

Broomfield



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When Worship is an Abomination, Part 4

Achilles

In Homer's Iliad we read of Achilles, one of the greatest Greek warriors ever to have lived — at least in their mythology. He was the son of Peleus who was a king of the Myrmidons in Thessaly, and the goddess, Thetis, who was a sea nymph.

When Achilles was a child, Thetis dipped him into the river Styx to make him immortal. The waters made him invulnerable except for his heel by which his mother held him. And sure enough, Achilles' death occurred when he was struck by an arrow in his Achilles' heel. From this story today we reference the Achilles' heel as that place where someone is vulnerable to attack.

Does the church have an Achilles' heel? Where are we most vulnerable when it comes to Satan and His devices?

While we might suggest many answers, Matthew 4 and the temptations of Christ give us at least one.

Matthew 4:8-10, "Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

From this passage we can see that worship is one of our more prominent Achilles' heels. Redemptive History bears this out.

1. The fall revolved around the issue of worship, Genesis 3:1-7.
2. Christ's coming was for the purpose of seeking true worshippers, John 4:23-24.
3. When it comes to giving a definition of the Christian, Paul describes us as ones who worship, Philippians 3:3.
4. And in eternity future, our life will revolve around worship, Revelation 7:9-12.

Accordingly how we worship and who we worship will give us a good indication of a person's future. Insofar as a person's worship is genuine and comports to the word of God, we can predict good things for them. But insofar as a person's worship is distorted and unbiblical, we anticipate bad things.

In fact, we are examining a text which gives us the consequences of abominable worship. And it is with sobriety that we note that there are two consequences.

Divine Commentary

1 Samuel 2:17, “**Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD:** for men abhorred the offering of the LORD.”

There are times in life when we do not know for sure the opinion of God on a specific matter. However, Hophni and Phinehas received divine commentary that their sin was very great.

This is not to say that God's will is unknowable — for indeed it is. But when it comes to the specifics of life such as this job or that job; to go forward or stay put; or to make the purchase or not; most often we must proceed in faith.

Such is not the case when it comes to how we ought to view the conduct of Hophni and Phinehas. For from this text **WE KNOW GOD'S ASSESSMENT** when it came to their actions: God declares it to be a **GREAT AND HORRIBLE SIN!**

Yet why was their sin so great? To borrow a phrase from Christ¹ Hophni and Phinehas were not greater sinners than anyone else in redemptive history, were they? So why is God so upset here?

Notice the little word at the beginning of verse 17 — “thus,” “therefore,” or “wherefore” — depending on your translation. It links us to what is said before, and so explains why the sin of Hophni and Phinehas was so great. Specifically verses 13-14 outline their flagrant disregard for the worship of God whereby they took meat not intended for them, and then verses 15-16 tells us that they took that which belonged to God — the fat of the sacrifice — for themselves.

While the first of these transgressions might be understandable if not even excusable (Who here hasn't violated God's word this past week? How can we therefore cast the first stone?), what we read in verses 15-16 should shock our senses!

As we saw before, the fat of the sacrifice belonged to God.

Leviticus 3:16, “And the priest shall burn them upon the altar: it is the food of the offering made by fire for a sweet savour: all the fat is the LORD'S.”²

1 Samuel 2:16 indicates that this truth was accepted throughout Judaism.

1 Samuel 2:16, “**And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently,** and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, Nay; but thou shalt give it me now: and if not, I will take it by force.”

And thus, to claim the fat of the sacrifice as your own — or in their case, to forcefully take the sacrifice that belonged to God from a worshipper — would be akin to marching into the dining hall of a great king, grabbing the food off his plate and taking a big bite out of it. This would be a way of stating that you are

¹ Compare Luke 13:2

² Compare also Leviticus 3:3-5; 7:30

the king!

Absalom

At the time of 2 Samuel 16, Absalom has successfully executed a coup against his father, David. David is on the run. His men are scattered, and Israel is in disarray.

Now, in order to demonstrate that he had secured the throne (at the advice of Ahithophel), Absalom participated in an act which had clear implications in his day.

