

Worship: The Ultimate Priority of the Church  
Pt. 2 – The Prescribed Pattern for Worship  
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We're continuing a topical series. We normally are working through books of the Bible at Providence, that's what we think is to be the normal diet of the church for our maximum spiritual health and the well-being of the body, but from time to time we do believe it's appropriate to sort of spice that regular diet with topical messages and so we're at a series on the doctrine of the church. What is the church supposed to be? Who are we and what are we called to do? We've been looking at this subject for a number of weeks and last week we title a message that was going to be in two parts, last Sunday and this morning, "Worship: The Ultimate Priority of the Church." That's the title of the two-part series here. Worship: the ultimate priority of the church and we saw last week, the first part of that was the supreme importance of worship, and this morning the theme of this morning's message that helps us to unpack how worship is the ultimate priority of the church, is the prescribed pattern for worship. That's the title of the message this morning, "The Prescribed Pattern for Worship."

If worship is to be our ultimate priority and as we saw last time we are created for worship, that's what we were made to do, we were saved to be worshipers, as we saw from John 4, Jesus came to seek worshipers, the Father is seeking worshipers in sending Jesus into the world, true worshipers who worship him in spirit and in truth. And if we're called to be worshipers, then it's important for us to know how to worship and so we're going to look this morning at the how of worship, and we're going to see that God in his word is quite detailed and specific about how we are to worship him, about how he wants to be worshiped.

So the prescribed pattern for worship. Essentially what we're going to see is that how we worship is not up to us, it's not according to our understanding, according to our feelings, to suit our tastes, to satisfy our desires. No, worship biblically is prescribed by God. The one who comes to him must come according to his instruction. This is the clear teaching of the Bible and I hope to show you this, this morning, and just the weight of the biblical evidence for how strongly God feels about this. Worship is not up to us, it is regulated by Scripture. It's commanded by God. It's prescribed, the pattern for worship is prescribed by God.

And when we talk about this, a term some of you may have heard of is something called the regulative principle. The regulative principle. This is something that is often talked about in Reformed churches. This is the principle and I think this is exactly what we believe and I'm going to show you from Scripture today why this is so clearly a biblical concept, but the regulative principle of worship says this: the corporate worship of God is to be regulated by Scripture. Any activity or practice in corporate worship must be grounded upon specific biblical instructions or principles. I'll say that again: the corporate worship of God is to be regulated by Scripture. Any activity or practice in worship must be grounded upon specific biblical instructions or principles. That's the regulative principle.

Now there's another approach that many Christians use, including some Reformed that's more the Lutheran idea that came out of the Reformation, and that is the normative principle, and that is essentially this: anything that is not forbidden is allowable. That's the normative principle. If it's not forbidden, you can do it. The regulative principle says, no, if it's not commanded, you can't do it. Do you see the difference? And we believe the Bible teaches the regulative principle and I think you'll see it this morning as we look at the various ways God makes this clear in the word.

So we believe that Scripture must through specific biblical instruction directly in instruction or principle, we must draw every action or practice in worship from the Bible. Very relevant issue so, you know, God intends us to worship him in spirit and in truth. He wants wholehearted worship, that's part of what he commands. He commands us to worship him from the heart. He's not interested in mere external ritual. Mark 7, Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13 about the Pharisees, he says, "Truly you worship Me in vain. You worship outwardly but your hearts are far from Me." God wants worship from the heart, yes, but in our day the common, at least among Evangelical, Bible-believing Christians is to emphasize worship from the heart and forget that it's not just from the heart, it must be regulated by God's word. It has to be both and from the heart is regulated by God's word. God doesn't want your worship if you're not going to worship him from the heart, but God doesn't want your worship if you're going to try to be creative and do your own thing. If it feels good do it, is not a biblical concept. In fact, that's completely anti-biblical. If it feels good be suspicious of it. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it? You can't trust your heart.

Now a redeemed heart instructed by the word, there is a measure of freedom. We're going to see the Bible lays down clear parameters but within those parameters there's some measure of freedom of application. It's not like every single thing has got to be in a certain precise order but there are elements that God has commanded to be a part of worship and there are elements that he's not commanded, and we believe that we should only be involved in those elements in which he's commanded.

So we ask why, you know, and you might hear someone ask this sometime if someone comes to a worship service with you and they say, "Why a sermon? Why do you sit and listen to a man teach the Bible for that long? Why not more of a dialog?" I remember reading some books on that, or actually particularly one book where this guy was arguing

for that, the sermon needs to be replaced with a dialog. Now there's places for Bible study but what about worship? What's worship supposed to be? Why a sermon? That's the question that we need to answer biblically. Why not drama? You see, these are the questions that the regulative principle addresses.

