

An Indictment of Worthless Worship

Malachi 1:6–14

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Introduction

Please turn with me in your Bibles back to Malachi chapter 1, and follow along as I read our text for this morning: Malachi 1, verses 6 through 14. [...]

“Familiarity breeds contempt.”

I imagine that many of you can think back to a time—maybe when you were first saved—when Christianity was thrilling to you. You had come to grips with the reality and the depth of your own sin before a holy God. You had come to see and enjoy the unspeakable majesty of God’s holiness. You knew that because the sinless Son of God had absorbed in Himself the full exercise of the wrath of God against your sin, this Holy God had graciously forgiven you of your sin and granted you eternal life. And fellowship with Jesus in those early days was just so sweet! It was like He was your best friend in the world and didn’t leave your side all day. You couldn’t wait to carve out some time in your schedule to be alone with Him—to read and meditate on His Word in Scripture, to pour out your heart to Him in prayer. Coming to church to worship God and fellowship with other believers was the highlight of your week. You couldn’t wait to set aside that time in your week where you gather together with the people of God and offer Him a sacrifice of worship as the gathered assembly. And evangelism? It seems like you told everybody you came in contact with this wonderful message of grace and salvation that you had just experienced in your life. Indeed, there are few things more encouraging than a young believer’s (guided) zeal for Christ.

But after some time passes—and you know how this goes—Bible reading, and prayer, and church attendance, and evangelism—it all kind of becomes familiar. What was once such a joy, such a privilege, such a thrill in our own hearts—starts to become boring; even burdensome; even wearisome. The Bible starts to look thicker and thicker, and our Bible-reading plans always seem to have us in the consecration laws in Leviticus, or in the genealogies of 1 Chronicles. Prayer is reduced to quick requests when something goes wrong, and praying for ten minutes seems like an hour. Attending church just gets to be another appointment on your calendar that forces you to wake up early on Sunday. And if we’re not careful, even listening to God’s Word preached can become little more than an academic exercise. We stop experiencing these activities for what they are—namely, glorious privileges for worship—and we just go through the motions. In so many ways, familiarity—even with these most wonderful, delightful responsibilities—can breed contempt.

Well, a similar thing was happening with the priests of Israel in the day of the prophet Malachi. We mentioned it last Sunday morning, that Malachi had undertaken his prophetic ministry somewhere between the mid- to late 400s BC—about 100 years after Judah’s return from exile in Babylon. And about 80 years before that—just twenty years after the return from exile—the prophets Haggai and Zechariah spoke words of great promise and encouragement to God’s regathered nation. Through Haggai, God commands Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple. And Ezra 3:10–11 tells us that when the foundation was laid everyone sang praises and gave thanks to God. But those who were old enough to remember Solomon’s temple wept at the building of Zerubbabel’s temple. It paled in comparison to the splendor and the beauty of that glorious temple that had been destroyed by the Babylonians.

But God promises through Haggai that all the nations will come to the temple of Jerusalem with their wealth. He says, “I will fill this house with glory” and “The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former.” In Zechariah 8, God promises: There’s going to be such peace in Jerusalem that men and women will grow old, and that the streets of the city will be filled with children playing. Eventually God says, Zechariah 8:7, “Behold, I am going to save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west; and I will bring them back and they will live in the midst of Jerusalem; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God in truth and righteousness.”

But like we said last time, by Malachi’s day, it had been about 80 years since God had given those promises to Israel, and they saw no such Messianic renovation. And so they began to wonder where God was, and when He was going to fulfill all these magnificent promises. And after years and years of waiting, and hoping, both the priests and the people became disillusioned. Sure, they still went about their religious business. They celebrated the feasts and offered the sacrifices. But the monotony of the routine led them to become familiar and bored with the worship of God. Their hearts became hardened, and the temple service became little more than going through the motions. In their case, familiarity did breed contempt.

And so God sends Malachi to speak into these issues—to rebuke Israel for their unfaithfulness. And among all the sins for which Malachi will rebuke Israel, he spends almost two whole chapters—from chapter 1 verse 6, all the way to chapter 2 verse 9—indicting the priests for their worthless, corrupt worship practices.