2 Samuel 16:21-22, “And Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Go in unto thy father’s concubines, which he hath left to keep the house; and all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father: then shall the hands of all that are with thee be strong. So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house; and Absalom went in unto his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel.”

The thinking at this time was that if you took for yourself that which was the former king's — for example, his harem — you were the king by virtue of the fact that the king nor his army were there to stop you.

The beautiful passage of 1 Samuel 18 also demonstrates this truth. As we read this passage we know that Jonathan is the heir to the throne. Yet, after killing the Philistine, David is brought into the house of Saul. And we read, “Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle” (1 Samuel 18:3-4).

David now possessed Jonathan's robe, armor, and sword. This demonstrated that Jonathan new that he now was heir to the throne! Again the thinking was that if you possessed that which represented the king (or future king, as in this case), you yourself were the king!

We see it throughout the ancient near east. When a king rose to power through war, it is not uncommon for them to claim for themselves the property and the prerogatives of the prior monarch. For example, when Alexander captured Darius' wife, it was a strong statement both to Darius and to Alexander as to whom would be the next king!

Thus, when Hophni and Phinehas took by force the fat of the sacrifice — that which represented God's share in worship — they loudly proclaimed that Israel was under new management: God was dead; they now were king!

Ought we therefore to be shocked when we read, God desires the death of these two boys?³ Is it a surprise that God deposed Eli’s house from serving as priests?⁴ Is it any surprise that Eli's sin was physically “un-atoneable?”⁵ And that Eli and his sons died a horrible and miserable death?⁶

These boys claimed a divine prerogative for themselves and thereby corrupted the worship of God. And for that they received the Divine declaration that their sin was indeed great which brought with it the

³ Compare 1 Samuel 2:34

⁴ Compare 1 Samuel 2:30

⁵ Compare 1 Samuel 3:14

⁶ Compare 1 Samuel 4:11-18

sentence of death! Such is the first consequence of abominable worship.

And yet as I consider the sin of Hophni and Phinehas, and the fact that they knew better — having at their disposal at least the first six books of the Bible — I cannot help but to wonder how much greater is our sin when we have the sixty-six books of the Bible and yet do the same thing.

You say, “How have we claimed as our own that which belongs to God?”

Just think for a little and you'll come up with many examples. Yet let me give you just one. How many of you have ever been moved to anger on account of the circumstances in which you live? Perhaps you lost your job. Or you lost a loved one. Maybe your health has failed. Or perhaps someone else received the honor that you felt you deserved.

Does not God control and dictate all things- from the greatest to the very least? Is not the king's heart like channels of water in the hand of the Lord?⁷ Isn't it true that no one can touch us except by the authority of God?⁸ Is not providence — that is, the governance and care of this world — a Divine prerogative?

And thus when you:

- worry
- kick against the goads
- are moved to unrighteous anger on account of the action of another
- question why something is happening
- criticize God for what is going on in your life
- claim for yourself the Divine prerogative of providence
- place yourself as judge over God

... Is to proclaim the world —just as Hophni and Phinehas — that God is dead and you are king!

This is arrogance, impudence and presumption.

Then why hasn't God struck everyone of us dead?

Hophni and Phinehas claimed a divine prerogative and God struck them dead! How is it that we expect to be spared?

There is an answer — though it is quite unbelievable.

There was a time when God became man. Remember? And far from the actions of Hophni and Phinehas He did not claim the prerogatives that accompany deity — though He was in fact God! Rather we read in Philippians 2 just the opposite.

Philippians 2:6-8, “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

⁷ Compare Proverbs 21:1

⁸ Compare Job 1, and John 19:11

So how is it that God doesn't strike us dead for our folly when we- like Hophni and Phinehas- claim divine prerogatives?

Because the One who had a claim to the throne of the universe died on our behalf!

So, today, the only reason we can worry — without judgment— or criticize God's rule —without judgment — or claim the prerogative of God — without judgment — or act like Hophni and Phinehas and not have God desire our death is because Christ bore our judgment in His body on the cross!

