

## EASY RELIGION?

The task of the preacher often has been summarized as follows: to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comforted. One Old Testament prophet of the eighth century B.C. realized it was his duty to perform the latter and cried out:

Woe to you who are complacent in Zion,  
and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria . . .  
You lie on beds inlaid with ivory  
and lounge on your couches.  
You dine on choice lambs  
and fattened calves.  
You strum away on your harps like David  
and improvise on musical instruments.  
You drink wine by the bowlful  
and use the finest lotions,  
but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph (Amos 6.1-4-6).<sup>1</sup>

Amos is not condemning the moderate use of these conveniences. Amos is denouncing the excessive use of anything to the point of religious indifference and false security. These Israelites contented themselves with ease and luxury, and they neglected to help the poor, the needy, and the distressed. Materialism engulfed them, and all their religious forms and pomp could not save them. God sent Assyria upon them to carry them away into exile.

Our lesson is this: We must fight the tendency toward materialism and possess genuine concern for spiritual matters. All of us need the love and mercy of God. Those who are sick or have medical problems need the care of others. Those who grieve for the loss of someone need to be comforted. And those who are oppressed need justice. The words of the shepherd from Tekoa ring just as true today as they did many centuries ago.

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<sup>1</sup>Scripture references are from the *New International Version* (1984).

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Seek good, not evil,  
that you may live.  
Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you,  
just as you say he is.  
Hate evil, love good;  
maintain justice in the courts.  
Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy  
on the remnant of Joseph (Amos 5.14-15).