Now, you say, “Mike, what does all that have to do with me? I mean, priests, and temples, and altars, and animal sacrifices: the sacrificial system of Israel has been fulfilled in Christ, the perfect sacrifice!” Yes, that’s true. But the New Testament takes the Old Testament imagery of sacrificial worship and describes the Christian’s entire life as a sacrificial offering of worship to God. Romans 12, verse 1: “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present

your bodies a living and holy *sacrifice*, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.” That’s the language of the priestly temple ministry: “spiritual service of worship.” Christians offer sacrifice! Not animal sacrifice, but the living and holy sacrifice of our entire lives. Hebrews 13:15–16 says, “Through [Christ] then, let us continually offer up a *sacrifice* of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such *sacrifices* God is pleased.” Our praise, and our thanksgiving—our deeds of love and generosity to others—all of these things are described as sacrifices, as if we were priests ministering in the Holy Place. And 1 Peter 2:5 says that we’re living stones, “being built up as a spiritual house [a temple!] for a *holy priesthood*, to offer up *spiritual sacrifices* acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

You see, friends, the Christian’s entire life is a priestly ministry. The way we live, the way we serve, the way we obey or disobey, is like the offering of spiritual sacrifices to God. Hebrews 10:19 and 20 tells us that Jesus’ flesh was like the veil of the temple that separated Israel from God’s presence in the Holy Place. And because we are united to Christ by faith, the text says, “We have confidence to enter the **holy place** by the blood of Jesus.” You see? As a kingdom of priests, Christians live every day in the Holy Place—we live every day in the very presence of the Holy God Himself.

And though that is an amazing privilege—though that is a marvelous display of grace—it should also strike a holy fear into our hearts. People died for failing to properly revere God while ministering in this holy place! And we are in the holy place every day—before the face of God every moment! We are a kingdom of priests, waiting eagerly for the coming of our Messiah to set up His kingdom on the earth and bring all of His promises to pass.

And that means we have much to learn from the faithless priests of Malachi’s day, who grew tired of waiting for the coming of Messiah, and who let the years of waiting for the fulfillment of His promises lull them into apathy, so that they became guilty of offering worthless worship. And as we consider God’s Word to Israel through the prophet Malachi this morning, I want to highlight **three marks of worthless worship**—three characteristics of unworthy worship.

And my hope is that we would remember that we Christians *are* “a holy priesthood”—that we are a kingdom of priests of the New Covenant, and that our entire lives are spiritual sacrifices to God through Christ. And as we see these **marks of worthless worship** from the priests of Malachi’s day, my hope is that we’ll be able to (a) detect the presence of worthless worship in our own lives, (b) put it to death by the power of the Spirit, and (c) worship God in Spirit and truth in a manner that He is worthy of.

I. Self-Righteous Self-Defense

That first **mark** of worthless worship is their **self-righteous self-defense**. We see this immediately in verses 6 and 7. Yahweh says, “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?” says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise My name. But you say, ‘How have we despised Your name?’ You are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, ‘How have we defiled You?’”

This is not a good-faith request for information. It is bitter contentiousness. It is hyper-sensitive self righteousness. And it characterizes the people’s attitude throughout the whole book. We saw last week, in chapter 1 verse 2, God declares His love for them. And their immediate response is, “*How* have you loved us?” In chapter 2 verse 13, God tells them He doesn’t accept their offerings, and their response, verse 14 is, “For what reason does the Lord not accept our offerings?” “What’s wrong with them?” 2:17: God says, “You have wearied the Lord with your words.” And they don’t miss a beat: “How have we wearied Him?” Chapter 3 verse 8, God says, “You’re robbing Me!” They say, “How have we robbed You?” Verse 13, “Your words have been arrogant against Me.” They say, “What have we spoken against You?” Throughout the whole book, their default response to God’s rebuke is not the response of true worshipers.

The sacrifices of God, David tells us in Psalm 51:17, are a broken spirit and a contrite heart. But this is not humble, contrite submission. This is not the kind of self-examination and brokenhearted repentance that characterize those who know their own weakness, who desperately want to be rid of sin in their own lives. No, this is the response of those who trust in themselves to be righteous. These are the kind of people who are shocked to learn that they could be offering worship to God that He’s not pleased with.

This is a tell-tale sign of **self-righteousness**. When a self-righteous person is criticized about their worship practices, they take personal offense, because their worship is about them. And this could be correction in any area of life, but let’s consider literal worship practices. “What? What do you mean that my hand-flailing and dancing in the aisles is distracting to others? This is my way of worshiping God! Ugh! Legalist! Fundamentalist!” “I like the light show and the smoke machines, OK? It makes me feel comfortable! The music from heretical worship bands really makes me feel close to God! (Figure that one out!) Why are you harshing my mellow? Who are you, the worship police?!” “What do you mean I should wait to be dismissed before I get up to leave the worship center?! I stayed for the whole sermon! Don’t you know I’ve got places to be? Back off!” “Don’t clap? ‘Worship isn’t a performance’? Are you serious?”

