



**Deuteronomy 12:1-15**  
*The First Principle in Worship*

**NKJ Deuteronomy 12:1 "These are the statutes and judgments which you shall be careful to observe in the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth.**

**2 "You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree.**

**3 "And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place.**

**4 "You shall not worship the LORD your God with such things.**

**5 "But you shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go.**

**6 "There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks.**

**7 "And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you.**

**8 "You shall not at all do as we are doing here today -- every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes --**

**9 "for as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you.**

**10 "But when you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety,**

**11 "then there will be the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the LORD.**

**12 "And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion nor inheritance with you.**

**13 "Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see;**

**14 "but in the place which the LORD chooses, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.**

**15 " However, you may slaughter and eat meat within all your gates, whatever your heart desires, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you; the unclean and the clean may eat of it, of the gazelle and the deer alike.**

This will be the first of two brief sermons on worship, in this sermon we will lay down some critical principles and in the next we'll build upon them.

In the preceding chapters of this book, Moses has been in some senses expositing or opening up the first Commandment, he has been speaking of the importance of loving and worshipping only the true God of heaven, and now he turns to the second commandment:

The first commandment deals with *who* we should worship and the second concerns *how* we should worship

Here, in these verses, God tells his people both How He will be worshipped and where He will be worshipped. The first and foremost principle of worship being that it is God and not men who decides how He is to be worshipped – or as the Westminster Confession of faith summarizes it *“the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.”*

The first thing that God therefore sets before them is that He is not to be worshipped in the same places and the same manner in which the Canaanites worshipped their false gods. They worshipped in sacred groves and on every hill and mountain top because they felt these places were suitable for directing the attention of the worshipper towards heaven. They appealed to the senses. This was true of the worship itself, it was full of smells and sounds, and feelings. They frequently cut themselves and would go into trances, their worship as well frequently involved ritual prostitution and sexual depravity and human sacrifice. It was all designed to appeal to carnal sensation.

And here we learn something very important: God's worship is based on revelation, it is not sensual. We are not to feel our way towards God assuming that if it feels or looks good it is pleasing to Him. We also need to remember that in OT worship the figures and types, the altars and sacrifices all had a purpose in foreshadowing Christ, in pointing to Him. The author of Hebrews for instance, tells us in Hebrews 10:5 that the priests serving in the Tabernacle and later the Temple **“serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things”** and in Hebrews 10:1 tells us that these ceremonial laws **“were a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things”** and therefore it was not the shadows that were the substance of redemption but what they pointed to. The sacrifices of Goats and Bulls as we are told, could not take away sins, but they were types that pointed the worshipper to the once for all sacrifice that does take away sin – and that is the sacrifice of Christ. These ceremonies were all intended to have a redemptive focus – to show men the way to be forgiven of their sin through faith in the redeemer God Himself would provide.

The focus of Canaanite religion was not redemptive in its focus. The Canaanites worshipped their gods for what they thought they could get out of them. Primarily it was fertility. They wanted fertile fields and rich harvests, they wanted many sons. They wanted Baal and Ashtoreh to bestow blessings upon them and they wanted to avert their anger so they would not be cursed. It was a religion whose primary focus was on the earth, was on the here and now. The focus in Canaanite religion, and here I'm going to get into trouble, was on **health and wealth**, not on glorifying the mighty Creator of the universe and being forgiven and reconciled to Him.

Therefore if someone were to add some Canaanite element to the worship of God because it appealed to them, not only would it be to treat God with contempt, it would be without substance, and act that

did not point the worshipper to the future coming and sacrifice of Christ as all the other actions did. It would not be true worship, it might please men, but it would have no redemptive value, and the more of these acts that were added, the less and less the worship would be true, and holy, and profitable, and redemptive and the more profane and worthless it would become.

Therefore, although modern sensibilities are appalled by this, God commands them to destroy the places where the Canaanites worshipped, lest the Israelites be tempted to worship there and gradually incorporate the elements of their religion. And unfortunately their failure to do this meant that Canaanite worship was gradually incorporated into the worship of Israel. The Israelites did begin to worship God in the "sacred groves" and in the high places and they began to adopt their worship practices as well. Eventually this abominable worship would be one of the things God condemned them for and for which they were sent into exile in Babylon:

***Jer. 7:30 "For the children of Judah have done evil in My sight," says the LORD. "They have set their abominations in the house which is called by My name, to pollute it.***

***31 "And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into My heart.***

***32 " Therefore behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "when it will no more be called Tophet, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter; for they will bury in Tophet until there is no room.***

But why would they do this? Well because the worship that God commands is adapted only for the spiritual and believing man. Only he can truly enter into it, because only he is truly moved to worship his creator and seek forgiveness for his sins.

