

God's Favor

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There was a minor prophet who lived in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel. He was a herdsman of Tekoa. He was called to the prophetic office two years before the earthquake during Uzziah's reign. His name was Amos.

Amos prophesied chiefly against Israel, against those that were at ease in Zion. Amos vividly describes the life of the people: people "that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David, that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments...." Amos 6:3-6. You can picture in your mind people who lived in the security of material things. The people of Zion had more than enough to satisfy their human needs and to care for the poor. But they were evil and oppressed the poor instead of supplying the needs of the poor. In their wickedness, they sought to satisfy their evil fleshly desires by drinking wine out of bowls, inventing musical instruments, singing in a tremulous voice to the sound of the viol, and putting on costly perfumes. The people of Zion lived for their own worldly gain. They lived to fulfill their selfish goals of luxury and ease.

Amos accurately calls the people who are at ease in Zion, kine of Bashan. Now, a kine can be cows or cattle. Kine of Bashan were a breed of cattle very strong, but also very wanton and unruly. These cattle were so unmanageable they often broke through the barriers which were meant to hold them in a particular place. They often were found grazing on other people's land. The kine of Bashan were strong cattle often attacking smaller cattle. David says this about them in Psalm 22:12: "Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round." The people at ease in Zion were very much like those cows of Bashan because they oppressed the poor and crushed the needy. They laughed at and mocked the poor and needy of Zion, their very own kinsmen. Oh, they had a high priest and they offered sacrifices, but God despised their feast days and did not accept their offerings because they also had their own gods, Moloch and Chiun, which they made by their own hands. Woe to them that are at ease in Zion! Woe to the kine of Bashan!

The people at ease in Zion did not live by true faith. They were not doers of God's Word. They were not free from the bondage of sin. They desired the day of the Lord, but to them that day would be a day of darkness and not light. The cows of Bashan would find the day of the Lord very dark with no brightness in it at all. Woe to them that are at ease in Zion! Woe to them that desire the day of the Lord! What shall you gain in the end?

Remember that Amos is a prophet of God. He not only points out the many sins of the people and the just judgments for those sins but includes the command to the people from the Lord; "seek ye me, and ye shall live; seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth; The LORD is his name...." Amos 5:4b & 8. Is there repentance from idol worship? Is there repentance from the oppression of the poor and needy? No, there is not repentance. Is there a seeking after the Lord? No. The Lord God intends to destroy the kingdom of Israel from off the face of the earth. However, with the command to seek the Lord, God preserves His righteous people. Among the house of Israel, the elect covenant people of God are preserved.

The young people of Zion could be characterized as without shame, without sorrow over sin, without repentance from sin. They reasoned: I'll do it just for the fun of it, because I feel like it. Besides, everyone else is doing it. They were at ease, too! They were the cows of Bashan, too! They committed the same sins their parents committed. They were rebellious and followed the worldly crowd. They were hooked on drugs: the drug of self first, the drug of the lusts of the flesh, and the drug of the pride of life. They were caught in the bondage of sin and were far from God. They may have called themselves the young people of Zion, but they were not the true righteous of Zion. Yet, among the young people of Zion, God preserved His righteous young people. In the midst of a perverse generation, God preserved and still preserves His righteous young people. But their lives were far different in character. You may wonder why it was wrong to be without shame. Shame can mean dishonor or disgrace. We would not want to bring dishonor or disgrace upon ourselves. We would not want to bring shame upon ourselves. But this is not the meaning of shame as it is used in the first sentence of this paragraph. Shame can mean what a person feels inside of him when his conscience bothers him. He feels something. He has a disturbed or painful feeling of guilt, incompetence, indecency or blameworthiness. A person who knows shame feels guilty and blameworthy. Closely related to shame is the word *ashamed* which means to feel shame as from doing something bad, wrong, or foolish. The opposite in meaning to the word *ashamed* would be the word *proud*. We could say, then, that the young people of Zion did not feel any guilt for doing something wrong and this would lead them into the sin of being proud in the heart.

Perhaps a few examples will help us to understand the idea of being without shame. It happens sometimes that parents and teachers will confront children of the covenant with a question such as, "Did you commit this shameful sin?" The answer comes back as, "No, I didn't," even when the parents and teacher know that he did do it. They are concerned that the child confess his sin, but the child does not confess the sin and does not show any shame or sorrow. Our children can be shameless liars, and lest we forget, we too can be shameless liars if we are not careful.

Another example of being without shame is our desire to fulfill the lusts of the flesh. An ever-increasing plague or trouble with you, young people, is the flesh. Sometime in the past it was shameful (a violation of what was considered to be just, moral, or decent) for young people to hold hands or embrace in public. Today much more than holding hands and embracing is done in public. These fulfillments of lust are an everyday occurrence in public. These fulfillments of lust are occurring repeatedly with people of a younger age which is very alarming. The trouble is you show no shame in doing these things. Now that bothers a lot of people who are concerned about you as being the covenant seed and the future church. In other words, from the viewpoint of the children of God who have much experience in the battle of faith, you lack shame in doing those things you should be ashamed to do as God's people in the midst of the world.

Closely related to being without shame is showing no sorrow over sin and showing no repentance from sin. Sorrow over sin and repentance from sin are two essential daily experiences each child of God knows as he walks his pilgrim's journey through this life. He must know them. Without them he does not know God's favor, the forgiveness of his sins through the precious blood of the Lamb, and the power of Christ's atonement. Without them he can only know God's displeasure.

When there is no shame, young people, in lusting in public; no sorrow over this sin, and no repentance from this sin, then you can only know God's displeasure. When there is no shame, young people, in telling a lie; no sorrow over this sin, and no repentance from this sin, then you

can only know God's displeasure. Then your faith is said to be vain. When you are not ashamed of the sin of telling a lie and the sin of lusting, then you are ashamed of the merits of the suffering and death of our Savior. Then you do not know the righteousness of Christ. Then you are like those who are at ease in Zion. Then you are like the cows of Bashan. Woe unto you, saith the LORD!

The young person who does know God's favor and in whom true faith is being wrought by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost is free from the bondage of sin. He does good works in this life out of a love to God. These good works do not merit him anything, nor is he justified by them. He does good works, but not to merit by them. He fights the good battle of faith as an obedient servant doing only what is his duty to do. He repents from telling lies and in no way satisfies the lusts of the flesh. (Read Articles XXIII and XXIV of the Belgic Confession, page 31 in the back of the Psalter.)

Soon you will be starting school again. These words are meant for you. Seek the LORD and you shall live.

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