You see? “Worship isn’t about God! It isn’t about pleasing Him! It’s not about worshiping Him according to His revealed Word! No, *my* worship is about *my* feelings. My comfort. My preferences.” This is the response of self-focused, self-centered, **self-righteousness**.

A true worshiper hears a rebuke like this from God's spokesman, and he's genuinely concerned. Now, I'm not saying that you have to be captive to the conscience of every legalist with a pet peeve. But even if you don't automatically accept the criticism, the true worshiper listens to the reproof of wisdom, because he wants his worship to be pure. He wants his worship to be acceptable to God. And if there's a chance that it's not, he wants to hear about it. "Thank you so much for pointing that out to me. I know that probably wasn't easy for you. I really do want to be careful to worship God in the way He's prescribed, and so I appreciate your exhortation. I'm going to go the Lord with that." That's the response of a humble worshiper. But when the **self-righteous** take personal offense when they're rebuked, they reveal that their religious activity is more about themselves than anything else.

And given the historical context of Malachi, I think that's exactly what's going on here. "What do you mean we've despised Your name? How have we defiled Your altar? Listen, we keep bringing the sacrifices! We keep this temple thing going! We're actually keeping our end of the bargain, God! The sacrifices *are* getting offered! But where are You? Where's the restoration You promised? Where's the glory in this temple that You promised?" And as blasphemous and unthinkable as that sounds to us, here, in a proper frame of heart, and with the wickedness of such thoughts stripped down to their naked deformity, if we're honest with ourselves, we recognize that those kinds of thoughts can creep into our hearts. "I keep reading my Bible! I keep going to church! I keep going to Bible study! When is this "spiritual growth" and "satisfying communion with Jesus" thing going to kick in?" "You keep talking about meaningful discipleship relationships happening through Bible studies. But we just keep talking about work and sports!"

These priests figured they were righteous—that they were doing what God required of them. "The sermons are getting preached! The songs are getting sung!" But the righteous worshiper doesn't arrogantly defend himself when God criticizes. The righteous worshiper—always aware of his own weakness and proneness to wander—humbly and thankfully receives biblical correction—wherever it comes from, even if the delivery is bad. Even if the person bringing it isn't as gentle or kind as you might like. The wise man wrings whatever truth he can out of any correction when it's brought to him.

How are you doing with this? Really. If someone confronts you about your worship practices—which is to say, about *any* part of your life since every part of your life is worship in the presence of God, in the holy place—when someone addresses your sin, what's your default reaction? Is it to immediately defend yourself? whether out loud or just in your heart? When other believers, who love the Lord and who love you, come to you and address something in your life, for God's glory and for your benefit, what's your response? Is it like the priests? "What? *How* is that sinful?" "No, no, no... Don't be so legalistic!"

One example of this that I've continually emphasized is the importance of attending a mid-week Bible study as an extension of your fellowship group. We're thankful to God that our attendance is so high. But one of the disadvantages of a big church—and even a big fellowship group—is that you can come to service, stare at the back of someone's head for an hour, and leave. And nobody knows anything about you. Having a group of 15 to 30 people that are aware of both (a) your weaknesses, so they can serve you, and (b) your strengths, so you can serve others—that is an essential part of being members of the body of Christ. Having a qualified man or group of men caring for your souls as undershepherds is the best way that the elders know how to faithfully shepherd a flock as large as ours.

What's your response to hearing an exhortation like that? "Hey, listen, I make it to church! ... most of the time." "Well, that's great. But nobody knows who you are; nobody's involved in your life; you're not accountable to anyone." "Listen, I read my Bible! I pray! I even give!" If that's your attitude—if your response to correction is to list off all of your religious activity as a way of **self-righteously defending** yourself—it may be that your acts of "worship" are more about you than about giving God what He is worthy of. That's a call to self-examination.

