

Only Two Kinds of Worship

Worship of God Conference

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Bible Text: Isaiah 1:10-20

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The National Center for Family Integrated Churches welcomes Scott Brown with the following message entitled “Only Two Kinds of Worship.”

In my first message I said that God has been known to destroy entire nations for the way that they worship and that he’s actually wiped out entire family lines as a result of their worship. Tonight I want to give you an illustration of that and I would like for you to open up your Bibles and turn to the first chapter of the prophet Isaiah. While you’re getting there, I would just like to speak a little bit about what is happening in Isaiah. In the first three verses of Isaiah, God is calling witnesses against the nation for their apostasy and he says to them that they have rebelled. He says, “The ox knows its owner And the donkey its master's crib; But Israel does not know, My people do not understand.” Then he says, “Alas, sinful nation, A people laden with iniquity, A brood of evildoers, Children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the Lord, They have provoked to anger The Holy One of Israel.” So God is bringing a word of judgment upon the people.

Then he speaks of how hard-hearted they have become and he says, “Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more.” He’s talking about a people that God has chastised many times for one single purpose: to turn them. This is one of the great values and beauties of chastisement is that God uses it in order to turn us around; he brings various kinds to get our attention. But he says, “Why should you be stricken again? You will just keep revolting.” Then he says that there is a result of all of this rebellion and he says, “The whole head is sick, And the whole heart faints. There is no soundness in it, But wounds and putrefying sores.” It’s a nation that has become sick as a result of its troubles, its sins really.

Then the national effects are spoken of in verse 7, “Your country is desolate.” Then in verse 8 and 9, he speaks of the fact that there is a remnant, though. Even though there is this terrible devastation, there is a booth, a small booth in the middle of a field in this bombed out nation, there are a few who still love the Lord. Then in verse 10, which is where we’ll pick up our message here tonight, the Lord tells the nation through the prophet Isaiah the reason why he is coming with judgment, with a very harsh judgment. The reason he is coming to judge the nation is because of their worship. Worship is so

critical. People today feel so free to play around with worship but we have to recognize that God has destroyed nations, he has brought armies against nations and he has wiped out families because they've neglected his clear instruction about worship. So beginning in verse 10, let's read the text.

“10 Hear the word of the Lord, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah: 11 ‘To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?’ Says the Lord. ‘I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats. 12 When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts? 13 Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies – I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. 14 Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. 15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. 16 Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, 17 Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow. 18 Come now, and let us reason together,’ Says the Lord, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. 19 If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; 20 But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword’; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

In Isaiah, chapter 1, verses 10-20, we learn from Judah what it means to come before God in corporate worship and it shows us how we ought to prepare ourselves for corporate worship. The passage is about a number of things: on the one hand, it's about the way that God has regulated his worship in the days of the old covenant; secondly, it's about the nearness of God which was the purpose of worship and how the nearness of God can be destroyed by one particular thing. It shows how it happens that a people would no longer have the nearness of God while they maintain a farce of biblical rituals and all of the duties of religion. It's a story of this: how a faithful Bible regulated worship can be an abomination to God.

We've been talking about how God is the only one who can regulate worship but that's not the end of the story for us who listen to the Lord. The problem with the church, the problem with the people of God is that it's quite easy enough to keep the Sabbath, to do the right things, to read the Scriptures in your times of worship, to pray, to sing the Psalms, even to sing the imprecatory Psalms, to observe the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis, to focus on the preaching, but while all of that is going on in the heart, in the home, in the shop and in the community, there are sins of commission and sins of omission. It's what's going on outside of the worship that destroys the value of the worship event itself.

You know, this evening there were many hundreds of us singing and I wonder how many there were among us who were just simply mouthing words, maybe have been mouthing words for a long, long time without a true heartfelt dependence upon God, a hope for obedience, a loathing of sin, a hunger for the beauty of the Lord? What Jesus said was, "This people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me." So, we have to ask this question: when we come before God to worship, what is going on in our lives? And what we find here is that we have a people who are honoring God with their lips. You might think of it this way: if there were an infrared heat sensing device hovering over this building and was able to map the spiritual heat that was being expressed while we were singing in this room here tonight, that heat sensing device would be able to map where the cold spots were and it would be able to show where the lukewarm areas might be. It could be an entire family; it could be an individual in the midst of a family; it could be an entire section. It would also show the warm hearted true worshippers of God.