So we're going to look and we're going to see that from the very beginning God regulated worship. And I want to show you this, we're going to go to two passages, we're going to start in Genesis 4 and then I told you we were going to Exodus 25, didn't I? You turned in your Bible to Exodus. Hold your finger there. I think we should read Genesis 4 first and then we're going to go right to Exodus 25. Familiar story of Cain and Abel. Now think about this, the very beginning of the Bible, this is the first account after sin has entered the world and God has sent them out of the garden. The first thing we're told about is Cain murdering his brother Abel, but what is so important for us to see is why he murdered him.

Look at verses 1 to 7.

1 Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD." 2 Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. 3 So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. 4 Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; 5 but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. 6 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? 7 If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it."

Two brothers, both try to approach God in worship. Abel does it through a sacrifice, a blood sacrifice. Cain does it through offering the fruit of his toil and his effort. In tilling the ground, caring for the soil, he brings the best of his produce to God. God receives Abel, God doesn't receive Cain. God graciously appears to Cain and says, "Why are you so upset? If you do well, you will be accepted." Cain in his audacity is angry that his own way of approaching God is not acceptable to God. Do you see that? God graciously condescends to reason with him and invite him to true worship. The mercy of God is amazing.

Now the reason he should know this is because the reason Abel knew what to do was because he had learned from what Adam and Eve found out when they were trying to cover their nakedness and they tried to cover their nakedness with fig leaves and God killed an animal, first death in the universe was when God killed an animal to cover their sin with animal skin because without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of

sins. Abel took that revelation from God and acted on it. This is how we approach God through blood sacrifice. Cain said, "I'm going to approach God how I want to."

And this now fast forward ahead to the time of the Israelites. They've come out of Egypt, God has radically delivered them from slavery in Egypt, he's brought them out to be his own people. He's going to set his presence among them and make them a worshipping community. He's going to create the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, and have them build it, and then he's going to meet with them at this appointed place but, again, it's not, the specificity with which he lays out what must be done to meet with God. There's not a suggestion box on how to worship in heaven. I mean, God's not looking for suggestions. He's telling us, "This is how you approach Me. I am holy and he who comes to Me must see Me and treat Me as holy."

So Exodus 25 after they've received the law, Moses is up on the mountain, he's just gone back up after telling the people of the law in chapter 24, 25:1 says, "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me.'" I want you to raise a contribution because they're going to build the tabernacle. And look what he says and skip on down to verse 8,

8 "Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. 9 According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it.

"I'm going to show you a pattern for the tabernacle. I'm going to show you a pattern for the furniture. Just this way you construct it."

Now what he does in verses 10 to 22 is to talk about the ark of the covenant. This is the footstool of God, the ark of the covenant behind the Holy of Holies. As Ted was talking about, the high priest would go to the ark of the covenant once a year on the Day of Atonement pass the veil, behind the veil once a year. He said, "This is how the ark is to be," and he gives great specific detail. Look at verse 10, you "shall construct an ark of acacia wood two and a half cubits long, and one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits high. You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and you shall make a gold molding around it. You shall cast four gold rings for it," etc. etc. etc. all the way down to verse 23. Then he talks about that, "You shall make a table of acacia wood." But outside the veil he's going to have a table for showbread, that is, the bread of his presence, verses 23 to 30. Then verse 31, he turns to the gold lampstand. "Then you shall make a lampstand of pure gold." Then the section ends talking about the lampstand, verse 39, ""It shall be made from a talent of pure gold, with all these utensils." And look what he says in verse 40, Exodus 25, "See that you make them after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain." After the pattern which was shown you. Apparently God opened the eyes of Moses to see the reality of heaven and the true temple in heaven and he said, "I want you to help the people to make a tabernacle after of that which I showed you on the mountain, and every detail must be precisely as I say. And when you do that, then you will be able to meet with Me."

So the pattern. Let's pray and ask the Lord to help us as we continue to look at his word.

*Our Father, we thank You for the gift of holy Scripture, that You are not only a God who is truly there but You are a God who is not silent. You are a speaking God. You have made Yourself known with clarity to sinful people like us. We come asking now for the grace of the Holy Spirit and the illuminating power of His ministry in our hearts and lives to help us to see, to believe, to understand, and to obey Your word. Lord, make us more faithful worshipers. We pray that You would make some who have not come to Christ yet today true worshipers who worship in spirit and in truth. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

He says make it according to the pattern. Three times you heard that word "pattern," twice in verse 9 and once in verse 40. The word "pattern" is basically the Hebrew word here, it means "blueprint." It's a pattern to build by. It's rooted in the word for "build." And so it's like a blueprint. He says, "I've given you a blueprint and you are to help the people to do exactly according to the blueprint so that I can meet with you." Now think about this: God delivers the people from Egypt, he shows himself to be a God who hears their cries by reason of their taskmasters, they're miserable in Egypt under the oppression of the Egyptians. He hears. He sees their suffering. He comes down to relate to them. He shows himself to be a loving compassionate God. He delivers them from Egyptian bondage by his mighty hand. How mighty he is to save. He's taken them to Canaan, to a land flowing with milk and honey because our God loves to give good things to his children and he says, "Listen, the best thing that you're going to have is you're going to be My people. I'm going to be your God. We're going to make worship your communion with Me. You were created for this and you've been separated from this and I want to help you become true worshipers of Me. I want to commune with you." And so he gives the instructions for the tabernacle, make it, build it according to the blueprint.

