

A HARLOT FOR A BRIDE?

Today's Text: Hosea Chaps. 1-3

Extracts:

The Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take a wife of harlotry, and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry." So he went and took Gomer... and she conceived and bore him a son. ... And she conceived again and bore a daughter. ... Now when she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. ... Then the Lord said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover, and is committing adultery..." So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley [Hos. 1: 2-3, 6, 8; 3: 1-2]

A woman who provides sexual services for monetary gains is called a harlot or prostitute. Although prostitution is an old institution, it used to be done away from public view. But it is today a major business that provides direct and indirect employment to millions of 'sex workers' and contributes to national incomes throughout the world.¹ In fact, sex work has been legalized in such countries as The Netherlands, Belgium, New Zealand and Germany.

When a married woman is also a harlot, we are dealing with a more complicated matter. According to a UK marriage survey (2005), adulterous behaviour accounted for the greatest single reason (27%) for marriage breakdowns.² Adultery occurs when a consenting person has sexual relations with somebody else who is not his or her spouse. In this case, a husband or a wife may be involved in the act. But when a married woman practises prostitution, it suggests that she gets paid for adultery! Either her husband lives with it or he has the choice to end the union. In most cases, the latter is the typical reaction.

In today's study, God asks a prophet to go and marry a harlot. He does so and raises children by her. Yet she does not stop her harlotry and God asks her husband to take her back! If you were in Hosea's place, what would you do? Let us find out from today's lesson.

¹ Lin Lean Lim (Ed.), *The Sex Sector: The economic and social bases of prostitution in Southeast Asia*, Geneva: International Labour Office; 1998

² UK Marriage survey, Monday January 24, 2005: <http://marriage.about.com/b/a/141538.htm>

1. Profile of a harlot

During the earthly ministry of Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman who had been caught in adultery, that is, having sexual relations with another man who was not her husband [**Jn 8: 1-11**]. According to the Law of Moses, her punishment was death by stoning [**Lev. 20: 10**]. However, when Jesus then asked anyone without sin to cast the first stone, all her accusers disappeared! We learn from that story that none of us can take a ‘holier-than-thou’ position on the subject of today’s lesson because, in a sense, *we are all harlots as the bride of Christ!*

People have different reasons for their sexual conduct, whether they are married or single. Let us examine a few cases:

a) *The fornicator*

There are some people who are not (yet) married but engage in sexual relations with people who are also not (yet) married. What they are doing is called fornication if it is for pleasure and not for economic gains.

Many young people are under pressure to lose their virginity and practise fornication as proof that they now ‘belong.’ Some do it out of curiosity, especially teenagers to whom public policy agencies teach the use of condoms but not abstinence for birth control. There may also be confirmed bachelors and spinsters who have decided not to get married but continue to play the field. There are also couples who co-habit (live together) as lovers but are actually not married. The bottom line in all those cases is that they are all fornicators and what they are doing is considered immoral in the sight of God. That is why Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount that the only ground for divorce is “fornication” [sexual immorality in NKJV] [**Matt. 5: 32**] because those involved were not married in the first place!

b) *The adulterer*

When the sexual act involves a man and a woman, one or both of whom are married to others, it becomes adultery. It is unfaithfulness to the innocent party. For example, King David had his own wives but he slept with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite [**2 Sam. 11: 1-4**]. That was an act of adultery. It hurt innocent Uriah and David’s wives.

However, the sexual act alone is not what constitutes adultery. In the words of Jesus, “whoever looks at a woman to lust for her *has already committed adultery with her in his heart*” [**Matt. 5: 28**]. A woman who lusts in her heart for a married man has already committed adultery with him. Therefore, any

act of sexual unfaithfulness is adultery. It includes pornography, masturbation and such-like immoral acts.

c) *The harlot or prostitute*

People may have their reasons for adultery. For example, it could be due to problems in the marriage, such as the spouse's unfaithfulness or inability to give the partner babies. It could be that the adulterer is a nymphomaniac who cannot be sexually satisfied by one partner. However, if it is for material gains, then adultery becomes harlotry or prostitution.

