

STRANGE FIRE

Leviticus 10:1-11

INTRODUCTION

- “A time will come when instead of shepherds feeding the sheep, the church will have clowns entertaining the goats.” (Spurgeon)
- Churches today are full of every form of carnal entertainment available – dancing, dramas, jugglers, fire-breathers, clowns, concerts, mimes, movies, etc.
- At the heart of this corruption of worship is the abandonment of God’s glory as the object of worship, and the adoption of man’s pleasure as the object of worship
- If there is one chief characteristic of the world today, and sadly of contemporary churches today, it is self-love
- Self-love is inherent to every person – it is part of our sinful nature, but when a sinner is regenerated, a new law is written in his heart, and his chief love is of God, then of his neighbour, while self is denied
- But many churches, filled with unregenerate sinners, have rather sought to incorporate the love and glorification of man as their guiding principle of worship
- The philosophy is, “Worship your way”
- Such people are prophesied to arise in the last days who “shall be lovers of their own selves...lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:1-5)
- To attempt to worship God according to man’s ways, in ways that please man, is idolatry and a violation of the second commandment (Exodus 20:4-5)

- But such idolatry is almost as old as time itself, found in Cain's attempt to offer his own works to God (Genesis 4:3-5)
- In Nadab and Abihu we have recorded the stark consequences of worshipping God falsely according to man's device and not according to God's word

I. THE PRIVILEGE OF FAITHFUL WORSHIP

A. Man was created to worship and glorify God

1. All things were created for God's pleasure (Revelation 4:11)
2. God's design is that "All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name." (Psalm 86:9)
3. To worship God is to know him to be God, to know ourselves to be his creatures and to render ourselves unto him (Psalm 100:2-3)
4. God is seeking for true worshippers to worship him (John 4:23)
5. Though man was created to worship God, yet most of mankind refuses to worship him, instead giving worship to other beings and things (Romans 1:21-25)

B. Man has no excuse for idolatry

1. Nadab and Abihu were sons of the high priest, Aaron
2. They were blessed with a godly upbringing
 - a. They saw the wonderful works of God in delivering Israel from Egypt
 - b. They had the word of God in their home and in their society

- c. They were instructed in the worship Jehovah
3. Those who receive light are responsible to receive it and obey it (John 12:47-48; Matthew 11:20-24; Amos 3:2; Luke 12:47-48)
4. Every person has received light from God, if not by the Scriptures, then by the revelation of nature, and have a duty to respond to that divine light by worshipping the true God (Romans 1:20)
5. *Light obeyed increaseth light,
Light rejected bringeth night,
Who shall give me power to choose,
If the love of light I lose?*

II. THE PRESUMPTION OF FALSE WORSHIP

- A. They offered "strange fire"
 1. They offered "strange" (profane, unauthorised) fire
 2. What precisely was unauthorised about it? Some possibilities:
 - a. They used unconsecrated utensils
 - b. The incense was not the prescribed formula (Exodus 30:9)
 - c. The incense was offered at the wrong time of day (Leviticus 16:1-2)
 - d. They entered too far into the tabernacle (Leviticus 16:1-2)
 - e. They acted of their own volition, without authorisation

- f. They used fire of their own making (common fire) rather than taking it from the coals of the altar of burnt offering (Leviticus 16:12-13)
 3. It seems that it was likely the last of these in which they transgressed as it is specifically the “fire” that is called strange
 4. The altar of burnt offering was the place of blood sacrifice, where atonement for sin was made
 5. By choosing not the path of blood atonement, but rather their own way to enter into the holy place and to offer incense (prayer), they are like many who think they can approach unto God without the blood of Jesus Christ atoning for their sins
- B. This is known as “will-worship”
1. This is any form of worship that is based on man’s will, not God’s revealed will (Colossians 2:23)
 2. Man has not been given liberty to devise his own ways of worshipping God
 3. “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it” (Deuteronomy 12:32)
 4. The Jews of Christ’s day were guilty of such will-worship and received sharp rebuke from the Lord (Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:13)
- C. In this present dispensation, the New Testament alone is the rule for Christian worship
1. If an element of worship cannot be found the New Testament, either by command or deduction, it should not be a part of corporate Christian worship