What we learn from Isaiah here is that you can have all the right sacrifices lined up, in fact, you can be like the people who are spoken of here, you can actually do more than Scripture actually required. You know, Scripture commanded one thing but these people were not just bringing calves, they were bringing fed cattle, they were going beyond what God had specifically required. So, this passage is the perfect passage for us because many of us came here with a desire to learn what is pleasing to the Lord and to order our worship properly but we have to make sure that we're not deceived as people who are attempting to reform our practices and do what the Lord has required of us because it shows a people who are doing all the right things on paper, they are doing them by the book, but what they've really ended up with was abominations before God in their worship. This will always be an issue among the people of God because you can do all the right things and not have true worship at all. This was the problem with Israel. It was a day for religion but the religion didn't make it sway into the rest of the week.

The focus of this passage is about corporate worship but I think you can see it also encompasses personal worship and family worship as well. We also have to recognize that there are only two categories of worship that are spoken of in this passage of Scripture. We like to think in terms of worship as contemporary or traditional or we might have different other terms that we use for worship but God doesn't use any of those kinds of terms at all when he speaks of worship. There are only two kinds of worship that God speaks of in his word and that is acceptable worship and unacceptable worship. Those are the only two categories. That's where we need to focus the attention of our hearts: is our worship acceptable or is it not acceptable?

Now, let me give you an outline of this passage. First of all, we'll see how a religious people can go through the motions of worship but still be like Sodom, that's in verse 10. Secondly, we'll see how a biblically ordered worship can actually be an offense to God, that's verses 11-15. Thirdly, how an offensive people can repent, that's verses 16 and 17. Then number 4: how a repenting people can be cleansed, that's verse 18. Number 5: how a cleansed and obedient people can be blessed, that's verse 19. Number 6: how a disobedient people will be destroyed, that's verse 20.

The hope for us here tonight is in this passage of Scripture. The hope for worshippers who have relied on their ceremony is this: “that though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.” It’s so easy for people like us to criticize the antics and the circus performances that often compose modern worship today. It’s easy for us to criticize the music hype; it’s easy for us to identify the playing on emotions that often passes for the worship of God in our modern era. The music manipulation, the video clips, the plays, the manipulation. Even things that maybe we have gotten used to: the hand shaking in the midst of worship; the puppet shows; the clown shows; the mimes; the liturgical dances; the drama; and the stage antics; riding of vehicles on stages; all kinds of things just to get people’s attention. It’s so easy for us to smugly speak about those things and think that, “O no, we’re nothing like that. We would never do anything like that. We are so regulated by Almighty God. Look at us. We sing. We pray. We celebrate the Lord’s Supper. We do all these things.” So, it brings up this issue of regulated worship and those who desire to have regulated worship.

What’s happening in this passage is that God is giving us his mind, that we would be wise about worship and the elements of that worship that are prescribed by God and what is acceptable to God and what is not acceptable to God. So, this is an Old Testament passage about worship. Now, because it is an Old Testament passage about worship, I think it might be helpful just to make a very quick comment about how we should think about Old Testament passages of worship. To get a marvelous explanation of this, please listen to Sam Waldron’s message that he delivered today on that subject of how to use the Old Testament law which is abrogated, how to think about it. How do you read and understand the ceremonial law that the Lord Jesus Christ has abrogated?

Here is an interpretive principle and I’ll just try to state it as succinctly as I can: the forms of Old Testament worship were abrogated and are no longer in use but they are fulfilled in Christ while the heart of the principle of Old Testament worship remains. So, the Old Testament principles of worship remain while the forms are being abrogated. They being: the ceremonial law. So when you get to new covenant worship, you find so many of the elements of it. You find that you need a sacrifice just like in the Old Testament and the Lord Jesus Christ is the sacrifice. You need a priest and the Lord Jesus Christ is the faithful and compassionate High Priest. You need a temple and he has said that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and also the church is the temple of God. You need the lamp like you did in the Old Testament temple worship experience and now the Lord Jesus Christ is the light. You need in the Old Testament, clothing for the priests and now you’re clothed in righteousness. In the old covenant you needed to be circumcised, now you’re circumcised in your heart. So all of the imagery, the types of the old covenant worship they exist in their fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, it’s not right to throw it out because it speaks to us about what worship is today but we have to just ask this question: if there were an infrared heat sensing device that mapped out the heat level in the hearts of the people all over this room, what would be seen? Because God does see. He sees into every heart. He knows when we’re mouthing the words. He knows when in our hearts, there is desire, there is true hope, there is genuine love for him.