Oh Lord, please melt our hearts! Take away our love of sinning! Crush the rebel within that would question Your wisdom! Make us instruments for Your glory and praise!

Dishonoring God

Such is the first consequence of abominable worship — Divine Judgment. Yet notice, there is a second they brought dishonor on the Lord.

1 Samuel 2:17, “Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: **for men abhorred⁹ the offering of the LORD.**”

The subject of this statement is rather ambiguous — and hence this passage generally is translated in one of three ways: either (a) they [i.e., Hophni and Phinehas] despised the offering of the Lord: NIV, NRSV (b) for men [i.e., all of Judaism] abhorred the offering of the Lord: KJV, NKJV (c) for the men [i.e., not making a commitment either way, but simply being true to the original] despised the offering of the Lord: NASB, ESV, RSV.

The ambiguity here is due largely on account of the Hebrew. First, “men” has an article which results in the translation of “the men.” This points to a specific group of people (possibly Hophni and Phinehas, but it could be broader). But second, Hophni and Phinehas were just referenced in this verse with the phrase, “the young men.” Consequently for the writer now to refer to them as “the men” isn't natural. We would expect the phrase, “...the young men” or just “...they” if the writer intended it to be Hophni and Phinehas.

Accordingly, there is some question as to the referent in this verse. However, in light of the fact that Hophni and Phinehas were just referenced with the phrase, “the young men,” I and many others¹⁰ take this statement as a reference to “the men” of Judah.

From this we see the second result of abominable worship: the dishonoring of God among other people! On account of Hophni and Phinehas' sin “the men [of Judah] despised the offering of the Lord!”

And yet, what does this mean? The word for “abhor” is the opposite of the Hebrew word used in reference to the Covenantal Love of God. Occurring twenty-nine times in the Old Testament, this word is used synonymously with those who:

- Rebel against authority, Psalm 107:11
- Are unwilling or disinclined toward obedience, Proverbs 1:30

⁹ אָבָה na'ats

¹⁰ See also Bergen, EBC, Keil and Delitzsch, and Matthew Henry

- Hate, Proverbs 5:12
- Refuse to believe in the Lord, Numbers 14:1
- Forsake God, Isaiah 1:4
- Reject God, Isaiah 5:24
- Scorn God, Psalm 74:10.

From this we conclude that “despising” is the activity of treating something lightly and so with disdain. In fact The Theological Wordbook put it this way, speaking of the one who despises God:

“He not only 'deprecates God's power and ability to carry out his threats' but his contemptuous view of God leads him to prefer sin to God and to express this contempt in conscious contempt of God.”¹¹

And this was the net result of Hophni and Phinehas' sin among the people of God. It not only resulted in their own condemnation, but the compromise of a nation when it came to their relationship with God! On account of these two boys, when the people of God contemplated the worship of the Lord, His covenantal love, and the peace offering — which is the sacrifice behind the “offering” in this text — they disdained it! This is such a horrible consequence of abominable worship — yet a very predictable one.

Sin Breeds Sin

When David sinned with Bathsheba, God said, “by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme “ (2 Samuel 12:14).

Such a horrible thought that we could do something that could cause others to “disdain” the name of the Lord! And yet that is what we do when we compromise the worship of God!

When the priests of Malachi’s day corrupted God’s worship, God rebuked them saying, “For from the rising of the sun, even to its setting, My name will be great among the nations... But you are profaning it, in that you say, ‘The table of the Lord is defiled, and as for its fruit, its food is to be despised’...I am a great King,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘and My name is feared among the nations’“ (Malachi 1:11a, 12a, 14b NASB).

Why such a strong rebuke to the priests of Malachi's day?

Because how you worship will have an impact on God's witness among the nations! As God is to be feared, so must be our focus and goal in worship. It is not for us, or evangelism, or encouragement, or a shot in the arm. Worship is for the Lord!

God’s rebuke for false worship was leveled against His people in the day of Paul.

Romans 2:23-24, “Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.”

