

Counterfeit Worship

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[0 : 00] Seeking the Lord's blessing, it is turned to the first passage that read together in the book of Leviticus in the Old Testament, chapter 10 of Leviticus and verse 1.

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took a censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorised fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them, and fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.

The Leviticus 10 verse 1, they offered unauthorised fire. We come to books and chapters in the Bible like this in the Old Testament that bring to us these pivotal moments in the history of God's people that contain within them the far-reaching effects and consequences of the behaviour and conduct of the people that remain instructive to us to our present day.

Reminding us that here in the history of God's people in the Old Testament, we see a people who are seeking to live out their identity as God's people, a people who are on a journey and seeking to inherit a promise, a people who themselves have found freedom because of the work of God in their lives, who have understood that they are a redeemed people, a people who are constituted to be God's people, to be the people who know Him and to follow Him, and therefore they are called out of Egypt, called into relationship with Him.

And central to that relationship, and central even in the whole calling of them being taken out of Egypt, is their meeting with the Lord at Sinai, and you see this in the book of Exodus, you don't see them entering the land of Canaan, Exodus you find them at the mountain of Sinai, they have been constituted as a people, and central to what they receive through Moses, central to their identity, central to their walk and life with the Lord, is worship.

[2 : 39] What it means to be a worshiping community, what it means to be a worshiping people, central to who they are as those who are called out, who are free and who are redeemed.

And it has always been such and remains so. At the very beginning in creation itself, God created us to be the image bearer, bear His likeness, created to walk in relationship with Him, created to worship and praise Him.

And that's what we do as we gather together, we come to worship the Lord, come to praise Him, and that's what our lives are to be about. Our whole lives are to be the pursuit of knowing Him.

And so worship becomes part of our spiritual discipline, part of our relationship with the Lord, private worship, family worship, corporate worship.

They are all fundamental to our enjoyment and our pleasure of God, and living out what it means to be God's people and to be called Christians.

[3 : 48] To live the life of faith. And we do this in terms of the enjoyment and pleasure of God in the realization and understanding that the Bible is teaching us that this is what God wants from us, this is what He desires from us, this is what gives Him pleasure to see His children worshiping Him.

And yet there is upon us this necessity to evaluate our worship, to evaluate all the different aspects of our Christian life and our Christian walk.

The Bible teaches us that we are to examine ourselves, examine the quality of our Christian life, examine the quality of our worship.

And then again we come to the conclusion of our imperfections, failings and shortcomings. Of course there is imperfections, we are still sinners.

Of course we do things that are wrong. But that does not give us a license to stop there. But rather to pursue the great pleasure, the enhancement of our worship, the joy in the Lord to ensure that we are vibrant, faithful and God honoring.

[5 : 12] And sometimes when we come to passages like this they are instructive in this regard. And to teach us things that are not honoring to God.

And today here in the Viteges chapter 10 in verse 1 we are told of what is not honoring to God, unauthorized fire. And what we are dealing with here is the sense in which we are trying to evaluate for ourselves how real our worship is.

Is it authentic, sincere? Is it true? Is it authorized? Or is it something else?

Let's turn then to consider what occurs here at the beginning of chapter 10. What we have is the narrative presenting to us two sons of the High Priest. These words are of course recorded by Moses too of his nephews.

Sons of his brother Aaron who has been engaging in his own activity as the High Priest in chapter 9 in bringing the offerings.

[6 : 18] What occurs here is that they themselves offer a different kind of offering in verse 1 of strange or unauthorized fire and they are judged by the Lord for this.

They are themselves punished and consumed in verse 2. They are destroyed for offering to God what is inappropriate worship.

The word here used unauthorized. You will see the footnote in the ESV is strange. The word can be translated strange unauthorized. It speaks of what has been counterfeit.

Something that is not real. Something that is false or fake. Something that is not legitimate.

And as we consider this we remind ourselves that worship is the highest activity in which we ourselves engage in. And the context of this reminds us of this.

[7 : 17] That's why we read together in chapter 9 to remind ourselves there of the children of Israel worshipping. It's our duty to worship God. We are called to do this.

We are created to do this. We are redeemed to do this. We are called to offer our lives as a spiritual worship and we are called to engage in acts of worship.

And if so we must do them effectively and properly. And the problem here is that what they have engaged in is not legitimate.

And it does not honour God. And God is teaching us here in chapter 10 that it is unacceptable and that he must deal with it.

We see that we need to have this understanding of the difference between what is true and what is not true. And this passage is teaching us about this distinction and this danger.

[8 : 22] The danger of what is not acceptable. And what is not acceptable is when worship is unspiritual and dishonours God.

What has captivated the attention of these two men is what has gone on in chapter 9 but especially in the phenomena that has occurred at the end of chapter 9 in verse 23 and 24.

The glory of the Lord appeared to all the people and fire came out before the Lord consuming the burnt offering, the pieces of fat on the altar. The people saw it and they shouted and fell on their faces.

And so something has happened that has captivated the imaginations and they seek in some way to replicate this.