Verse 10, how a religious people can go through the motions of worship and still be like Sodom. “Hear the word of the Lord, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah.” First of all, he says hear and hear what? Hear the word of the Lord. Hear the law of God. And the law of God that is being communicated here really has to do with the first commandment. Solomon said, “He who turns his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer will be an abomination.” So, he’s appealing to the law of God. The Lord Jesus Christ said that he did not come to destroy the law or the prophets. He did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

So, it’s a loving Father who is giving the law and he’s saying to his people, “Give ear. Here is my law regarding worship.” And he’s speaking to the heads of the people. He says, “You rulers of Sodom.” He’s speaking of the rulers of the people and he’s comparing them to Sodom and Gomorrah and he’s saying they are not like Sodom and Gomorrah, they are embodiments of Sodom and Gomorrah. We know from Genesis 13:13 that the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord. Notice this: Judah, the people of God, are being compared to Sodom. It’s absolutely amazing and the only difference between Judah and Sodom and Gomorrah is this: God had mercy on Judah and didn’t destroy them. What we find here is that God has grace toward his people. In Matthew 12, Jesus says that the men of Nineveh will rise up in judgment and they will condemn Judah and they’ll speak of the mighty works that were done. And if they’d been done in Sodom, then they would have repented. So, Judah is being compared with Sodom. Their wickedness was so great and God was scanning Israel and he was seeing the heat, he was seeing the coldness and he was seeing the lukewarm in Israel.

In verse 10 we see how a religious people can go through the motions of worship and still be like Sodom and then in verses 11-15, how a biblically ordered worship can become an offense to God. These are the accusations that God brings toward unacceptable worship and there are 12 of them. There are 12 graphic illustrations of the offense that God brings. First of all, and he’s speaking about their offerings, he is speaking about them. He has his heat seeking device and he’s showing them what his response is when he sees the coldness, when he sees the lukewarmness, when he sees also the heat.

The first is, “It is worthless,” verse 11. “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?” Says the Lord.” He’s saying, “They are purposeless. They are worthless.” It’s a rhetorical question. “They are completely worthless. All of your prayers, all of your taking of the Lord’s Supper, all of our biblically ordered worship that you’ve tried so hard to obey to the T without bearing at all, they are worthless,” is what he says.

2. God is fed up. He says, “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle.” God is fed up.

3. Also in verse 11, God has no delight. He says, “I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats.” This has to do with the principle of delight. There is a kind of

worship that God does delight in. It's like sweet aroma to him. What a wonderful thing it is when there is warm heartedness and it rises up as incense before the Lord and it's pleasing to the Lord. While it's possible to have worship that is displeasing to the Lord, it is also possible for a people to rise with hearts genuinely loving him and desiring his beauty and it is a delightful thing to him.

4. He's saying that he did not ask for these things. Verse 12, "When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts?" He's not saying that he didn't ask for these sacrifices because he did ask for these sacrifices but what he's saying is that he wasn't asking for sacrificing being done that way. He never wanted it to be so cold, so hard hearted, so mouthing of the words. He wanted it to be genuine; this was its design.

5. He says cease and desist, he demands that it end. He says in verse 13, "Bring no more futile sacrifices." It's better not to sacrifice at all; it's better not to sing at all than to sing with an impure heart.

