it (5:18-20; 6:8-9)

A day of surprises

You will notice that there are some sections of our passages that I have missed out.

I have missed out the end of each oracle as it mentions God's judgment.
And I have missed out two longer passages in Amos 5:18-20 and 6:8-10.
These two longer passages pick up the theme of judgment.
Amos 6:8-10 emphasises that the thing God hates is Israel's pride and arrogance.
Amos 5:18-20 tells us about the Day of the Lord.
This is the first time in the Bible that the term, 'the Day of the Lord' occurs.
It seems as though the Israelites thought that the Day of the Lord would be a good day for them.
Perhaps they thought that it was a time when God would appear.
And when he appeared he would act to judge the enemies of his people.
In other words, they thought it would be a day of victory, of salvation, of great revelation, and of great glory for his people.
But Amos tells them that it will be a day of great surprise and great reversal.
Instead of being a day that they long for, it should be a day that they dread.
Instead of it being a day of light, it will be a day of darkness.
And Amos captures the surprise by imaging a man who has the ultimate bad day.
Look at it in verse 19.
He imagines a man going about his normal daily business.
He meets a lion and runs for his life.
But then he meets a bear.
And finally he gets to the security of his house.
You can imagine him rushing in, locking the door behind him, and breathing a sigh of relief.
He then stops to catch his breath and leans against the wall of the house, the very wall that gave him shelter from the lion and the bear.
But then a snake crawls out from the crack in the wall and bites him.
This is what the day of the Lord will be like for Israel.
The very God they found security in will be the source of their judgment and terror.
And the day that they longed for would be the day that they would dread.

Why?

Now at this point, I want to ask why the Day of the Lord will be such a day of surprise for God's people?
Well, let's start by thinking about pride.
You see, the essence of pride is that it puts humans at the centre of things.
And the essence of the Day of the Lord is that it is the day OF THE LORD.
It is God's day.
It is the day on which he will be glorified.
It is the day on which he will be at the centre of everything.
And if he is at the centre of everything, then humans will not be.
On the Lord's day there will be no room for anyone who does not have God at the centre.
On the Lord's day there will only be room for God and the things of God and people who have God at the centre of their existence.
The Lord's day will be exactly that ... It will be the LORD'S DAY.

Avoiding it and its consequences

Friends, let me tell you that the day of the Lord is a day that is surely coming.
The New Testament calls it the day of Christ.
It is a day when Christ alone will be exalted.
It will be a day of judgment.
And it will be a day when all human confidence, complacency, and pride will be crushed.
So, I want to urge you to take a good hard look at yourself and ask if you are ready for this day.

And I want to tell you the secret of being ready for this day.
The secret of being ready for the day of the Lord is to rid yourself of pride.
It is to avoid pride.
You see, God hates pride.
And God hates people who are proud.
And the proud will not survive the day of Christ.
So, how do you avoid pride?
Well, the opposite of pride is humility.
Where pride shows itself in speaking, humility shows itself in listening.
Where pride shows itself in disobedience, humility shows itself in obedience.
Where pride shows itself in independence from God, humility shows itself in dependence upon God.
Where pride shows itself in trust in humans and self, humility shows itself in trust in God.
So, the humble person is one who trusts in God and his word.
The humble person is one who lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.
The humble person is one who lives in a manner that pleases God.
They are obedience, and dependent.
They love the things God loves and hate the things God hates.
Let me give you some practical ways of avoiding pride.
First, determine that your only confidence before God will be in Jesus.
He alone is sufficient to relate you to God.
Second, determine that you will be a student of God's word.
You will search God's word for his guidance and instruction.
And when it differs with your own opinion, you will choose to listen to God's word.
Third, deliberately work on not thinking of yourself as greater than or more important than other people.
Cultivate an attitude where you do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to.
Fourth, don't think that rightness is your sole prerogative.
The Bible is clear, the person that thinks he knows does not yet know as he ought to.
Thinking you know everything is a gross display of ignorance.
But it is also a gross display of arrogance and pride.
Fifth, be a learner.
In my view, teachability is the greatest sign of humility and unwillingness to learn the greatest sign of pride.
You can tell when someone is proud.
They do not listen to people.
And in the end, they do not even listen to God.
They think that they alone are the source of all knowledge and insight.
So, let me urge you to cultivate these things.
Cultivate a confidence in Jesus.
Cultivate a love for God's word and let that word shape your thinking and your actions.
Cultivate a humble perspective on yourself.
And cultivate a teachable attitude.
These things will help you avoid a surprise on the coming day of Christ.
They will be good preparation for that day.