

Amos 5:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the LORD,
the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken.

Analysis

Amos issues a straightforward command: "Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken." The Hebrew *dirshu-tov ve'al-ra lema'an tichyu viyhi-khen YHWH Elohei-tzeva'ot itkhem ka'asher amartem* contrasts seeking good versus evil. The verb *darash* (דָּרַשׁ, "seek") implies active, diligent pursuit—not passive avoidance but intentional action toward righteousness.

"Good" (*tov*, טוֹב) in context means justice, righteousness, and covenant faithfulness—specifically protecting the poor, maintaining honest courts, and rejecting oppression. "Evil" (*ra*, רָע) refers to the social injustice Amos condemns throughout: selling the righteous for silver (2:6), oppressing the poor (4:1, 5:11), perverting justice (5:7, 12). This isn't abstract morality but concrete ethical demands of covenant law.

The promise "that ye may live" (*lema'an tichyu*) offers life as consequence of seeking good. The Hebrew *chayah* (חָיָה) means both physical survival (escaping coming judgment) and covenantal flourishing. The phrase "and so the LORD... shall be with you" (*viyhi-khen YHWH... itkhem*) promises divine presence—the ultimate covenant blessing. The devastating addition "as ye have spoken" (*ka'asher amartem*) exposes Israel's presumption. They claimed God was with them (likely citing covenant promises), but Amos declares: God's presence is conditional on obedience, not automatic because of ethnic identity.

This verse demolishes two errors:

1. works-righteousness (thinking good deeds earn salvation)
2. cheap grace (presuming covenant status nullifies moral accountability).

True faith seeks good because it loves God and neighbor. As James 2:17 states: "faith, if it hath not works, is dead." Salvation is by grace through faith alone, but saving faith necessarily produces good works.

Historical Context

Amos, a shepherd from Tekoa in Judah, prophesied to the northern kingdom of Israel during the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 BC). This was a time of territorial expansion and economic boom, creating massive wealth inequality. The wealthy elite oppressed the poor through debt slavery, corrupt courts, and economic exploitation. Despite maintaining elaborate worship at Bethel and Dan, Israel had abandoned covenant faithfulness for social injustice and religious syncretism. Amos condemned their exploitation of the vulnerable while predicting imminent judgment through Assyrian conquest. His prophecies were fulfilled when Assyria destroyed Israel in 722 BC, about 30 years after his ministry.

Amos was contemporary with Hosea and ministered during Israel's last period of prosperity before destruction. As a southerner from Judah called to prophesy in northern Israel, he was an unwelcome outsider delivering an unwanted message. His emphasis on social justice and his declaration that religious ritual cannot substitute for righteousness make his message perpetually relevant.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does Amos 5:14 deepen your understanding of God's character, particularly His holiness, justice, and mercy?
2. What specific attitudes, thought patterns, or behaviors does this verse call you to examine and change in light of the gospel?
3. How does this passage point forward to Christ and His redemptive work, and how should that shape your worship and obedience?

Interlinear Text

יְיָ יִהְיֶה לִּי תַחֲיִי וְלֹא עָלֵי וְאֵל טוֹב דִּרְשׁוּ
Seek **good** **and not evil** **that ye may live**
H1875 H2896 H408 H7451 H4616 H2421 H1961 H3651

כְּאִשׁ רֵא אֶתְּךָ מִצָּבָא וְתֵּי אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה
and so the LORD **the God** **of hosts** H854 H834
H3068 H430 H6635

אֲמַרְתֶּם:
shall be with you as ye have spoken
H559

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 1:9 (Good): Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.

Matthew 6:33 (References God): But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Micah 6:8 (Good): He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Micah 3:11 (Evil): The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us.

1 Chronicles 28:20 (Good): And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD.

Amos 3:3 (Parallel theme): Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

2 Timothy 4:22 (References Lord): The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.

Isaiah 55:2 (Good): Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

Psalms 46:11 (References God): The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

Proverbs 11:27 (Good): He that diligently seeketh good procureth favour: but he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him.