

What God Wants

BY PASTOR DAVID GUZIK



“For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” Hosea 6:6

God used the prophet Hosea to present the message of His love in an unforgettable way. God told him to marry a prostitute as a way to illustrate the amazing love God has for His people. Because of his cheating wife, Hosea had a unique perspective on how God felt about cheating Israel, who didn't faithfully love God the way that God loved them. God used the prophet Hosea to help them understand who He was, how He loved them, and what He expected from them.

For example, in Hosea Chapter 5, the prophet proclaimed that even though Israel came to God with sacrifices, they would not find Him. They would not find God because He withdrew Himself from Israel (Hosea 5:6-7), because they had dealt treacherously against Him. And their sacrifices were not sincere expressions of commitment to God, but rather empty, religious rituals.

In Chapter 6 of Hosea, the prophet told Israel what God wanted instead of empty sacrifices. God put it powerfully and eloquently: ***“For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings”*** (Hosea 6:6).

At this time, the people of Israel were still good at bringing sacrifices, but they had forsaken mercy and abandoned the knowledge of God and truth (Hosea 4:1). God wanted right hearts full of truth and mercy more than He wanted sacrifice. This wasn't to say that sacrifice was unimportant to God—it was a valued part of the covenant God had made with Israel on Mount Sinai. Yet, compared to mercy and the knowledge of God, sacrifice is far less important.

Though God seemed distant from His people in the Old Testament, Hosea's faithfully delivered words revealed His nature to be the same as that which was revealed perfectly in Christ. Jesus twice quoted

Hosea 6:6 to the religious leaders of His day. He quoted this particular passage to them because they also had missed the heart of God, choosing to focus on the external matters rather the internal.

The first time Jesus quoted this passage is found in Matthew 9:13a. He sat down to dinner with many notorious sinners in an obvious attempt to reach out to these spiritually needy and hungry people. When the Pharisees criticized Him, Jesus answered: ***“But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’”*** Jesus reminded them of the message of Hosea and applied it to their current situation.

The second time Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6 is found in Matthew 12:7. The context was again criticism by the Pharisees, but this time it was against the disciples of Jesus instead of Jesus Himself. Jesus jumped to their defense and told the Pharisees: ***“But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless.”*** The Pharisees were hung up on their own traditional religious interpretations of the Sabbath law, but Jesus emphasized that God cares more about how we treat others than our adherence to religious traditions or ceremonies.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus seemed to speak with the heart of Hosea 6:6: ***“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift”*** (Matthew 5:23-24). It's great for you to come to church and participate in worship and bring your gifts to God. Yet the way you treat others is more important. Get things right with others

before you come before God. It's too easy for us to think, “I get along with God just fine. It's all those people I can't stand.” If you aren't getting along with others, let the Holy Spirit do some serious soul-searching in you. Are you fulfilling the command of Romans 12:18? It says, ***“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably***

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with all men. Sometimes it isn't possible; even Jesus had enemies. Yet Christ even treated those who hated Him with the mercy spoken of in Hosea 6:6.

Hosea also told us that God values ***“the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.”*** Israel brought animals for sacrifice, but they never presented themselves as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). They missed what God really wants: a deep, close relationship with Him—expressed by the phrase, ***“the knowledge of God.”***

Are you doing things for God when He would rather you first get some things right with another person? Are you doing something for God when He would rather you first draw closer to Him in the ***knowledge of God?*** Remember God's priorities, then make them your priorities. ☞

David Guzik is director of CC Bible College in Siegen, Germany. He has served in pastoral ministry for 20 years and has authored several Bible commentaries.

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