It's interesting, the word "tabernacle" is most often rendered in the Hebrew "tent of meeting." In fact, you'll see that term in your Bibles more often, 140 times in the New American Standard the phrase "tent of meeting" in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers 140 times. The tent of meeting. That's the tabernacle. It's interesting, it's hard to exactly translate this phrase. The Hebrew phrase, the word "tent" is there but "of meeting," it means "the appointed place." The force is "tent of appointment" and the verb that this noun comes from, "of meeting," it means "to fix; to appoint; to establish."

So the idea is, "This is the tent and nowhere else. I will meet with you here and no other place." That's the force of it and 140 times you hear that phrase in the New American Standard Bible, 146 total but sometimes they translate it slightly different than "tent of meeting." And Moses says, "Listen, the place that you will meet with Me and no other place, I will tell you every detail about how it's to be made." And what he does after those verses we just read, he continues. We saw in chapter 25 he talks about the things, the tabernacle proper in chapters 25 to 27. These are the things that must be there in the tent of meeting, including the specifications for exactly how big the outer tabernacle is, the holy place.

Basically to get a picture of the tent of meeting, what it was was a courtyard separated from the rest of the community of Israel by curtains that were held up by poles and rods. And so this large courtyard was the tabernacle proper. I mean, the tabernacle complex, the tent of meeting complex. So you would go into the tent of meeting complex to meet with God and as an Israelite, a Jew not of the tribe of Levi, you could take a sacrifice in and you could meet God at the altar outside of. There was a bronze altar there and then there was a tent proper that was actually closed in. And the tent had two sections, the first section called the holy place, and the second section called the Holy of Holies. And this covered section now, the tent inside the big open courtyard, there's a door there and the only people that could go beyond the door into the tabernacle itself, even the holy place, had to be priests. Nobody else could go in there. Not even the Levites could go inside the tabernacle proper, the tent of meeting itself, and the high priest could only go behind the veil; no one else besides him and him only once a year to meet with God in the full expression of God's presence as revealed there over the ark of the covenant.

So the Lord, he's saying, "Listen, I want to meet with you. I want you to be able to be right with Me. I'm going to give you the opportunity, all of you Israelites, to commune with Me, to be right with Me, to be restored to be worshipers of the true and living God. But you must do it according to My specifications." And so chapters 25, 26 and 27 great detail, painstaking specificity, exactly every element within the tabernacle complex, the veil is on the outside of the tabernacle courtyard itself, every part of the tent, every part, each constituent part of the worship of God specifically detailed out. Then chapters 28 to 30 of Exodus, three chapters belaboring everything about the priests and the priesthood, their garments, their activities, and their requirements.

So he lays all of it out with all of this detail and then chapter 35 through chapter 40, all that he laid out in chapters 25 to 30 of how you're to build the tent of meeting, how you're to clothe and robe the priests, now in chapters 35 to 40 he says, "This is what they did in building the tent of meeting and this is what they did in getting the priests ready, their garments ready." And as they do that, we see what happens when you approach God according to this pattern.

There's two points this morning, two main points, and the first point is how God responds to worship according to the pattern, the prescribed pattern, because this is the beautiful thing that we see in Exodus and Leviticus and it's meant to teach us. As we saw in Hebrews, these types were meant to tell us about what Jesus was going to do and that's why it was so critical that they hold to it with precision because it's revealing to them the reality of what salvation is going to be.

So how God responds. The first point this morning, how God responds to worship according to the pattern and the first thing that we see is that we're to obey specifically his requirements. As I've just shared, chapters 25 to 27, 28 to 30, it's all laid out and then I want to show you what happens when they obey and, again, the emphasis. Now remember we're talking about is worship today, and now I understand there's a lot that's happened since this time, we're on the other side of the cross, the other side of the Holy Spirit, but think about all of Scripture is still teaching us about God and what he's like,

and what I'm suggesting to you is that this kind of specificity about how you approached God back then certainly still has an application to us today. If he felt like this back then, he's still, this is still the principle of how he feels today.

It's not up to us. We might think that, "Hey, it would be better to watch a live action movie. People are better at watching those today. Attention spans are tough. Nobody sits and listens to my talk anymore. What are you doing with preaching?" Well, we could say, yeah, that makes sense except that God has prescribed preaching. So we have to cultivate new tastes because our tastes are bad, our tastes are wrong. God tells us how he's to be worshiped.