II. Empty Formalism

Well, a **second mark** of worthless worship is **empty formalism**. Unworthy worship is marked by self-righteous self-defense, number one, and number two, by an **empty formalism**. Look at the end of verse 6: "How have we despised Your name?' You are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, 'How have we defiled You?' In that you say, 'The table of the Lord is to be despised.' But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil?" And He repeats this charge again in verse 13: "And you bring what was taken by robbery and what is lame or sick. ... Should I receive that from your hand?"

The Levitical Law was clear. Acceptable sacrifices to Yahweh were to be *blemishless*, without defect. Leviticus 22:19 says, "For you to be accepted—it must be...without defect. ... Whatever has a defect you shall not offer, for it will not be accepted for you. ... it must be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no defect in it. Those that are blind or fractured or maimed or having a running sore or eczema or scabs, you shall not offer to Yahweh." And yet that was exactly what they were doing. The priests, whose responsibility it was to protect the holiness of Yahweh's sanctuary! And here they were, offering the blind, the sick, and the lame. They offered God their worst rather than their best. They offered what would cost them the least. They had no category for sacrifice that was a *sacrifice*. "Who cares if the animals have stuff wrong with them? They're going to get burned anyway, right? And besides, the sacrifices *are* being offered, aren't they? The ritual is being performed!"

You see? The whole task was nothing but an external duty. It was just **empty formalism**. They were just going through the motions. If their hearts were in it, they would have gladly desired to give God the best of what they had to offer. But worshiping God according to the prescriptions of His own Word was not their concern.

What about us? We who are a holy priesthood, who offer up spiritual sacrifices to God by our entire lives of worship? Well if we take honest stock of our own lives, it's not long before we realize that we fail in just the same way the priests of Israel did. We don't give God what He is worthy of. So often, we don't give Him our best. The spiritual disciplines of Bible reading and prayer take a backseat to other things that seem more pressing. We give God our leftovers—especially the leftovers of our time. We “do our devotions” in our spare time, if we can squeeze them in at all. We seem to have plenty of time for entertainment, for social media—which, of course, can be lawful recreations, but only in their proper place. Only when we've properly prioritized our personal worship time of prayer and Scripture reading, of church attendance and involvement in fellowship. See, God calls for our first fruits, not for our leftovers.

Yahweh tells the priests in chapter 1 verse 8 that not even their governor would accept such sacrifices as payment of taxes. And I think that applies to us in a big way. We offer to God what we would never dream of offering to our employers. We'd never think of going into work a few hours late on Monday morning because we didn't get enough sleep the night before. But how many times have you skipped the early service—or church all together—because Saturday was a late night? We wouldn't treat our jobs that way, or our schoolwork that way. But, God help us, we can treat Jesus that way.

And then even when we get to church, we're not always fully here. We let the routine of the order of worship lull us into mindless ritual, as if just being physically present is enough. But true worship—true, acceptable sacrifices of worship to God—requires intentionality and focus. Our hearts need to be engaged. We've sung some songs so many times that, if we're not careful, our minds can begin to wander even as we're singing. Even as we're carrying a tune and vocalizing the proper words, we can be thinking about lunch, or where we need to be after the service. On some days, we're so tired that we long for congregational prayer time just so we can lean forward, put our heads down, and rest our eyes. But our worship in prayer and our worship in song should have all of our hearts and all of our minds engaged. We should be singing from our souls as if we were in the presence of the Lord Jesus Himself. When a pastor is leading us in congregational prayer, we should be closely following along, making his words our words as we call out to God in praise, in confession, in thanksgiving, and in supplication.

Even in the special music and the instrumental music—when the orchestra is playing the melody to, “I Sing the Mighty Power of God,” it's not a concert where we get to sit back, relax, and enjoy the show. No, that is an opportunity to worship. Even though we're not singing along, and

even though we can seem a bit passive in the matter, those times are opportunities to consciously worship God with gifts better than our own; to worship God for giving such wonderful gifts and talents to fallen human beings, such that we can enjoy beautiful and pleasant music that reflects God's own nature. These musicians have been blessed beyond measure, and they're using their talents in the greatest enterprise that one could engage in: the praise of Almighty God. They are giving expression to the adoration that ought to be in our hearts, but in a way that we could never do, simply because He's given them gifts that He hasn't given us.

I can't sing like Phil Webb, or Grace Chung, or John Martin. But I *can* thank God for using my brothers and sisters to express the love for God that's in my own heart in a way that I could only look forward to doing in heaven. We can thank God for being the Creator of beautiful music. We rejoice in the gifts He gives to others. We can pray that He would receive the song being sung as an offering of worship from hearts satisfied and made glad by His grace. We can pray that He would be magnified by the reproduction of His own skill and wisdom in the image of His creatures.