And their concern is with the external elements of the phenomena, of the signs and wonders of these things that have happened.

[9 : 22] And their concern is not deep. Their concern is with what is seen and with what is external. Not with the things of the soul and the heart because that is what God is seeking in the worshipper, that our worship would be of the heart, that we would be engaging all that we are, that it would be deep within ourselves.

But here are these people concerned with what is external, captivated in this way and really it is a carnal attraction.

It's a sense of worldiness enticing at a certain level the being of a person. And what they do then in verse one is they take their censor and put fire on it and also put incense on it and offer something unauthorized before the Lord.

And what they are doing is they are employing tactics of manipulation in order in some way to replicate what they have just seen, to produce something that is like it.

It's not the real thing. They are not willing to wait upon Aaron their father and to wait upon the right way to sacrifice. They want to see this again.

[10 : 40] They are not willing to engage in seeing Aaron culling the calf as the sin offering, to engage in all that God has prescribed. They are wanting to do their own thing and to replicate in some manner to imitate what is spiritual but actually what is just of the external.

It draws their carnal minds, it entices the flesh and it pursues on so much. Persuades even on their own office, even on their own understanding.

These are men from a good home. Their father is high priest. After Moses he is the man of the greatest significance in the life of Israel of this day and of the religious life of Israel too.

They have been taught the law of God. They have even been placed into office in the religious life of Israel.

They should have known better. That is often one of the great tragedies we see in people who do not come to the Lord in their own communities.

[11 : 55] Grown up under the sound of the gospel, grown up even under the teaching of many good people, people who should know better. And they have never come to the Lord, never been willing to repent, never been willing to bend the knee before God.

And here are the sons of Aaron. Rather than take their proper position and place, they seek a position that does not belong to them. They are promoting themselves.

They are exalting themselves. They are unwilling to constrain their own ego. And they push themselves even here in the context of worship.

And the alarm bells are signaling. Because worship is about the promotion and exaltation and honouring of God.

And here are men leading worship in which they are exalting themselves and promoting themselves. Alongside self-promotion, you often see a lack of self-control.

[13 : 04] And many of the commentators turn to verse 9 of chapter 10 where it says drink no wine or strong drink or your sons. Where they believe that they are, these two men may have been guilty of being drunk in the most holy place and entering into the engage and the activity that belonged only to the high priest.

They are pursuing. And they are offering something that is different. Unauthorised or strange, something different to what God himself has prescribed.

Something innovative. An introduction. And many of the commentators believe that what they have seen in the world around them and in the worship of the false gods in Egypt, they now wish to adapt these and introduce them and adopt them here in the worship of God.

What they are engaging here too is introducing here things that belong maybe to their own imaginations, possibly to the world and unbelief and bringing them to worship.

And it's not legitimate. And it's not right. And it's not authorised. And it's strange.

[14 : 30] It doesn't belong. Worship is all about God, not about the cravings of the flesh, not about the carnal mind.

It's not even about the world around us. Worship is about what we offer to God, as he has called us to.

We come here to think first on this prohibition, but secondly to think on what's at stake. What is at stake here?

It's quite amazing the response of God. In verse 2, fire came out and consumed them and they died. They bring strange fire and a real fire comes.

And at this point, we see something of what we also recognise in Acts chapter 5. The beginning of the commencement of the life of God's people constituted as a covenant people, a people of worship, as the redeemed people.

[15 : 39] We have this sense of which awe and fear and reverence is very real in the communities because of the death of those who are dishonouring God in worship.

The gravity and the seriousness of our approach to God is brought before us here in very stark and powerful terrors. To remind us of who it is we come to worship, who it is we have to do with, to remind ourselves that our God is a consuming fire.

And for us it occurs at the beginning of the Old Testament church and at the beginning of the New Testament church. It doesn't really happen much thereafter.

There is a specific closeness to God in these moments. And as we drift away, as people and as churches, there is less evidence of this.

What that is to be given to God must be defined by God. Jesus himself speaks to the woman of Samaria in chapter 4 and he tells us of the prescription of worship.

[16 : 58] He says to worship in spirit and in truth. And some people take these words and they think that there's options or a choice of being in the spirit or of being in truth.

But there is no difference to be made. Both are demanded. And we're told by the apostle too that we ought not to grieve the Holy Spirit.

We ought to be a people who worship in spirit and in truth. We ought to give this worship to God as he prescribes.

And as we recognize here of how we are called to honour him and to reflect upon the quality of our relationship with our God and to think upon the worship of the believer and the church.

Five came out verse 2 and consumed them. They died. Moses says to Aaron their father, this is what the Lord says, among those who are near me I will be sanctified before all the people I will be glorified.

[18:15] There is the charge against them in verse 1 they offer unauthorized fire, they transgress the holy. They dishonour God.

And so we have to consider too the manner in which both here and also in Acts chapter 5 that there are significant repercussions and how the narratives unfold and how there is a witness even in this worship of who God is and a fear that comes upon the people not just within the church but also outside the church to think on these things and to think that worship itself is ordered by a God who is a God of order.