Well, so he gives all of this specificity and then he shows us they did exactly what they were supposed to do and I want to show you a key phrase that's repeated over and over and over again. Chapter 39 of Exodus, verse 1, this is where they're making the priestly garments, "Moreover, from the blue and purple," Exodus 39:1, "Moreover, from the blue and purple and scarlet material, they made finely woven garments for ministering in the holy place as well as the holy garments which were for Aaron," here's the key clause, "just as the LORD had commanded Moses." That clause, that phrase is repeated 42 times between Exodus 39 and Leviticus 9, in fact, it's really 39, 40 and 8 and 9 of Leviticus. Well, it's also a couple of times back in Exodus 35. The total is 42 times, "just as the LORD commanded Moses."

Now look down to verse 5 of chapter 39, "The skillfully woven band," he's still talking about the garments of Aaron, "The skillfully woven band which was on it was like its workmanship, of the same material: of gold and of blue and purple and scarlet material, and fine twisted linen, just as the LORD had commanded Moses." Verse 7, "And he placed them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, as memorial stones for the sons of Israel, just as the LORD had commanded Moses." Verse 21, "They bound the breastpiece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a blue cord, so that it would be on the woven band of the ephod, and that the breastpiece would not come loose from the ephod, just as the LORD had commanded Moses." Verse 26, "alternating a bell and a pomegranate all around on the hem of the robe for the service, just as the LORD had commanded Moses." Verse 29, "the sash of fine twisted linen, and blue and purple and scarlet material, the work of the weaver, just as the LORD had commanded Moses." Verse 31, "They fastened a blue cord to it, to fasten it on the turban above, just as the LORD had commanded Moses." Couldn't they just have waited until the end and said, "Everything was done just as the LORD commanded Moses"? I mean, paper was a premium, why waste all the extra paper of saying that? Because God wanted you and me to hear 42 times "just as the LORD commanded Moses."

That is the refrain. Everything must be done "just as the LORD commanded Moses," according to the pattern. In fact, you come to the end of the chapter and we'll skip over some of these, I'm not going to go through all 42, I promise, but I encourage you to read a section if you haven't read it recently. Go back and read it. Verse 42 of chapter 39, "So the sons of Israel did all the work according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses.

And Moses examined all the work and behold, they had done it; just as the LORD had commanded, this they had done."

Then chapter 40, now that they've got the priestly garments and everything set, they set up the tabernacle. We'll hit some high points, there's eight more of those in this chapter. We'll read a couple of them. Verse 16, "Thus Moses did; according to all that the LORD had commanded him, so he did." Skip down to verse 32, they set up the tabernacle exactly like it was done, commanded, verse 32, "When they entered the tent of meeting, and when they approached the altar, they washed, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. He erected the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and hung up the veil for the gateway of the court. Thus Moses finished the work." They did all of the work "just as the LORD commanded Moses." How does God respond to that? The next verse, Exodus 40:34, "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."

God is a God who graciously invites sinners to come into his presence. He delights to show his glory to sinners like you and me but we must come according to his command. You come according to his command, you can see his glory. You don't come according to his command, you're like Cain, you'll be rejected because God is holy. There's nothing wrong with him who is holy telling us how to come to him. I mean, isn't it crazy, we think as sinners that we know better than God? What kind of insanity is that? No, God tells us, a holy God, perfect in purity and complete in righteousness, the fullness of beauty and goodness, he tells us how sinners come into his presence. In fact, you see this again, just turn to Leviticus 8 and 9, the same thing happens. I'm going to jump right to the end of this but this is where Aaron and his sons are consecrated, the great instruction about how, specific instruction about all the sacrifices that need to be offered. In Leviticus 1 to 6, five different sacrifices that are prescribed for different situations. Four of the sacrifices require the death of an animal, blood must be shed. Then that's all the instruction is given, now God says, "Okay, the tabernacle has been set up. I filled it when you finished setting up the tabernacle. Now the priests have been set apart and the sacrifices have been made and you've done everything," again, the refrain in Leviticus 8 and 9 as Aaron and his sons are set apart, "just as the LORD commanded Moses."

Look at verse 5 of chapter 9 actually, Leviticus 9, "So they took what Moses had commanded to the front of the tent of meeting, and the whole congregation came near and stood before the LORD. Moses said, 'This is the thing which the LORD has commanded you to do, that the glory of the LORD may appear to you.'" Verse 7 ends with the phrase, "just as the LORD has commanded." Verse 10, "The fat and the kidneys and the lobe of the liver of the sin offering, he then offered up in smoke on the altar just as the LORD had commanded Moses." I mean, great specificity about what to do with vital organs of the sacrifices. I mean, just incredible precision and you're like, "Why so much detail?" It is a serious thing for sinners to come into the presence of a holy God. It is an infinite distance that is covered when God meets with you or me because of our filthiness and our unworthiness, and all of these things through types were teaching about the vast distance between God and man.