Malachi says the priests brought "the blind" for sacrifice. How might that apply to us? For us to bring the blind for sacrifice would mean to worship God in ignorance—with the eyes of our spiritual understanding as it were shut and blinded to the revealed truth of God. It happens when we fail to bring the truth of the Scriptures to bear on our worship, so that we innovate rather than worship God as He's prescribed. We bring the blind when we bypass or disengage the mind in favor of emotionalism—when worship becomes more about how we feel than about what God deserves and demands from us in His Word.

How about "the sick"? We bring the sick for sacrifice when we are cold, or dull, or lifeless in our worship. Our minds may be engaged, but we don't make heart-work of it. We go through the motions—stand when we're supposed to stand, sit when we're supposed to sit, sing when we're supposed to sing, quiet down when we're led in prayer and listening to a sermon—all the while leaving the heart unengaged. Thomas Watson said, "The devil does not care how many sermon pills you take, so long as they do not work upon your conscience." Jesus indicts those who worship Him with their lips but whose hearts are far from Him. Matthew 15:8-9: "In vain do they worship Me."

And we bring "the lame" for sacrifice when we allow our minds and hearts to be distracted with empty thoughts—letting our minds wander as we think about the schedule for next week, or what needs to get done around the house, or whatever. Our entire lives are sacrifices of worship, but the pinnacle of our worship comes on Sunday morning in the gathered assembly—where we gather as the people of God together with our brothers and sisters; where the Lord is enthroned on the praises of His people. When that happens, what sacrifices do you bring to the temple? We are not to endure a sermon; we are to make sure our minds are fully engaged, so that we perceive

the truth being proclaimed from God's Word and are properly affected by it—so that as the truth of God penetrates our minds and enflames our hearts, our hearts then overflow in genuine adoration and pure worship of God that issues in a holy life.

You see, if we're not careful, all of our Bible reading, all of our church attendance, all of our fellowship activities, can become little more than going through the motions—little more than the **empty formalism** of the priests of Malachi's day—little more than taking God's name in vain.

And what is **God's response** to this empty formalism? Verse 10: "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar!" God says, "Keep your offering! If you can't give Me what's in your heart, I don't want what's in your hand!" God gets so fed up with their shallow and casual approach to worship that He'd rather the temple be closed down! No worship, is better than blasphemous worship! If you would, turn quickly to Isaiah chapter 1. Isaiah 1, starting in verse 11. God says to Israel, "What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me? ... I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer."

And in the same way He told the people of Isaiah's day that He took no pleasure in their sacrifices, He looks at the priests in Malachi 1:10 and says, "I have no pleasure in *you*." What a statement! Could you imagine hearing those words from Almighty God? from the Judge of all the world? the God who sees to the depths of your heart, the God who is sure to know you accurately, as you truly are, looking at you with the piercing eye of omniscience, and saying, "I take no pleasure in you"? No! What I want more than anything in the world is to delight the heart of my Savior and my God. I want the One I love more than life itself to look upon me, see the fingerprints of His own grace, and be pleased with the work of His hands.

And so I need to search my heart, and confess, and repent, and seek His grace, so that I might offer to Him what He is worthy of. And friends, He is worth more than your leftovers. He does not accept the lame, and the blind, and the sick, and the half-hearted, and the begrudging. Determine to put to death by the Spirit of God any **empty formalism** that might be lingering in your life. Spend time in prayer this week. Ask God to reveal where this might exist in your life, if anywhere. (Praise God if it doesn't!) But if it does, ask God to expose it, and then put it to death by the power of the Spirit of God and the promises of the Gospel. Commit yourself by His grace to worship Him in spirit and truth.

III. Contempt for the Duty

Well, not only is unworthy worship marked by self-righteous self-defense and by empty formalism. The **third characteristic of worthless worship** is **contempt for the duty**. Take a look at verse 12. He repeats what he mentioned already in verse 7, and then adds to it. He says, “You are profaning it, in that you say, ‘The table of the Lord is defiled, and as for its fruit, its food is to be despised.’ You also say, ‘My, how tiresome it is!’ And you disdainfully sniff at it.”

