

Broomfield



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When Worship is an Abomination, Part One

Hidden Threats

As many of you know, my family and I spent a couple of years in Florida ministering in a church. And Florida is a great place to learn all about termites! Termites can pose a serious threat when it comes to housing and the like. Because termites don't like light, they remain unseen in the ground or in the walls. They feed on wood. They can destroy a wall, floor joists, or even the ceiling of a structure without anyone knowing it until it is too late. Truly, termites are hidden pests that can be present in the most glorious surroundings.

So also is the case when it comes to false worship! As we'll see from this text, false worship has a most devastating effect on the people of God!

False worship is often accepted as innovative and on the cutting edge. It has crept into many a church without being noticed. In fact today, churches are being modeled after the mall with food courts, novelty shops, entertainment centers, and theatre-styled worship where actual movie clips are viewed as part of the sermon.

And yet there is nothing new under the sun. Though packaged differently, Hophni and Phinehas were on the cutting edge of the worship revolution in their day. What they were doing was innovative. And amazingly it was accepted by most Jews. Yet it displeased God!

That we might understand our passage and its relevance on our lives today, I want to spend some time with you discussing the Biblical standard when it comes to worship. For as we see God's standard for worship, we understand the actions of Hophni and Phinehas for what they really were — abominations!

In Creation

So let us first look at the Biblical standard. Let us take note that acceptable worship is God focused. We see this in creation. In Isaiah we find this prophecy that God gave to His people in order to demonstrate their importance to Him. At the climax of this prophecy God said, “bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him” (Isaiah 43:6-7).

Do you see that when God made us, He fashioned us to be worshippers of Him?

Thus we and all of creation are at our best when we are worshipping the Lord. Worshipping ourselves, mankind, or creation are all perversions of God's standard.

In Redemption

Secondly, this Biblical standard is seen in redemption.

What was the reason for the Exodus?

Exodus 7:16, **“And thou shalt say unto him, The LORD God of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let my people go, that they may serve¹ me [worship] in the wilderness: and, behold, hitherto thou wouldest not hear.”**

Often times we entertain the thought that God delivered His people from Pharaoh because He loved them and wanted to bless them. While I wouldn't argue against this, it nevertheless falls short of the whole picture. According to this text, the ultimate reason God delivered His people was so that they could "worship Him in the wilderness."

In Salvation

We see this same theme in salvation.

Philippians 1:29, **“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.”**

This is such an amazing text.

Why is it that God saved you?

According to Paul, it was for the sake of Christ! What that means is that we are fulfilling our ultimate purpose when everything in our life is revolving around Christ.

In Kingdom Living

And thus we read this same thing in the nature of kingdom living.

As Paul was longing to minister in Spain² he needed a missionary base closer to the field. (Antioch could not be his base of support if he was to minister in Spain; it simply was too far away.) So Paul penned this epistle to introduce himself and his teachings to the Romans. In our passage, Paul is getting to the heart and soul of his passion as an apostle of the Lord. Notice with Paul's summation of his missionary endeavors.

Romans 1:9-10, **“For God is my witness, whom I serve³ [worship] with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, if by**

¹ עבד 'abad

² Compare Romans 15:24

³ λατρεύω latreuo

any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.”

Again, while this is intended as an introduction, nevertheless what Paul says in this verse is radical when it comes to the nature of Christian service. The word that Paul used to summarize all that he did as an apostle was “serve” (latreuo not diakoneo or douleuo as would be expected)! In the New Testament this word is used always in reference to religious service, and is therefore often translated as “worship.”

Philippians 3:3, “For we are the circumcision, which worship⁴ God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

Hebrews 10:2, “For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers⁵ once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.”

Revelation 7:15, “Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve⁶ [worship] him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.”

From this we discover the true nature of Christian service: It is worship!

ALL service rendered to and for God is worship! What we do as children of God is worship! That is what we are all about: Worship!

And thus, our identity as redeemed individuals is not what we wear or the friends we keep, or the jobs at which we work BUT the worship we offer to God!