Oh how it should grieve us to hear that we have dishonored God among the nations! Yet once again, that is the inevitable result of compromise when it comes to the worship of God!

This is such an important truth for us to realize as we consider the work of God's kingdom. Today we live

¹¹ The Theological Wordbook, Volume II, page 543.

at a critical time in redemptive history as it relates to the church's witness and ministry in the US. As Europe has gone, it is believed by some that we are merely 30 to 40 years behind them.

Did you know that Christianity is a joke in much of Europe. The fastest growing religions in Europe are Islam and mysticism. Hundreds of church buildings are vacant and in ruins. Few attend church because Christianity is viewed as an archaic and foolish religion of the past. And of those who do attend church, most are familiar only with legalism and formalism. Indeed, Christianity has all but vanished from Europe.

And in our own country, we are facing a crisis that is rarely spoken about today. We are losing our children by the hundreds. This is a result of children's church and a contemporary approach to worship. While contemporary worship has been successful in drawing large crowds it has been a dismal failure for our children. Far from attracting the next generation, it has turned them off as they are taught early to be consumers when it comes to the worship of God!
Brothers and sisters, may I make a suggestion?

Is it possible — and I'm only asking — that the decline of Christianity in Europe and the loss of current generation is due to a compromise when it comes to our worship?

After-all, didn't Hophni and Phinehas' rebellion when it came to the worship of God lead to the whole-sale abandonment of God on the part of people? Didn't the compromise of God's worship in Malachi lead to God not being regarded as holy?

Indeed! And mark these words. Spiritual decay always begins with the church's worship — it is our Achilles' heel! And thus, the greatest blessing/gift that we ever could pass to the next generation is not only a high and holy esteem of the worship of God! But also a genuineness when it comes to worship such that we teach our children not only that the worship of God is for them but also how to worship with integrity!

To do this is radically to effect our children and the culture in which we live!

Corinth

Corinth was a divided church. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians as a rebuke on account of their sin. Now of all the places this division surfaced, it was manifested in the use of their spiritual gifts. A typical gathering for worship was chaotic as each did their own thing. Some sang solos. Others claimed a vision. Still others proclaimed a message. Far from things being done decently and in order, their worship had the markings of a three-ringed circus.

In this context, it is not surprising that of all the gifts that the Corinthians longed for, tongues was chief on their list — it was the most showy. So in 1 Corinthians 12 to 14 Paul discusses spiritual gifts endeavoring to show that, as it relates to the body, tongues are an inferior gift. His message simply is this: If you are going to long for any gift, long for the one that builds up the body — such as prophesying/preaching.

Now in this context Paul makes this statement:

1 Corinthians 14:23, "If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?"

Paul declares that the worship of compromise is shown when everyone gathers to do his own thing, experience God, or to get. And this is what the gift of tongues was all about in Corinth. The non-believer (and I'd suggest to you the covenant child as well) would declare that they thought that the Corinthians were crazy!

But if on the other hand, you do it God's way.

1 Corinthians 14:24-25(NASB), "But if all prophesy [if the word of God is powerfully proclaimed in the context of Biblical worship], and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, (1) he is convicted by all, (2) he is called to account by all; (3) the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so (4) he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you."

Do you see the point?

The greatest evangelizing/discipling tool we have as a church is not rock bands, contemporary worship, or giving people what they want BUT the upholding of Biblical worship as a people who worship with integrity!

When this happens conviction sets in. The secrets of the heart are disclosed. The glory of God rests heavily upon the congregation such that all fall on their face and worship!

May I leave you with one exhortation?

Let us not look lightly upon the worship of God. Let us not disdain the offering of the Lord. But with integrity and with our heart, let us labor as a congregation to be worshippers of the Lord. Let us teach our children how to worship. Let us strive for undistracted worship — where we do not worship with half of our heart and with the other half we think about the game, plan for the coming week, and daydream. Let us say what we mean and mean what we say.

Let us be a congregation that weekly participates in the supernatural activity of worship!

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on March 20, 2005. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.