2. This is known as the *Regulative Principle of Worship*
3. This is in contrast to the *Normative Principle of Worship* – whatever is not prohibited in Scripture is permitted in worship
4. The Regulative Principle is built upon the following five biblical commands concerning worship:
 - a. We are to worship God in ways that edify our local church (1 Corinthians 14:26)
 - b. We are to worship God in a proper and orderly manner (1 Corinthians 14:40)
 - c. We are to worship God in Spirit and truth (John 4:24)
 - d. We are to worship God in reverence (Hebrews 12:28-29)
 - e. We are to worship God in awe (Hebrews 12:28-29)
5. The rule all throughout Scripture is that God has not given man liberty to worship him as he pleases – man is to worship God according to his word
6. The elements of worship that are prescribed in the New Testament for corporate worship of the church are:
 - a. Preaching (2 Timothy 4:2)
 - b. Scripture reading (1 Timothy 4:13)
 - c. Prayer (1 Timothy 2:1-2)
 - d. Congregational singing (Colossians 3:16)
 - e. Giving (1 Corinthians 16:2)
 - f. Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:26)

- g. Baptism (Matthew 28:19)
- 7. The church has not been given liberty to alter or add to these elements of worship
- 8. However, the church does have a degree of liberty regarding the *circumstances* of worship
- 9. Any attempt to “innovate” the church’s worship by adding to or removing from the prescribed worship of the New Testament is idolatry, will-worship and strange fire

III. THE PUNISHMENT OF FALSE WORSHIPPERS

A. God’s direct and severe judgment

- 1. On some occasions God brings immediate judgment upon sinners, smiting them upon the spot
- 2. Other sins await judgment on the great day – yet all sin will be judged
- 3. Some people have the idea that there is a difference between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament – the former is a God of wrath and judgment, the latter is a God of mercy and forgiveness
- 4. But God does not change – he is the same yesterday, today and forever
- 5. The same God who burned up Nadab and Abihu struck dead Ananias and Sapphira for their deception (Acts 5)
- 6. God is a consuming fire in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 4:24) *and* the New Testament (Hebrews 12:29)
- 7. As Nadab and Abihu’s privileged pedigree and position did not save them from divine wrath, so all sinners of every

rank, whether kings or slaves, must give account of themselves to God

8. As these men transgressed by fire, so they were judged by fire – God metes the punishment according to the crime
 9. “For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” (Galatians 6:8)
 10. Note the connection of wine and strong drink with the sin of Nadab and Abihu (v.9) – yet another example of the dangers of alcohol, the folly of those who touch it, and the need for God’s people to avoid any association with it (Proverbs 20:1)
- B. God’s holiness and glory are preeminent above all things, including man’s desires and preferences (v.3)
1. God “will be sanctified in them that come nigh me” – he is to be worshipped in holiness, by a holy people who declare his holiness
 2. Likewise his judgment upon sin shows him to be holy, righteous and sanctified
 3. God “before all the people will be glorified” – when he is believed in, obeyed, revered and worshipped
 4. And God is yet glorified in his wrathful judgments upon sinners
 5. Aaron, Eleazar and Ithamar were forbidden to mourn – their continued service in the tabernacle maintained the honour of God and testified to his righteous judgment
 6. The people mourned, not for the loss of the idolaters but for the corruption of Jehovah’s worship by them

CONCLUSION

1. What is your attitude to the worship of God?
2. Do you seek to worship him according to what makes you feel comfortable or according to what glorifies him? (2 Thessalonians 1:12)
3. To be jealous of God's worship, to seek to maintain a Scriptural pattern of worship in the church, to protect the church against the man-made innovations that are infecting worship today is the duty of every believer
4. Do you have a constant attitude of holy reverence towards the things of God, being on guard against ever treating such things in a casual way?
5. "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him." (Psalm 89:7)
6. Do you praise God not only for his acts of kindness but also for his acts of judgment? (cf. Revelation 16:7)
7. Is God sanctified in you by the blood of Jesus Christ?
8. Is God glorified in you as you yield to the Spirit daily?
9. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31)