The Consummation

Revelation 21 describes the New Heavens and the New Earth. What a glorious place this shall be. And yet would you notice what is at the center of the New Heavens and New Earth:

Revelation 21:22, “And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.”

There is no question that, amongst the people of God in the Old Testament, the center of life and culture was the temple. That is why when we read that in the New Heavens and New Earth there is no temple— for God is the temple we understand therefore that the focus and center of eternity is God! Samuel Rutherford wrote, “The Lamb is all the glory, of Emmanuel's land.”⁷

When it comes to the activity of time and eternity — worship — it should be clear that it is God focused. Thus the bottom line in all things and at all times in our lives is NOT am I happy or fulfilled or getting my way but is the focus, passion, and longing of my heart the honor and glory of God. The apostle Paul said, “for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

Acceptable worship is God focused! This is the Biblical standard!

⁴ λατρευω latreuo

⁵ λατρευω latreuo

⁶ λατρευω latreuo

⁷ New Trinity Hymnal #546

God Directed

Biblical worship is God-directed. After giving multiple instructions on the specifics of worship God gave this command:

Deuteronomy 12:32, “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.”

This only stands to reason. If the focus of our worship is God, then it only follows that God ought to be the one who dictates how He ought to be worshipped.

And this is such an important point. We live in a day where somehow we have accepted the notion that because God is man-centered in all He does. We believe that as long as what we do in worship is from the heart, God will be pleased.

I hope you see that this type of reasoning is false.

Who could argue that Uzzah's touching of the ark to steady it wasn't from the heart? Who would say that Nadab and Abihu's first act as priests was not from the heart? And yet each paid the price of worshipping God in their own way.⁸

Since God is the focus of our worship, truly He and He alone ought to be the one who says how it ought to be done. Korah wrote, “God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding⁹” (Psalm 47:5-7).

We are to worship with understanding. The idea here is that God is worthy of intelligent worship. This is worship which flows from a mind informed by the word. So when it comes to worshipping a God who is the pinnacle of our praise, we must worship according to His will and word.

Marriage Reception

Think of it in these terms. We've just had two wedding announcements in this congregation. This means that right now two sets of parents are planning a party in order to honor the marriage of their daughter.

Now can you imagine any of the guests at these receptions being offended because the food that will be served isn't their favorite? Or perhaps the accommodations don't suit their preferences? Perhaps they don't like the music?

Indeed any and all invited to these receptions will consider themselves privileged guests by virtue of the occasion.

So it is in the Kingdom of God. All of life is a reception thrown in honor of the marriage of the Son of God. As a result the fact that you don't like God's providence — which is designed not for your glory, but the Son's — doesn't matter. The fact that you don't care for God's dealings in your life doesn't matter. The fact that God's plans have intersected with your own doesn't matter! All that is going on in this world

⁸ Compare 2 Samuel 6:7 and Numbers 3:4

⁹ שָׂכַל sakal

is for Christ!

Accordingly, when it comes to the worship we offer, Christ rightly is the one who ought to direct it.

Specificity

Biblical worship contains specificity. As we consider this I want you to notice first our inclination as sinners. Listen to this description of the passion of the non-believer.

Romans 1:21-23, “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.”

The natural bent of mankind is to run from God — how striking.

It is easy to think that while non-believers aren't worshippers of God, they certainly don't hate Him. And yet this passage argues otherwise. In the heart of man is a longing to destroy Christ. And because fallen man can't do that, they run from Christ instead.

Now many believe that salvation changes this inclination, but it doesn't. When Christ called Peter to the ministry He told him to cast his net into the sea. Under protest Peter did what the Master requested and caught so many fish that the net began to rip. When Peter realized who Christ was his first response was this:

Luke 5:8, “When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

Though a disciple of the Lord, nevertheless Christ's deity traumatized Peter, and so he asked for Christ to leave. And whether you believe it or not, this is the inclination of everyone.

Why is this important?