Harlotry can take different forms. For example, those who grant sexual favours to their bosses for promotion or favourable job postings are prostitutes. Those who set up brothels where harlots operate are themselves prostitutes. Pimps, that is, those (mostly men) who find customers for a prostitute in return for a portion of her earnings are themselves prostitutes. Parents from poor countries who sponsor their daughters to go to rich countries as sex workers are themselves practising prostitution.

Whether for money or for pleasure, the reaction of an injured husband or wife is quite predictable. The innocent party may not take kindly to the adulterous affairs of their spouses. The word of God says, "Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding. He who does so destroys his own soul. Wounds and dishonour he will get, and his reproach will not be wiped away; for jealousy is a husband's fury; therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance" [Prov. 6: 32-34]. For example, a retired police chief in Nigeria recently shot and seriously injured his wife that he had caught having illicit affairs with another man in a hotel room.³ A Mississippi millionaire has been slapped with a judgment of more than US\$750,000 for allegedly luring away another man's wife (that worked for him).⁴ However, some spouses may forgive their erring partners and help them to overcome their weaknesses. For example, Hilary Clinton stood firmly by her husband, former US President Bill Clinton, who was publicly disgraced for having adulterous affairs with a White House intern, Monica Lewinsky. But how many men will condone and remain married to a woman who continues to practise her prostitution from their homes? Hosea did! Let us learn why and how he coped.

2. Hosea married a harlot!

Like his older contemporary (Amos), Hosea's prophetic ministry was in the Northern Kingdom of Israel *at the same time* that Isaiah and Micah were active in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. At the time, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was materially prosperous but morally bankrupt. It was already steep in sin and

³ Hammed Shittu, 'Police Authorities Quiz Retired DIG,' www.thisdayonline.com of 25 October 2007.

⁴ Mike Celizic, 'The millionaire and the plumber's wife,' <http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/21529255/?GT1=10450>; Oct. 29, 2007

disobedience. In the sight of God, unfaithfulness to Him (idolatry) is similar to unfaithfulness between spouses (adultery). That is why He used idolatry, adultery and harlotry almost interchangeably [see, for example, **Ezek. 16: 23-30**]. God employed *empathy* to vividly convey to Hosea and Israel how much He suffered on account of their idolatry. When we *sympathize*, we look at issues from our own perspectives. However, when we *empathize*, we see things from the perspective of the other (hurting) party. In today's lesson, we shall concentrate on Hosea's personal experience as the husband of a harlot. What kept him in the relationship and what lessons can we learn from his experience as we deal with one form of harlotry or the other in our own homes?

Let us examine the key aspects of the story:

a) *God commands Hosea to marry a harlot*

God said to the prophet, "Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry, and children of harlotry." Without asking any questions, "he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim" [**Hos. 1: 2, 3**]. Harlotry was forbidden in Israel [**Lev. 19: 29**] and priests were not to marry harlots [**Lev. 21: 7, 14**], and I believe that also applied to prophets. The punishment for harlotry (in a priest's home) was burning with fire [**Lev. 21: 9**]. Yet, when God commanded Hosea to marry a harlot, he did not hesitate to do so because obedience is better than sacrifice!

That is a big lesson here for the modern believer. If we were to receive such a prophetic message, we would treat it with absolute skepticism. We would comb the Bible to find justification for not obeying it. Test the spirits! Satan can pose as an angel of light, so do his messengers! God is not a God of confusion! He cannot contradict Himself! We are a royal priesthood and priests are forbidden to marry harlots! Therefore, the word is not from the Lord! O yea? Was it not the same God who forbade the making of graven images or the likeness of *anything in heaven or on or under the earth* [**Ex. 20: 4**] that commanded Moses to make the brazen serpent [**Num. 21: 7-9**]? Where did Paul get the practice of sending handkerchiefs and aprons from his body to heal the sick since Jesus never did such things [**Acts 19: 11-12**]? In both examples, the answer lies in *obedience to the word of God*.

So, Hosea obeyed what God asked him to do because he knew that the same God would help him to deal with what would follow, for "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" [**1 Cor. 10: 13**]. Abraham obeyed God to sacrifice his child of promise, Isaac, but at the critical moment, God provided him with a ram in place of his son [**Gen. 22: 1-13**]!

b) *Hosea raises a family with Gomer who returns to harlotry!*

Gomer bore the prophet three children, two sons and one daughter [**Hos. 1: 3, 6, 8**]. Thereafter, she deserted her husband to continue with her harlotry and her children became “the children of harlotry.” Their mother “played the harlot; she who conceived them (had) behaved shamefully; for she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water; my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink’” [**Hos. 2: 4-5**].