Isn't it amazing, we grow up thinking it's like the man upstairs. God's like a cosmic Santa Claus. And in Evangelicalism, people who even have some understanding of the Scriptures will focus so much on one aspect of it, God's lovingkindness, which is the most precious truth, yes, God's lovingkindness is treasure, in fact, it's the thing he likes to lead with. He likes to focus on this is his character, his goodness. In Exodus 34, he let all of his goodness pass before Moses and what did Moses see? It was not what he saw, it was what he heard, "The Lord, the Lord," listen, this is Exodus 34:6 and 7. Moses said, "Let me see Your glory." God said, "I'll let you see My glory but you can't really handle seeing all of My glory, you're just going to see the back part of My glory passing by. I'm going to put you in the cleft of the rock and put My hand over you and so you can only see the back part of My glory." And as his glory passes by, it was not what Moses saw but what he heard was the glory. And this is what he heard, "The LORD, the LORD," that is, "Yahweh, Yahweh, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." Do you hear that though, seven different concepts saying how good God is, how kind God is, how merciful God is. That is who he is but what's happened today is too often in Evangelicalism folks have focused on that and they've missed that, the context of the Scripture. They've missed that this God who is a God of lovingkindness is also a God of unspeakable holiness and that we cannot draw near to him in our present sinful state, that our sins have separated us from him. And the wonder of it is, he still has found a way to make us righteous but we must come according to his prescription to be made right with him.

This is the beauty of what God is doing even in that Old Testament context, he's teaching them these things. You read this and you're like, I say reading through the chapters on the sacrifices, you know, what to do with the kidney, what to do with the fat, what to take here, he's teaching us that and he was teaching them that as they did it. I mean, the temple was like a slaughterhouse. How offensive. How, seriously, how repugnant is that? What is God teaching us? Our sins are so offensive to him. They were supposed to smell the awful smells, to see the blood and the death and understand it is not a small thing for a holy God to bring me into his presence. It is a majestic incredible work that must happen. This is what God is doing. It's not a small thing for someone to get saved.

But if you come according to his, if you obey his specifications, if you follow his prescription, his heart is to pour out his mercy upon you, to show his glory, and in Leviticus 9 we go on to the end of the chapter, verse 21, "But the breasts and the right thigh Aaron presented as a wave offering before the LORD, just as Moses had commanded. Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he stepped down after making the sin offering," they've done everything now, they've made the initial offerings to consecrate themselves and the temple. Verse 23, "Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. When they came out and blessed the people, the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. Then fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar; and when all the

people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces." All the people got to see the glory of God because they did what God had commanded.

This is the nature of God, he loves to reveal himself to those who will humble themselves before him. If you want to come according to what you want and you hold your opinion and you say things like, "My God wouldn't do that. I don't accept that about God." Well, you will not know God. But if you come humbly and you come to him and say, "I will receive You as You are. Lord, reveal Yourself to me, show me my need of grace and my need of forgiveness, and lead me to Yourself." If that's your heart, he will speak to you. He will show you through his word all that Christ has done and he will bring you into his presence and then you'll be able to come with those same questions that you had, "I don't understand this, Lord. I don't understand that." But you will come humbly and his word will instruct you and you'll come to see, "Now I understand." There's still some things I don't understand but more and more and more as the longer I live, the more that God opens up my eyes to see whenever I doubted, whenever I harbored some kind of doubt about, as I've continued to stay in the Scripture I've come to see, yes, that's exactly the best way. "You've done all things well, Lord."

So God's heart is to respond to worship according to his pattern by pouring out his grace and his glory on his people. Now one of the things that I want to say as a second point under this second subpoint, under how God responds to worship according to the pattern, it's not just obedience to the specific details, it's also obedience to the specific details that comes from the heart. It's not merely external conformity but inward expression of the heart.

This is one of the things that you see happening as you read your Bible and you read it thoughtfully because I really believe we're supposed to read our Bibles and ask questions like, "Why all this killing?" And then to put that in context of what God has shown us. It's because of our sin. And to see why all this killing, I mean, I remember there was a young lady at our church about 15 years ago who got saved and she was kind of like, a young high school girl but she really had a heart for animals and if she hadn't gotten saved, she probably would have been a PETA person at some point, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. You know, chickens are people too. Well, she got saved and she had a real tender heart. She came to me, wanted to meet with me to talk about why we eat animals, and she'd been reading and she saw the sacrifices and she's like, "I just don't, I don't understand this." And, you know, I listened to her, of course, and she had a humble heart, I mean, she was really concerned and she really was kind of giving some firm pushback but she had a humble heart and that's exactly the kind of person God always speaks to. "Yeah, I really don't understand this. Lord, I really don't understand this. Please help me understand it. But I'm teachable, show me."