It is important on account of our passion to flee from God's presence, God has NOT left His worship open and therefore subject to the inclinations even of the redeemed. Accordingly when God instituted Old Testament worship, He gave very specific commands and exhortations. These included

- The lay-out of the temple, Exodus 27:9-21
- The order of the service, Leviticus 1-6; 16
- The furniture, Exodus 25
- The vessels Numbers 4:9
- The tapestries, Exodus 26
- The garments of the priests, Exodus 28
- The dimensions, 2 Chronicles 3:3ff
- The color, compare Exodus 39:32-43
- The procedures, compare Exodus 29:10-29
- The support of the priests, Exodus 29:31ff; Leviticus 6:8-7:38
- How the animals were to be sacrificed, compare Leviticus 1-6

And so on and so forth!

All of this is important because we are going to begin examining what constitutes Abominable Worship. As we read of Hophni and Phinehas, we will know that they knew better — and so stood condemned before the Lord!

And as we consider these two rebels, we also will look at ourselves realizing that they are nothing less than types of worshippers today! They represent the inclination of our hearts!

Objective

Biblical worship is objective.

Ephesians 5:18, “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.”

This was an important statement in light of the religious culture of Paul's day — not to mention our own. By the time of Paul, the worship of the Greek pantheon had fallen on rough times. In its demise came the rise of the mystery religions which were attracting its multitudes. In these religions — which incorporated the Greek/Roman deities — God was viewed not as a person to be adored, praised, given to, or appreciated but rather as a force to be experienced. And thus through a variety of means — drugs, drink, music, wild dancing, sex, etc — it was believed that the worshiper ascended into the presence of the deity and so communed.

Now in the city of Ephesus, the primary deity was the god of wine — Bacchus. Not surprisingly, the worship of this deity occurred when the individual entered into a state of ecstasy primarily through wine (although the other avenues mentioned also would have been utilized). Thus in contrast to this Bacchus cult, Paul exhorts the believer in our text that they are not to seek to commune with God through the subjective experiences of wine, drugs, music, dancing, etc. Rather they are to worship God objectively by being "filled with the Spirit!"

What does this mean? Being "Spirit filled" is parallel with being "Word filled." Listen to a passage written about the same time as Ephesians.

Colossians 3:16-17, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

You will notice that there is a parallel between Ephesians 5:18-21 and Colossians 3:16-17. Being Spirit-filled and Word-filled both issue forth the SAME response. They result in exhorting one another unto fidelity.¹⁰ They result in a participation in a shared walking and praising of God.¹¹ They result in the giving of thanks.¹²

From this we see that to be "Spirit Filled" is one and the same as being "Word Filled." It is being so under the control of the Word of God (which is the word of the Spirit) that what we do and say is as the Spirit would do and say. God's thoughts are our thoughts. God's will is our will. His plans are our plans.

¹⁰ Compare Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16

¹¹ Compare Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16

¹² Compare Ephesians 5:20 and Colossians 3:16

His work is our work.

From this we conclude therefore that worship as God intended is not to be subjective. It is not to be determined by our likes or dislikes. It is not to be accomplished as we endeavor to ascend into the presence of the Divine. Rather, worship is objective. It is the objective offering of praise and adoration to a Divine being — a Person — in the manner He has prescribed!

Accordingly, the goal in worship is not to have an experience; or encounter; or a warm, fuzzy feeling; or a experience a moving by God. Rather it is to adore Him in the manner He desires!

And thus, the measure of good worship is NOT, "How does it make you feel" BUT, "Is God honored?" In fact hear this well: To long to be moved in worship is at its heart, pagan!

Angels Priority

Biblical worship is our highest priority.

How important is worship?

How important should worship be in our life?

I want to consider these questions by looking at how much the concern of worship has played in redemptive history. To begin with, let's go back before the creation of the physical world and look at the person and work of the seraphim.

Isaiah 6:1-2, "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly."

And a brief glance at these angelic creatures demonstrates the priority of worship. Notice that they have six wings. Two are related to service — with which they fly. The other four are related to worship. The seraphim could not look upon the glory of God so two wings were created for them to cover their face. Two wings were used to cover their feet because the feet represented sin. Worship is the priority, even for the Angels.

Nehemiah 9:6, "Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee."