6. He says it's an abomination. Verse 13, these are God's reaction to their worship, he says, "Incense is an abomination to Me." Now, God had commanded that they would bring incense before him. That incense would be a symbol of marvelous things, of things coming out of the heart. God uses so many physical things to speak of beautiful spiritual things. In fact, I dare say, you can hardly look at anything in the world and not see that it points to God. You can't even look at a door without thinking that he is the door of the sheepfold. You can't look at the stars. You can't look at anything. You can't look at the person next to you. You can't look at light. You can't look at anything without being reminded of God. God has placed his sign-posts for us everywhere. Here, incense is one of those physical things that has spiritual meaning and they were commanded to bring it and God was desiring a sweet smelling aroma which indicates the satisfaction of God in the redemption of sinners. His pleasure in having healed the broken-hearted; his pleasure in making atonement, covering with his blood, finding an acceptable sacrifice arising from the earth, the people who he created. It is his delight for those who truly bring the incense that he's speaking of here.

We continue on. 7. God cannot endure it. Verse 13, "The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies – I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting." So you have all these wonderful ceremonies that were designed for the pleasure of the people of God. Feasts for blessing, bringing the people together to sing, to rejoice, to eat together for a week. God was so lavish with the celebrations and the feasts of Israel. He gave them so many opportunities to just soak in his goodness and say, "Isn't it good to be a child of such a good king?" And he commanded them to take their money and tithe it, really to bring blessing and pleasure to their own families. God ordained all these things and these feasts and Sabbaths and assemblies were all designed for that. He says, "I cannot endure it." He says he cannot endure that and iniquity and the sacred meeting all together.

8. He says that he hates it. Verse 14, "Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates." The terminology that is used here in Isaiah is strong language and it's to say,

“I hate it with my whole heart.” There is a passionate, relentless hate that’s implied in the word that is here. You might just think of that when God stands above his people and there is this heat sensing device. He will either be blessed by it, he’ll find pleasure in it, he’ll be delighted in the fellowship and the praises of his people or he will hate it with a white hot hatred. Let’s don’t forget that this is highly regulated worship. None of us should be too proud about our highly regulated worship. We shouldn’t think that we’re so much better or so much out of the range of vulnerability just because we’ve regulated our worship. It’s just not that simple.

Not only does he hate it, it is troubling to God. Verse 14, “They are a trouble to Me.” Imagine what it might be like that God would be troubled with you.

Then he says he is weary of it in verse 14, “I am weary of bearing them.” Weary.

Then in verse 15, he’s ignoring it. He says, “When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear.” These two elements of worship, the lifting of the hands and the praying of the prayers, though they are visible to everyone else, everyone else can see them but God hides his eyes. He ignores it. Your brother sitting around you might think you’re so spiritual because of the depth of your prayers, the passion of them and you lift up your hands and yet God is ignoring it. It’s so easy to receive praise from men and yet God turns his face away and instead of beholding his face, his face turns away. This is the most tragic thing that can ever happen to a person is when God turns his face away. But to be able to behold his face, to be transformed from glory to glory, to be made new, to be cared for by the Holy Spirit, to be changed by the face of the Lord Jesus Christ is really the only thing of inestimable value to us personally.

And here we find a situation where there’s all this regulated worship and God has turned his face away. Think about that. When the people of God gather together there are some to whom God has turned his face and what a blessing it is when God shows you that you have not a heart toward him. He shows you that you are bankrupt; he shows you that you are not redeemed and that his face is turned away and you say, “O Lord, O Lord! Turn your face to me. O Lord! Have mercy on me.” And you begin to say in your heart what David said, “Lord, when you said seek my face my heart said to you, Your face I will seek.” What a wonderful thing that is when you finally hear the word of the Lord and he says, “Seek my face,” and your heart responds and he makes you new and he replaces your heart of stone with a heart of flesh. O, I pray, that our heavenly Father would do that among us, that he would say to so many of you who are cold there under that heat identifying device in heaven, that you would hear him say, “Seek my face,” and you would say, “Your face, Lord, I will seek.” That’s the heart of a Christian.

But here is a picture of God turning his face away from the raised hands and from the prayers that are spoken. There is nothing wrong with spreading hands; there is nothing wrong with prayers. These things can be such blessings to you but when men were doing this, it was not a sign of their holiness. So the whole idea that is communicated here is that God is displeased.