Well, anyway, so we talked for a while and I explained to her and I talked to her, I made it worse for her to which she was just talking about, she came to me with a Daniel 1 argument. This is a very unsophisticated argument that sounds good on the surface for vegetarianism. In Daniel 1, anyway, I didn't mean to go here but since I'm here, I've got to stay there. Daniel 1. They're taken captive to Babylon, Daniel and his three friends.

They're enrolled into the Babylonian school of the wise men, and part of what they have to do is eat the fine choice food and drink the wine of the king of Babylon because they're being trained to be advisers to him and he wants them to have the best education and the best diet. Well, they're going to have to eat things that are unclean. They're going to have to eat things that God has forbidden them to eat as Jews and so they have to make an appeal to the bodyguard who's over them and say, "Listen, please let us not defile ourselves." And he's like, "The king's going to kill me if you guys come in looking weak and so I can't do that." They make an appeal, "Listen, let's just try this for a period of time, let us eat vegetables and drink water and after a period of," if I can remember it was 10 days or something like that, "you test us to see how we look. You do whatever the test you are for our well-being and you see." And the reality was they were better off than the other guys.

So she came with that argument. "Vegetarianism, that's the way." And I had to share with her, "Well, no, that's not really the argument. The argument is look at the miracle of God in spite of the fact that they only ate vegetables and drank water." That's the point. In a fallen world, we need to eat meat. There's something about what sin has done to us. We need that. I don't understand it but God commanded after they got off the ark, now "every living thing shall be food for you." We need that.

So I told her that and that was, you know, that was the first little blow against this. She's a wonderful godly woman, a wonderful family. I hope I get to see her again sometime and I'll tell her that I made her a sermon illustration. But anyway, she moved away with her husband and, anyway. So I said, "Listen, it's even more difficult than that." And I talked to her about the sacrificial system and I explained to her that in reality when Israel was given the sacrificial system, there would have been, you know, literally hundreds of animals sacrificed each day at the temple: oxen, lambs, goats, rams, birds. They would have been sacrificed almost continually. The priests' hands would have been filled with blood and to have been there, it would have been so difficult and I know for you this is so difficult to even think about, I said to her. It is offensive and I said there's a part of what you're sensing that is right because God intended when he created the world there was to be no death. We weren't going to have to eat animals and it was better. That's hard to believe, isn't it? Better without steak. Better without, I stop there, I'm not going to go anywhere else with that. Better without meat, not in this present fallen, let's be clear, not in this present era but in the garden of Eden and in heaven we won't need it. But I said in this present time, I know it's so hard to think about all of the death that had to happen. It is so offensive and I said it was pointing to what would one day be the most offensive and repugnant thing that has ever happened in the universe and that is when God put his Son on the cross. That is the greatest offensive and awful thing that has ever transpired. It is offensive and yet it is beautiful. It is the greatest crime and it is the greatest gift all at once. So the sacrificial system was teaching us that, and so you see this is why that's how we have to see this.

So anyway, she did find after that conversation. Praise God for his goodness. But the beauty of it is that worship must be from the heart. The Lord was giving us the outward pictures not just to run through them and to just bring the right kind of sacrifice, offer the

right kind of incense. No, he was doing that so we would understand these things from the heart, the problem is my sin. Circumcision isn't something done outwardly in the flesh, in fact, God makes this clear even in Deuteronomy, he says circumcise your hearts. It's not about just merely, they had to be merely externally circumcised, I mean, they had to be externally circumcised, yes, they did in the old covenant, but it wasn't just about that. God says circumcise your hearts. It was a type. It was an image, an outward picture of what needed to happen inwardly and so is all of the sacrificial system, and so is all of really the whole tabernacle system in the temple. It's telling us what needs to happen for salvation.

So over time, true followers of God whose hearts were open to him were seeing the reality, it's about the heart. I was talking with a brother this week about how it's interesting how when Jesus was asked by the Pharisees why his disciples did not wash their hands in Mark 7 when they eat, he goes on and he tells them, "Listen, it's not what goes into the man that defiles a man, it's what comes out of the heart." And we were talking about the fact that, this brother was bringing up the fact that when the Jews first heard that, many of them in the crowd would be thinking, "This is crazy. This is incredible. What do you mean we can eat anything? We've learned that we can't eat shrimp, we can't eat any shellfish, we can't eat pork, we can't eat this, we can't eat that, we must eat only those things that are clean animals." And Jesus in that moment declares all things clean because what he's saying is, "Listen, it's always not been about the external, it's about the internal. The thing I was teaching you in the Old Testament is that you're to think about worship every moment of every day. You're to think about it when you start to eat something. Will this make me unclean means will this make me unable to go to the temple. If I touch this, will I go to the temple. Everything is about worship." That's what God was teaching and the faithful could see that. So when Jesus says those shocking things and says it's not what goes into the mouth that defiles the man, they were like, "Oh yeah, this is it. God was teaching us it's what comes out of the heart. It's all about the heart."