As beings created for worship, what is their job? Speaking of a time before the creation of this world, this passage shows us that in eternity past, before men were created the host of heaven worshipped.¹³

Central to Israel

Numbers 1:52-53, "And the children of Israel shall pitch their tents, every man by his own camp, and every man by his own standard, throughout their hosts. But the Levites shall pitch round

¹³ Compare Job 38:4-7

about the tabernacle of testimony, that there be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel: and the Levites shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony.”

Numbers 2:1-2, “And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by his own standard, with the ensign of their father’s house: far off about the tabernacle of the congregation shall they pitch.”

During the 40 years that Israel wandered in the wilderness, God arranged the people's encamping such that it placed a priority on worship! Their camp was to be arranged according to the following: The Tabernacle was to be in the center of the camp and then the priests were to encamp, and the Levites were just beyond the priests, and the twelve tribes made the outer ring.

By virtue of the lay-out of the camp, God was teaching His people that worship was to be at the heart of everything they did!

Central to Christ’s Ministry

The central theme of Christ ministry was worship. Christ began His earthly ministry by addressing worship.¹⁴ We also discover that the focus of Christ’s earthly ministry was for the securing of true worshippers!¹⁵ Christ commanded worship.¹⁶ And during Christ's darkest hour when He struggled most between His will and the Father's will, our Lord demonstrated the priority — The Will of the Father, and thus His glory!¹⁷

From these examples and more, we conclude that one theme that unites all of Scripture is that we and all creation exist to worship God! Accordingly it behooves us to purpose in our lives to lay aside our will and way and fulfill our chief end by serving the Lord according to His standard and will. God’s glory and our well-being depend upon it!

The Sheepish Lion

I love the story of Lambert, the Sheepish Lion. It is the story of a lion raised as a lamb. As a cub growing up with sheep, poor Lambert couldn't figure out what he was supposed to be, and so he couldn't figure out what he was supposed to do.

Should he eat grass... with fangs?

Should he play sheep tag... with claws?

Lambert's struggle was most exemplified in the fact that he couldn't find his voice — his brothers and sisters would "Baa!" and he couldn't. But then the day came when his family — his brother and sister sheep — were threatened by wolves.

Instinct took over and he fought off the wolves. And as a symbolic expression of his newfound identity,

¹⁴ Compare John 2:13-17

¹⁵ Compare John 4:23-24

¹⁶ Compare Matthew 4:10

¹⁷ Compare Luke 22:42 For more examples view appendix a.

he roared like a lion!¹⁸

Brothers and sisters, I believe that most of the problems we face as children of God in this world is that we have lost our identity. We are playing office politics... with crowns on our heads. We are worried about our looks... yet we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. We find ourselves longing for the things of this world... though we have been made rich in Christ. And at times we are plagued by fear... even though we know Him who still controls the waves!

It is no wonder why at times we are so miserable. It is no wonder, we don't seem to fit into our world.

If we would just assume our true identity — worshippers of the Living God — in and through all things the roar of the Lion of Judah would be heard through us. And though life may not be any easier — in fact it probably will be harder — nevertheless we will know the joy of the Lord which is our strength!¹⁹

From all that we have seen, let us purpose to live out our lives on this earth as priests and so worshippers of God most High!

Appendix A

There are many other examples in Scripture which speak to the Priority of Worship in the Bible such as these:

- The exhortations of the Psalter!²⁰
- The first sins of Adam and Eve²¹
- Demonstrated in Cain and Abel²²
- Given in the first three Commandments²³
- The cause for discipline in the Old Testament²⁴
- The Tabernacle²⁵ In Exodus 25-30 we read of the provision of the tabernacle as God's people wandered in the desert. This is so important! When we are in a time of turmoil, the first thing to go is the worship of God! Yet, in the midst of the turbulent time of the Exodus, God wanted His

¹⁸ This was taken from Dr. Bryan Chapell's opening letter in *Covenant*, Volume 20, Number 1, Spring 2005