The twelfth and final response of God is that he condemns it. Verse 15, he says, “Your hands are full of blood.” So when he looks down and when he turns his face away, he sees bloody hands and this does not mean that these people were serial killers, it means that they were killers of true righteousness. They appear one way in the assembly but they are killing godliness outside of the assembly. They want to keep their reputations up; they want to appear to be godly. They like the respectful greetings in the marketplaces; they care so much about their reputations. That’s what they care about the very most and they don’t mind lying and they don’t mind stealing from their employers as long as they can have an emotional genuine experience in the worship service, as if they can live any way they want but as long as they come in to the regulated worship of God and they can have an experience with God and they can hear the music and be moved by it and maybe even driven to tears and maybe even to confess their sins, but then when they walk out of that place, their hands are full of blood. That’s the picture that we see here.

This is why Psalm 15 is so helpful to this whole matter of worship where David declares,

“1 Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? 2 He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart; 3 He who does not backbite with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; 4 In whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honors those who fear the Lord; He who swears to his own hurt and does not change; 5 He who does not put out his money at usury, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.”

In this first section, I just want to pause for a moment and make some applications before we move on in the text. First of all, applications from verses 10-15: acceptable worship is not only determined by the sincerity of your heart in the moment of congregational worship. There is this popular idea that people embrace about worship and it’s a very dangerous and it’s a wrong idea and it’s this one: if your heart is right when you come into the church to worship, your worship is acceptable. Nothing can be further from the truth on the authority of Isaiah 1. This has to do with our tendency to compartmentalization where we think that we have one life in one place and another life in another. It is not acceptable worship to come into the meetings of the people of God and do all the right things when in fact, there is sin on the outside of the worship.

Jeff Pollard was telling me a story about his earlier life after he was converted out of the rock-n-roll industry and he was serving the Lord and seeking the Lord and he had a large group of people coming, young people not exclusively, to worship God. He said the worship was so remarkable. It was like heaven. The harmonies, the passion, the tears, the confession. It was absolutely amazing to him and it was almost like the roof would come off every time that they would gather together. He said it was the most moving experience he’d ever seen but then he said what he recognized was that no one’s life was changing and there was all kinds of disobedience going on outside but they would continue to come week after week and cry and sing with all of their hearts and then they

would be no different when they left the place. They would leave and they would kick the dog and yell at their children and turn on the television and watch stupid programs and some would fall into pornography. What was happening, he realized, was that it was just all emotional stimulus. You know, most worship leaders are trained how to do this: they are trained how to manage the emotion; they are trained how to work the audience. I know this very well. In my early training, we were taught how to begin the emotional state of the congregation and then bring it to a certain point and then sustain it and then bring it to another point and then finally at the very end, end with a crescendo. It was manipulation by music that somehow we were trained to begin with jubilation and then move to more somber tones and then bring the crowd up and then down to the depths of repentance and to manipulate through the use of the music. This is how we were trained to operate.

But here in Isaiah, we find something completely different. This is the idea where you create some kind of experience of inner sanctum in the worship. That what the pastors and the worship leaders are supposed to do is to try to create this emotional environment, this concealed bubble where something happens to people and it happens to them and you can see it all over the crowd. Somehow that makes the worship acceptable. But here in Isaiah we learn that if your life is out of order, even your tearful passionate worship is an abomination to God. It is lip service. God detects lip service.

Secondly, your worship is not better than your life. That's the second application. If you want your worship to be acceptable, then your life outside is the pivot point of the acceptability of your worship. We like to judge worship on how we feel and it's the wrong measure. Our first judgment should not be how did I feel but was my worship acceptable. Most people when they come to worship, they're asking what's in it for me and when you leave the worship, what's one of the questions that your friends might ask you? Back in my younger days, people were always asking each other, "How was the worship? How was the worship?" And basically what they meant by that was, "Just how phenomenal was it? Like, how did you feel so radically phenomenal during that time? What did it do to you?" That's really the question that's being asked. But we should actually ask: was the worship acceptable? Was it a sweet aroma? The kind of aroma that God desires? God's pleasure has nothing to do with how you feel or act in worship but how you act outside of worship. That is what this text is saying. Now, there's more to say about that that we'll touch on later.