So it's not merely just external conformity. It is following the blueprint but it's from the heart, following his specific pattern from the heart, that's the first point. The second point: how God responds to worship not in accordance with the pattern. How God responds to worship not in accordance with the pattern. He makes this very emphatic and it doesn't happen that often but when it does, it's like exclamation points, circled and underlined. And an interesting point, if you're still in Leviticus 9, astonishing how this happens. We just said verse 9:24, "fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces." They saw the glory of God fill the temple and fire come out from the temple and take up the burnt offering. Like that. It was like a little bit of Elijah's experience with fire coming from heaven. It came down, licked up the altar, the people saw this, when they saw it they knew it was God, they fell on their faces.

Look at the next thing Scripture records for us. Leviticus 10:1, "Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD," look at this next phrase, "which

He had not commanded them." And look what it says next, "And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, 'It is what the LORD spoke, saying, "By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.'" They had had this mountaintop experience. The tabernacle is completed. The priesthood is consecrated. The offerings have been inaugurated. Daily worship is happening and they are bringing the incense they're supposed to bring in. They're supposed to bring incense and they're not bringing the right incense in. They didn't follow the carefully prescribed pattern in Exodus 30:35 and following that told them exactly the recipe for the incense, and you're to offer this and nothing else. They bring strange incense, strange fire before the Lord and God to make clear how important it is you follow the pattern, he killed both of Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu. Two of his four sons dead like that. This is still the God who is a God of lovingkindness and mercy, "But by those who come to Me, I will be treated as holy."

Another story that really puzzled me and when you read that, I mean, even when I read, you know, you read Cain's story and you're like, "It seemed like Cain was pretty sincere at first. I mean, he worked hard on those vegetables or whatever and he brings them to You. Aren't You being too hard on him?" That's what I think our flesh says. That's what our human reasoning says. Nadab and Abihu, couldn't have there been a warning? This was the warning to everyone else.

Another passage that is another one of these and these are spread out, these places where God's wrath breaks forth are so uncommon, and this is what we should think about, the question is not why did these things happen in these circumstances, if we're asking the question rightly, the question should be: why did these kind of things not happen much more often? Given what you know about Israel, what you know about the people, isn't it amazing that God didn't do this kind of stuff all the time? And given what you know about yourself, myself, isn't it amazing?

But this is a story of Uzzah and peril in moving the ark. This is when David has become king over all Israel. God has put into his heart a desire to build the temple, to make the tabernacle permanent in Jerusalem. That's to take that tent of meeting and make it now the temple, a permanent one place that we meet with God. God has chosen Jerusalem, David knows it, in fact, David tells you in 1 Chronicles 28 that God showed him the pattern. He apparently saw the same thing Moses did. He mentions the word "pattern" three or four times in 1 Chronicles 28. He saw the pattern.

So he's got this in his heart, now he doesn't know yet but God's not going to let him build the temple, God's going to let his son build the temple, the son of David will build the temple. But he's bringing the ark of God into Jerusalem and David is a man after God's heart. David is a man who worships God from the heart and we read in verse 3 of 2 Samuel 6, "They placed the ark of God on a new cart that they might bring it from the house of Abinadab which was on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were leading the new cart. So they brought it with the ark of God from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Ahio was walking ahead of the ark. Meanwhile,

David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD with all kinds of instruments made of fir wood, and with lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets and cymbals." This is a tremendously joyful, wondrous occasion. Verse 6, "But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it." The oxen nearly turned it over and Uzzah reaches out and steadies the ark. Verse 7, "And the anger of the LORD burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God." This phrase "his irreverence" is a strong phrase. It means actually that he transgressed. He crossed over. He broke through where he wasn't supposed to break through.

Now when you read that and, look, we tend to have the same response David did. Verse 7 said Uzzah died there by the ark of God. Verse 8, "David became angry because of the LORD'S outburst against Uzzah, and that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day. So David was afraid of the LORD that day; and he said, 'How can the ark of the LORD come to me?' And David was unwilling to move the ark of the LORD into the city of David with him; but David took it aside to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. Thus the ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months, and the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his household." Now this is tough. I mean, the ark was about to fall, it was about to turn over. It's a reasonable action, you would think, right? When you go back and you read all of that specificity about how the ark was to be made, one of the things that you're told about the ark of the covenant is it had rings on it and there were poles that were to be placed into the rings, and whenever the ark moved it was to be carried by priests. The Levites were to bring the poles and the priests were to carry the ark and this was the only way the ark was to move. The ark of God's presence, the greatest expression of his holiness there in visible form, this was the way it was to happen. And so somebody hadn't been reading their Bible for them to put the ark on an oxcart, it was an abomination and they don't even know it. It's happening and this is, I mean, this wondrous worship, this enthusiastic from the heart worship but it's not according to the command of the Lord. Their sincerity does not overcome their failure to obey because, "By those who come near to Me, I will be treated as holy."