He created everything in order. Seven days. He created the seasons. He created the months and the years.

He created everything. Paul tells the church in Corinth that they are to worship in an orderly fashion. That disorderly worship does not honour God.

Here are two men who step out of order and their fire is met with the consuming fire of the reality of who God is.

[19:46] God is not a God of chaos. The world often feels like it is chaotic. We often struggle to understand what's going on in the world.

But God knows. God is at work. God is working everything together for good. And He calls us to trust Him, to believe in these things, to believe in it in a very general way around the world and specifically to in our own lives.

He calls us to trust Him and to worship Him. And our worship ought to reflect Him. It ought to reflect His glory.

It ought to reflect the reality that He is a God of order. Disorderly worship dishonours God. It distorts the message of the Gospel and it confuses the witness of God's people to the world.

We are called to be His people. First John chapter 4, test the spirits. We are called to worship in spirit and in truth, to have discernment, to have knowledge, to be able to interact in our minds and our hearts with all that's going on, to be able to engage ourselves, to be alert of the demonic chaos that goes on all around us.

[21:15] And threatens to lead people away from the narrow path of salvation.

And the purpose of this matter of life and death. So we see thirdly that we need to be discerning. What unfolds here brings the judgment of God. If we had time we could have also read the whole of chapter 10 and we'd find there that we find Moses being angry.

There are just a few occasions in the scripture where we find Moses being angry. We're told elsewhere that he is the meekest of all men but there are outbursts of anger. And at every single occasion where you find Moses angry it is because of the same reason God has been dishonoured. And that's the problem here. Moses and Aaron in verse 3, they understand God's judgment.

[22:24] They accept as right what God has done. They have got discerning minds. They are spiritual men. They recognise these things.

And the church today, the contemporary Christian church has to realise that it faces the same challenge. The challenge to be discerning.

The challenge to be spiritually minded people. To worship in spirit and in truth. And to discern what is real and what is false.

What is authentic and what is counterfeit within the church.

Our greatest challenge is not outside. And the challenge begins in here. In our own hearts and minds.

[23:23] To understand what is true and real of our own worship and to consider as we are instructed here in these words that what is at stake is the honour of God and souls.

The two most important things in the whole world. The honour of God and souls. Strange fire has become a pressing problem.

The reality of counterfeit worship in the contemporary church. And the call for God's people to understand the warnings not merely of just of the Old Testament but also of the New Testament you find there Paul and the New Testament writer constantly warning us false teachers will come in. False teaching will come in. Even Jesus himself speaks in that manner. He speaks of these false teachers, false messiahs, false Christ who come in to lead people astray.

That's the danger. That's the problem. And we are given this information in order that we would prepare ourselves. Understand that we're engaging in a battle.

[24 : 41] Understanding we need to be equipped with the full armour of God. Understanding that we need to protect our own souls. False teachers promote what is counterfeit.

Trying to replicate what is real but only seeking to display manifestations and phenomena. And they exploit.

It's all carnally minded. It's all about these external things. And they are dangerous. The Lord calls them wolves and sheep's clothing.

They look real. But they devour. And they preach a false gospel.

It's not a gospel of a narrow path. It's not a gospel of holiness. It's not a gospel of humility.

[25 : 37] It's a gospel of signs and wonders. Of a broad way. It's a gospel that does not say it is another gospel.

It is strange fire. And often what we see in contemporary churches, the promotion of prosperity. Of health and wealth. The concerns with healings. And finances.

External things. Never really concerned about the internal. Never really concerned about sanctification on the life of holiness and the believer.

Never concerned about these things. Never concerned about a narrow path but an easy road. And a gospel that attacks.

[26 : 33] That false gospel. That strange fire. It is a message that contradicts truth. It attacks vulnerable people.

It attacks true worship. And it attacks the teaching of the cross. We come to the cross.

Where we found our Lord following a narrow path. Living a life of humiliation. In a poor family. Despised and rejected of men. We find a saviour who suffers on the cross. It is an alarming contrast.

To a prosperity gospel of health and wealth. A suffering saviour preaching a narrow way. And calling a believer.

[27 : 29] Follow me. Follow me. And the apostle himself who says. That we're to share in the fellowship of suffering.

This is the people we are called to be. Shaped by our afflictions. By a God who knows and sees. And who will cause us to bear fruit.

Not the carnal fruit of the prosperity of our health or wealth. But the spiritual fruit. The fruit of the spirit.

To display the marks of grace. That we are not a carnal people engaging in strange fire. But a spiritual people.

Who are seeking to honour God. In spirit. And in truth. And the needs for us. To have a clear perspective.

[28 : 30] Upon the great sacrifice. On the cross. The greatest sacrifice of all. The acceptable sacrifice.

Of the Lamb of God. And to recognise. That we are being called. To be devoted to Him. To follow Him.

To worship in spirit. And in truth. To reflect a heavenly worship. That gives glory to God.

And all our sin. And is authorised by Him. May we seek to please God. With our worship. And our lives.

Amen. May the Lord bless our thoughts together.