The natural man, on the other hand, doesn't think of himself as a sinner, his hands can be covered in blood, and yet feel no pangs of conscience, nor think that there is any problem with his entering into the presence of a Holy God. In Psalm 50 he speaks of their worship saying:

***Psalm 50:16 But to the wicked God says: "What right have you to declare My statutes, Or take My covenant in your mouth,***

***17 Seeing you hate instruction And cast My words behind you?***

***18 When you saw a thief, you consented with him, And have been a partaker with adulterers.***

***19 You give your mouth to evil, And your tongue frames deceit.***

***20 You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother's son.***

***21 These things you have done, and I kept silent; You thought that I was altogether like you; But I will rebuke you, And set them in order before your eyes.***

***Is. 29:13 Therefore the LORD said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men,***

Their hearts remain unmoved, and eventually they grow weary of a religion they neither understand nor approve of, and they move on to doing not what God has appointed but what seems right in their own eyes. Humility and reconciliation they don't understand, but health and wealth and increase, that they understand! So their religion becomes sensual and earthly.

Whenever, therefore, God's people turn from His word and godliness goes into decline, the worship inevitably becomes sensual and worldly and disordered – We saw that in the middle ages, we are seeing it today.

Moses warned that was happening in the camp: **Deut. 12:8 "You shall not at all do as we are doing here today -- every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes --"**

Unfortunately these practices became the norm as a generation that knew not God rose up and worshipped as they saw fit: The final line of the book of Judges chronicles the apostasy of Israel in worship and practice: "***In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.***" (Judges 21:25) and sometimes I wonder if we couldn't declare the same thing over the Church today.

John Bunyan, the author of Pilgrims Progress said that next to God's nature and name, his service, his instituted worship, is the most awesome thing under heaven. ***His name is upon his ordinances, his eye is upon the worshippers, and his wrath and judgment upon those that worship not in his fear.***

Bunyan also said that regarding His worship **THREE KINDS OF PEOPLE** are specifically rebuked in the word:

1. ***Such as regard not to worship God at all; be sure they have no reverence of his service, nor fear of his majesty before their eyes.*** Sinner, thou dost not come before the Lord to worship him; thou dost not bow before the high God; thou neither worshippest him in thy closet nor in the congregation of saints. The fury of the Lord and his indignation must in short time be poured out upon thee, and upon the families that call not upon his name (Psa 79:6; Jer 10:25).

2. ***This rebukes such as count it enough to present their body in the place where God is worshipped, not minding with what heart, or with what spirit they come thither.*** Some come into the worship of God to sleep there; some come thither to meet with their friends, and to get into the wicked fellowship of their vain companions. Some come thither to feed their lustful and adulterous eyes with the flattering beauty of their fellow-sinners. O what a sad account will these worshippers give, when they shall count for all this, and be damned for it, because they come not to worship the Lord with that fear of his name that became them to come in, when they presented themselves before him!

3. ***This also rebukes those that care not, so they worship, how they worship; how, where, or after what manner they worship God.*** Those, I mean, whose fear towards God "is taught by the precept of men." They are hypocrites; their worship also is vain, and a stink in the nostrils of God. "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: therefore, behold I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid" (Isa 29:13, 14; Matt 15:7-9; Mark 7:6, 7).<sup>6</sup> Thus I conclude this first thing, namely, that God is called our dread and fear.

We cannot worship God though unless we know Christ – "We may be truly said to worship God, though we want perfection; but we cannot be said to worship Him if we want sincerity." STEPHEN CHARNOCK

“You think you serve God by coming to church; but if you refuse to let the Word convert you, how should God be pleased with such a service as this?... Every time you hear, or pray, or praise God, or receive the sacrament, while you deny God in your heart and remain unconverted, you do but despise Him, and show more of your rebellion than your obedience.... God biddeth you come to church and hear the Word, and so far you do well; but withal, He chargeth you to suffer the Word to work upon your hearts, and to take it home and consider it, and obey it.” - RICHARD BAXTER