Well, I'm not going to read the rest of the story but David apparently gets reading his Bible and he finds out, "We messed up. God's done nothing wrong. We were so irreverent that we didn't read His word. He gave us clear and specific instructions about how the ark is to move." So then the ark comes in on the shoulders of the priests. David dances before the Lord, worshiping God in unbridled, I mean, a sense of ecstatic joy, certainly bridled in godliness and all of that, but a sense of just wondrous joy in the presence of God and the ark comes into Jerusalem, the people of God celebrate, and all is right. When you do it according to the command, that's what God wants. He wants, in his presence is fullness of joy. At his right hand there are pleasures forevermore. God invites you to his presence, he invites you to the fullness of joy, to pleasures forevermore, but you must come according to his prescription because we're sinners.

Worship from the heart must be according to his word. Those are two examples. We could do others but that's enough to make the point. How God responds to worship not in accordance with the pattern? He does not receive it and at times he makes himself known

that he doesn't receive it. So when you think about the weight of all of that Scripture, how does that speak to the question of how we worship God? Isn't it obvious the regulative principle is correct. We worship God only according to how he has specifically commanded. What we see is when you look at the New Testament and we understand flowing out of the Old Testament the priority of Scripture, and we read the New Testament epistles, we read what Paul said to Timothy and Titus, and you see that worship is to contain several things, it's to contain the reading of Scripture. That's to have a central place in worship, Old Testament and New Testament. Prayers are to be offered. We are to pray together. We gather together to pray to God and so we need to pray prayers of confession, prayers of intercession, prayers of praise and worship. We need to sing to God because that's clearly laid out for us in Scripture. We need to worship God through the ordinances of the Lord's Supper and baptism. We need to express our faith together and that's it.

Those are the things that God has commanded for corporate worship and when we come together and we do it according to his command with hearts that are truly seeking his face, then he delights to fill his house with his glory. And now the beautiful thing about it is, I mean, all of the specificity about this is the one place to meet, the tent of meeting is the one place, that is fulfilled ultimately in Jesus. He is the tent of meeting. That's what John 1:14 says. It says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us," literally in the Greek "pitched His tent among us. The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us and we beheld His glory, glory as the only begotten from the Father full of grace and truth." In Jesus we saw the true tabernacle of God filled with glory. The old covenant had pointed to this moment and now where do you meet God? Where do you come to be a true worshiper of God? There's only one place and no other, it is Jesus Christ. You come through his flesh, his offering, his finished work, his righteousness, his sacrifice, his resurrection. That's how you come to meet God and no other way.

Then now that we become a part of him, he is our head, we become a part connected to him as a body and he says not only are we the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, we're also the building of Christ. We are the temple now. We are the earthly expression of his temple. 1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:4 and 5. You are the temple and so you and I come together, we come together as living stones each Sunday to worship God from our own heart individually but not merely individually, we gather together as God has commanded on the Lord's day, we gather together for the reading of Scripture, the preaching of the word, the prayers offered, songs, the administration of the sacraments to affirm our faith together, and as we do, he delights to fill his house with his glory and we can see more of his glory together when we come together than we can apart because he's ordained, "This is the place that I will pour out My grace. This is the one place."

Now, I mean, we can worship God wherever we are, that's the beauty of what Jesus has accomplished because you go to Christ, but when God's people come together, this is the extra-special one place. This is why we have to be in worship on Sunday. We've got to see his glory. To be present with God's people, this is what God has ordained for us. He's so good to us. He gives us the privilege of coming into his presence and helping one

another to worship him and to meet with him, and to love him, and to glorify him forever. And the very fact that you come testifies to the world of the reality that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords. We come apart from the world, called out assembly to testify to that reality. Your presence here this morning said that. Remember we saw last week the demons, Ephesians 3:10, they behold the mystery of God in its fullness when they look at the church in worship. They're like, "Wow." God is so infinitely wise. The good angels and the bad angels, the good angels in glory, the bad angels in terror behold the glory and wisdom of God.

Let's pray.

*Our Father, we thank You for the way that You have made for sinners to come into Your precious presence to be able to draw near to You in full assurance of faith, to be able to come in with our heads held high as a child now, and yet we come to a holy God, we come to a God that by all rights we should have to cower and shrink away from but You have made it so that we can come boldly into Your presence and You command us to come boldly into Your presence, not because of who we are but because of who Jesus is. And You command us to come together into Your presence to help one another into the presence of God and to see Your glory and to be filled with Your goodness and to reflect back to You the radiance of your word, and to leave this place each Sunday to go out and to tell others about the glory of our Savior. Father, continue to build Your church. Purify our worship. Show us where we need to individually and corporately, how we need to prepare our hearts, how we need to come with more earnestness, more faith. Lord, do this for the glory of Your name and the furtherance of Your kingdom. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.*