¹⁹ Compare Nehemiah 8:10

²⁰ Compare also Psalm 5:4, 11; 18:2-3a; 22:26b-28; 29:1-2; 30:4; 31:23-24; 32:11; 33:1-5; 34:1-3; 40:1-3; 43:3-4; 47:1-4, 4-5, 6-7; 64:9-10; 67:3-5; 68:3-4, 4-5, 32-33; 81:1-3; 86:8-10; 89:5-8; 92:1-2; 95:1-3, 5-6, 6-7a; 96:1-3, 7-10, 12; 98:1-3; 100:1-3; 103:19-22; 104:1; 105:1-4; 106:1-2; 107:1-3; 111:1-3; 112:1; 113:1-3; 117; 118:1-4; 124:6-8; 134:1-3; 135:1-3; 138:1-2; 145:3-4, 21; 146:1-2, 5-6; 147:1, 4-5, 7, 12-13; 148:1-2, 13-14; 149:1-2; 150:1-2, 6.

²¹ Compare Genesis 3:1-7, 22 Though much has been written by way of analysis of the fall it can be summarized in two words: False Worship. Adam and Eve gave preference to the snake and to themselves as opposed to God. This preferential treatment was a refusal to heed God's call to worship! As Dr. Robert Reymond put it: "The transgression of Adam was at its core the creature's deliberate rejection of God's authority and an act of willful rebellion against the Creator (this is what sin is all about, 1 John 3:4, 9). It was man claiming the stance of autonomy and freedom from God. It was man heeding Satan's 'call to worship' the creature rather than the Creator." (*Seminary Class Notes*)

²² Compare Genesis 4:24 The first division among men came between Cain and Abel over the WAY they worshiped. Abel brought an acceptable offering (4:4); Cain's was unacceptable (4:5).

²³ Compare Exodus 20:2-7, 26 When God formally gave His people a set of written commandments for the first time, what was it that was most important to Him? Notice that the first three commandments deal with the worship of the only true God! Clearly, worship is the Priority! (Compare also Exodus 34:14; Matthew 22:37).

²⁴ Compare Numbers 14:22-23, When the people of Israel were taken out of Egypt, they wandered for 40 years in the Sinai desert until an entire generation died. Why? Because they failed to worship God properly- they did not respond appropriately to God's glory! Even Moses failed to enter the land because he failed to worship God properly, Numbers 20:7-12.

²⁵ Compare Exodus 25

people to focus on His worship! Worship is the priority.²⁶

- The Age Requirement for the Priest²⁷
- The Activity of the New Life in Christ. Winning someone to Christ is an act of worship.²⁸
- Giving money to meet the needs of the body is considered to be worship²⁹
- The Christian's life of godliness and honesty is the activity of worship³⁰
- Loving the brethren is worship³¹
- In fact, ALL that we do is to be done to the exaltation of God³²
- And thus, a synonym for the Christian in the Bible is "A Worshipper of God,"³³
- The Theme of Heaven and Eternity³⁴

²⁶ In fact, notice that while it took 7 chapters (a total of 243 verses) for God to discuss all the standards, measurements, and furnishings that were to be a part of the Tabernacle, it only took 31 verses to describe the whole creation of the universe! Why such a priority? The Tabernacle was to be the place where God's Shekinah glory was revealed and the place where He met with His people (compare also 25:22)!

²⁷ Compare Numbers 4:3 Did you know that in Israel when a man reached the age of 20, he could serve as a soldier, Num. 1:3? When a Levite reached the age of 25, he could serve the Tabernacle, Numbers 8:24? But the Levite had to be 30 before he could become a priest, Numbers 4:3? In other words, by virtue of Numbers 4:3 God was declaring to His people that the activity requiring the most ability, training, and maturation is worship!

²⁸ Compare Romans 15:15-16

²⁹ Compare Philippians 4:18

³⁰ Compare 1 Timothy 2:2-3

³¹ Compare Romans 14:18

³² Compare 1 Corinthians 10:31 and Romans 1:9

³³ Compare Acts 18:7; John 4:23; Acts 18:13

³⁴ The message of the everlasting gospel is to worship God! Compare also Revelation 4:10-11a; 5:14; 11:15b-17a; 14:6-7; 15:4a; 19:4, 10a; 22:8-9.

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About the Preacher

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