The third application: the cultivation of true worship in the church really ought to begin at home. You know, rather than trying to fine tune worship in a congregation we should start at our homes where we cultivate genuine devotion to God, where there is holiness inside and outside of the home as a precursor to worship.

Here's a fourth: the regulated worship of God can be an abomination to God. You can do all the prescribed things but if we do not repent, then we have done nothing but polished up the outside of the cup.

Next: the heart that delights in obedience is the heart of true worship. In the same way that adultery is more than just a physical act, so there is more to worship than simply singing songs and praying and observing the Lord's Supper and preaching. It's far, far more than that. It's a longing for obedience. Obedience free worship is a contradiction to the gospel. It's a disconnection from the gospel because it separates the gospel from repentance and a heart turned toward God. Jesus said, "If you love me, you'll keep my commandments." The bottom line is this: the worship is futile because there is sin outside the corporate gathering and that true and authentic worship includes doing the will of God. The Lord Jesus Christ said in John 9:31, "Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him." The Lord Jesus Christ has summed up all of these verses in Isaiah.

This does not mean that obedience standing alone is the only thing that makes worship pleasing to God because the true worship of God does influence how you feel. It does have an impact on your life. I'll just give you a number of examples that are in the Scriptures to help us understand this whole matter of what our responses can be and really ought to be. First of all: there's gladness in Psalm 100 where we read, "Serve the Lord with gladness." There is joy in Psalm 100:1, "Make a joyful shout to the Lord all ye lands."

There is fear in 2 Kings 17 where we read, "But as for me, I will come into your house in the multitude of your mercy, in fear of you I will worship toward your holy temple," which is spoken in Psalm 5:7. He says that he will come into his house in the multitude of your mercy. Have you ever thought of the gathered people of God like that? It's coming into a place of the multitude of God's mercies. What a wonderful thing it is to have your heart tenderized by mercy through the worship of God and it will cause fear, actually.

Then there is rejoicing in Deuteronomy 26:11, "So you shall rejoice in every good thing which the Lord your God has given to you and your house, you and the Levite and the stranger who is among you." This is a picture of gathered worship.

Then there is the bowing of the head in Genesis 24:26. This is an example of personal worship, actually of Abraham's servant who is rejoicing because God had opened up the door for a wife for Isaac. He was so delighted. You know how delightful it is when a couple comes together as a work of the Lord; it's such a delightful thing. It soothes my soul and it makes me happy and so what happened with Abraham's servant is he bowed down his head and he worshipped the Lord. What a wonderful thing that was in his personal private worship.

There is confessing of sins, Nehemiah 9:3 where we read, "And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the Lord their God." One fourth of the day reading the word of God, the other fourth of the day just confessing and worshipping the Lord their God. Can you imagine what that would have been like to have spent so much time. You who have taken time to linger in worship know what it does to your soul.

Then there is the tearing of one's robe and shaving of one's head, acts of contrition in Job 1:20 where we read, "Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped." It's not just enough to tear your clothes, Isaiah says rend your hearts not your clothes. Your clothing is actually a figure to remind you that you could tear your clothes but instead you should tear your heart. Every time you consider your clothing, think about that for a minute: why has God given you clothing? To remind you of the rending of your heart, not just the rending of your clothes outwardly.

Then there is bringing of firstfruits in Deuteronomy 26 and then there is singing in 2 Chronicles 29:28. Then there is washing and anointing yourself in 2 Samuel 12:20.

These are all the things that happen to you when there is true worship and they may not all happen with the same intensity every time. Of course, that's not true. God is sovereign in all those things but these are the kinds of things that happen to a person when they are genuinely worshipping God. And we should ask ourselves: is this happening to us? Is this happening in our church? If not, why not? Perhaps it is because we have been rending our garments; we've been lifting our hands. We have been praying but not rending our hearts, not truly lifting up our hands in worship and not praying from the heart.

So, just a quick review of how a religious people go through the motions of worship are like Sodom, verse 10; secondly, how biblically ordered worship can be an offense to God in verses 11-15; and then, thirdly, how an offensive people can repent. Here's the good news: "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow." Do you see how God just doesn't leave us in our coldness; he doesn't leave you in your lukewarmness. He calls you and he says, "Wash yourselves."