When a man married to an actress or his children see her on the movie screen being passionately kissed by another man, they may not feel bad about it as long as they see her as only acting. At any rate, society provides an enabling environment for such actors and their families to accept what their wives or mothers do for a living. Actors and actresses win Oscars for it! In spite of the general acceptance of acting as a legitimate business, how many actors and actresses do you know that can sustain a marriage in the long term?

Marriage to a harlot is hardly acceptable nor easy in any society. There is the assumption that marriage may take the prostitute out of the street but it could also be a good cover for her to continue. For example, the harlot described in the book of Proverbs said to the young man that she was enticing, “Come, let us take our fill of love until morning ... for *my husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey ... and will come home on the appointed day*” [**Prov. 7: 18-20**]. Can a leopard really change its skin?

We know that Hosea was neither a pimp nor an actor nor did his wife suddenly become chaste. So, you can imagine the shame that he had to bear among the people. Behind his back, they jeered and derided him. I can see children following behind him on the streets, taunting him with the names of his children. The first son was called Jezreel (‘scattered’) [**Hos. 1: 4**]; the daughter was called Lo-Ruhamah (‘no mercy’) [**v. 6**]; and the second son was named Lo-Ammi (‘not My people’) [**v. 8**]. Such pressures can force any man of God to question the original message. Did God really ask him to marry a prostitute? Why has He then allowed him to bear all these insults? Why has He not stopped her from prostitution? After all, is anything too hard for Him? Is His hand too short or His ear too hard? Why has He forsaken the righteous?

The answer lay in God’s purpose. He wanted the prophet to know what He bore on account of the unfaithfulness of His chosen people. In spite of forgiving them their sins each time they had repented, they backslid soon after. Their spiritual unfaithfulness cried to the high heavens for Israel “decked herself with her earrings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but (the Lord God) she forgot” [**Hos. 2: 13**].

c) *Gomer is restored to Hosea*

God said to Hosea, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery.” So, he restored Gomer to himself “for fifteen shekels of silver; and one and one-half homer of barley,” and told her, “You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man-so, too, will I be toward you.” So, “just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans,” Hosea took back his wife that had not given up harlotry [**Hos. 3: 1-3**]. Thereafter, we are told nothing more about the woman, suggesting that the new bond that she had agreed with her husband held. That is symbolic of Israel’s fear of the Lord in the future Davidic kingdom when “the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days” [**v. 5**]. We can also go and do likewise.

3. Conclusion: Be like Rahab the harlot!

We can learn the following lessons from the above study:

- Social norms have been lenient on husbands who cheat on their wives while seriously frowning on adulterous wives. Yet, every sin carries the same weight before God and to sin in one area is to sin in all areas [**Jam. 2: 10-11**]. Therefore, *we are all sinners!*
- Adultery or harlotry is unfaithfulness to one’s spouse. In like manner, when we put worldly treasures above God, we are into idolatry, and that is unfaithfulness to God. Therefore, *we are all harlots!*
- Like Hosea, men can forgive their adulterous wives because they themselves are not any better. God says that He will forgive us our sins if we forgive others [**Matt. 6: 14-15**].
- Any wife (or in deed any woman) who finds herself deep into prostitution can look up to Rahab, the harlot who hid the two men sent by Joshua to spy on Jericho [**Josh. 2: 1-4**]. As soon as she knew that the God of Israel “is God in heaven above and on earth below” [**v. 11**], she gave up her former life. When Joshua captured and destroyed Jericho, he took Rahab and her father’s household along to Israel [**Josh. 6: 25**]. There, she married Salmon and bore him Boaz, the husband of Ruth [**Matt. 1: 5**]. Boaz was the father of Obed, the grandfather of David [**Ruth 5: 21-22**]. Jesus is a direct descendant of David and, therefore, of Rahab the former harlot!

There is hope for the repentant harlot.