In verse 18 he says, "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool." These are the remedies that God brings. God does come to rescue his people and he rescues them by speaking to them something so life-giving and it's repentance. Repentance.

There are two categories of remedies here. These remedies that God gives are marvelous but notice that there are two categories: first, there are sins of commission and the second are sins of omission. So, if one has been dead in their hearts then there are these two categories of sins that God is calling his people to address. First are the sins of commission. This has to do with cleansing and repentance and putting away. He says, "Wash yourselves and make yourselves clean." Let's make something very clear for a moment: repentance is not the same as confession. Let me say that again: repentance is not the same as confession. You know how that works if you're a parent when your children are acting shamefully to one another and you speak to them about it and they say, "Okay, fine. Okay. I did it. I know." Well, confession is not repentance. This is a call

to true repentance that results in washing yourselves and making yourselves clean. These are sins of commission.

And putting away evil. He says, “Put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes, Cease to do evil.” This has to do with stopping what you’re doing. In other words, it’s not enough to come and just confess your sins in the congregation and to cry about it. What makes the worship true worship is when you put away the evil of your doings. Notice what he says, “From before my eyes.” From before the Lord’s eyes. Those are the only eyes that really matter. The Lord turns his face toward you or he turns his face away. His eyes are the most important eyes. This isn’t self-cleansing, it is true repentance. It is not passive; it has to do with obedience for repentance.

You know, we need to recognize how impossible it is for us to turn to God like this. We don’t have it in us; it’s only a work of the Holy Spirit to create it. Romans 3:10 says, “As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.’” That is just a statement of our helplessness. And so he says, “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean” and it always involves putting off and putting on.

Then there are sins of omission. He says, “Do good.” These are the things that you’re not doing. “Do good.” Things that you’re leaving out of your life. There are five admonitions in verse 17: learn to do good; seek justice; rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless; plead for the widow. These are all sins of omission.

The first is to seek justice. This is to judge something properly; to look at something the right way. This has to do with looking at justice in all the different categories of life. Justice as a worker: how much do you speak when things are not right being done. Justice as a father in bringing discipline. As a child in your father’s house when your parent wants you to do something that you do not want to do. Justice as a church member. Seeking justice.

Rebuke the oppressor, that’s the second of the five. He’s speaking of bringing the oppressor to the right way and he’s speaking of an oppressive reckless person. Someone who is exercising authority in a wrong way or exercising authority that they don’t have for oppression. There are different kinds of oppression: there is oppression of children, Isaiah 3:12 says that children are their oppressors. You can be an oppressor as a father. You can be an oppressor as an employer. An employee can be an oppressor. Taking care of people who are being manipulated. Your wife can oppress you. Here he says, “Rebuke the oppressor.” Not expose the oppressor primarily, but go rebuke the oppressor. Go to your brother.

Thirdly, defend the fatherless, verse 17. How do you defend the fatherless? There are so many ways you can defend the fatherless. First of all, you can become a father. Second of all, you can exalt marriage and that defends the fatherless. You can make divorce more difficult. That defends the fatherless. You can refuse to commit fornication. You can have

a church that has fathers. You can be a friend to the fatherless. You can do what Job did and invite the fatherless to eat in your house. There are ways to defend the fatherless.

He says then, "Plead for the widow." Do you plead to the government for the widow? No, you should plead for the people who are responsible for the widow in the family and then the people in the church. We often refuse to plead for the widow to the right person. We don't ask families to actually come up and do what they're supposed to do. When someone in a family has suffered some great difficulty, it's the family's responsibility first of all. We are often so afraid to go to the family. We want to go to the church first; we want to go to the state first. But we should go to the family first. Helping single mothers. There are so many ways that God dealt with the widow with the poor tithe for widows and orphans. We put people in assisted living situations. Part of pleading for the widow is to plead with their children who want to put them there to take care of them.

So we've seen how a religious people can go through the motions of worship and still be like Sodom. We've seen how a biblically ordered people can be an offense to God. We've seen how an offensive people can repent. Now let's look at how a repenting people can be transformed, verses 18-20, "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool." He's speaking of the redness of sin. The commentators Keil & Delitzsch say, "Red is contrasted with white. It is the color of a selfish, covetous and passionate life. It is self-seeking in its nature, which goes out of itself to destroy. It drives about with wild tempestuous violence. It is, therefore, the color of wrath and of sin. It is generally supposed that Isaiah speaks of red as the color of sin because sin ends in murder. Sin is called red inasmuch as it is a burning heat which consumes a man and breaks forth and consumes his fellow man as well." But your sins which are scarlet, can be as white as snow.

Second to the last: how a transformed people will be blessed, verse 19. He says, "If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land." He's saying that there is a promise of blessing, that if you turn, the curse of God will be lifted and there will be blessing. Moses said it like this, "Blessed shall you be in the city, blessed shall you be in the country, blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl, blessed shall you be when you come in, blessed shall you be when you go out." This is the blessing of turning to the Lord. God will bless his people who turn.

Finally, how a disobedient nation will be destroyed, verse 20. "But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword"; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken." Proverbs 29:1, "He who is often rebuked and hardens his neck will suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy."

What we learn here from Isaiah: that the welfare of a nation really depends on something that's very, very surprising. The welfare of a nation does not depend on what the President does. It does not depend on what the Senators do. The welfare of a nation depends on the worship of the people of God in the church and false worship will draw the wrath of God on a nation while true worship draws the favor of God. Did you ever

think that the most important thing going on in America today or in any nation of the world, is the worship of the people of God? Did you ever think that it was the worship of the people of God that was holding back the wrath of God from the nation? That when the people of God gather together they are actually holding back his wrath? The most pivotal issue for a nation is the worship of the people of God and when the worship of the people of God becomes corrupt, God will come and destroy the nation. We often so look to Washington, we look to our laws, we look to our protest and we ought to do all of those things and yet we often look to those things and we neglect what is acceptable before God and what is unacceptable before God.

The true worship of God is the greatest leverage point for good and the preservation and the blessing of the nation of the United States of America than anything. Let me be just very clear about this text: here you learn that God judges nations by violating the first table of the law, by violating the laws of worship. There are people out here today that say, "No, no, no, God's people shouldn't concern themselves in the nation and for the first table of the law." Not so and this is why. This is why we find God saying, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow."

So, we've seen how a religious people can engage in highly regulated worship but still be like Sodom. We've seen how a biblically ordered worship can become an offense to God. And we've learned that it's not enough to say that I came in and I wept and I felt and I confessed my sins. It's a blessing if God gives us the ability to weep and confess our sins but if there is no obedience outside of the worship, the worship inside is nullified and it becomes an abomination to God.

Here in this passage we learn that there are two issues that we must pay attention to: first of all, our lives outside of the worship of God; secondly, the genuineness of our hearts inside of the worship of God. Both of those are held in balance and you cannot have one without the other. There must be a heart that says, "O Lord, I desire your beauty. I love your law. I desire to have truth in the inward parts. O Lord, have mercy on me." Yes, that's one part and the other part is this: that I will go from the house of the Lord and I will take oaths and vows before the Lord and I'll change my ways.

It's a passage of Scripture that calls us to enter into the house of God in a completely different way, to enter into the house of God for the express purpose to exit the house of God a truly changed person whose sins, which were like scarlet, have been made white as snow and yet, a person who goes out and he rebukes the oppressor and he defends the fatherless and he stands for what's true and what's beautiful in the world. And that is true worship.

Would you pray with me?

O Lord, how many times we've found our hearts cool, other times cold, other times lukewarm and other times so sweet, so submitted, so bowed down, so precious laid before you. O Lord, that you would come and bless all of us who are gathered here who have just heard your words, that you would help us to love you with all of our hearts as

we worship, that you would expunge all false worship from us, that you would keep us from just simply regulating our worship in a cold mechanical way that is completely disconnected from our lives. O Lord, that you would protect us from being the people that Jesus spoke of, "this people honors me with their lips but their heart is far from me." O Lord, that you would rescue us in our hearts. I pray that you would come and do a work of conversion of any here who have been stone cold and have realized it even here tonight. O, that you would cleanse them with hyssop, that you would make them white as snow, that they would hear your voice that says, "Seek my face," and then to respond, "Your face, Lord, I will seek."

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