That term “disdainfully sniff,” as the NAS puts it—the ESV renders it “snort”—translates the Hebrew word *naphach*. It means “to sniff or snort with contempt” (BDB). It’s like having your arm twisted into doing something you can’t bear to do, and voicing your disgust. It’s like a child who whines, “Ugh... alllllll riiiiight. *Fine!*” Insolent, complaining, bitter, contempt.

But don’t we say that, more than we’d like to admit? If not out loud maybe just in our hearts? “My how tiresome the work of the Lord is!” Getting to church before 9am after a long week can be tiresome. Going to Sunday school or fellowship group or Bible studies takes away from the rest we think we need after the busyness and the stress of the work week. How many times have you skipped your personal worship time so you could sleep just a bit longer? And think about evangelism: I don’t know that there’s a greater satisfaction and joy than proclaiming the Gospel to someone who stands in need of eternal life. And yet how easy it is to be embarrassed, and hesitant, and fearful in that joyful duty. In all these things—church, fellowship, prayer, Bible reading, evangelism—these are such wonderful privileges we enjoy! And yet there are days when we say to ourselves, “My how tiresome it is,” and we disdainfully sniff at them.

When we react that way, what do we communicate about a life of following Jesus? That it’s **contemptible**. We say with our actions what the priests said with theirs: “The table of the Lord is to be *despised*.” But—as 1 John 5:3 says—God’s commandments are *not* burdensome. And as a kingdom of priests—people who minister to each other as the body of Christ, and to those in the unbelieving world—Christians must communicate by our attitude, by our speech, and by our actions that the worship and service of the Lord is delightful. That’s how we stimulate one another to love and good deeds. We say with David, Psalm 27 verse 4, that the one thing I want is to behold the beauty of the Lord and to be about His ministry in His place. And then we live like that’s true.

That communicates that Jesus is glorious—that to be employed in His service is so satisfying that, so far from *contempt* for our duty, we *delight* in our duty. He’s just that enjoyable! He’s just that lovely! that I can suffer the loss of everything else in this life alongside the Apostle Paul, Philippians 3:8, and call it gain because I have Him! “My how *tiresome* it is”? No! “How *lovely* are Your dwelling places, O Yahweh of hosts! My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of Yahweh!” (Ps 84:1–2). “O Lord, I *love* the habitation of Your house and the place where Your

glory dwells!” (Ps 26:8). “Praise the Lord! For it is *good* to sing praises to our God; for it is *pleasant* and praise is becoming!” (Ps 147:1).

The Source of Worthless and Worthy Worship

And so these are the **characteristics** of worthless worship: (a) self-righteous self-defense, (b) empty formalism, and (c) contempt for our duty. And I hope seeing them in Israel’s bad example will help you in identifying such marks of unworthy worship in your own lives. But once we find and recognize it in our lives, we need to get rid of it. We need to put the deeds and attitudes of unworthy worship to death. But in order to mortify it at its root—and not just pick the fruit off the tree so it grows back, but to lay the ax at the root of the tree—we need to understand what causes worthless worship. We’ve seen the **characteristics** of worthless worship, but what is its **source**? Where does it come from?

The source of worthless worship is a failure to properly esteem God’s glory and honor His name. Notice that at the heart of Yahweh’s rejection of the priests’ sacrifices is His zeal for His own name. The end of verse 10 summarizes, “nor will I accept an offering from you.” Then He says, verse 11: “*For*”—because—“from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering that is pure; for My name will be great among the nations.”

God’s chief regard for His own name is why the sacrificial laws were as they were. Not because God is just some arbitrary, capricious narcissist, but because He is *worthy* of perfection! He is *worthy* of blemishlessness! God esteems His name and His glory above everything in the world, and therefore His people must esteem His name and His glory above everything in the world! He intends that His name will be magnified through all the earth and seen to be as glorious as it is. And for that very reason, you and I must worship Him in purity. He demands that He be treated in a way that is commensurate with His own character.

He’s been saying this to the priests the whole time! Look back at verse 6. He says, “If I am a father, where is My *honor*?” *Kavod*. It means glory, weight, gravity. He goes on to say that the priests *despise* His name. “Despise” there is *bazah*, and it means “to regard lightly”—just like Esau despised his birthright; he regarded it so lightly that he sold it to Jacob for a meal. He thought it a light thing, an insignificant thing. He didn’t at all perceive the weight of it.

The priests were despising *their* birthright of pure worship. Rather than regarding Him as weighty and worthy of reverential awe and pure worship, they treated Him as if He were insignificant and common. They didn’t think twice about speaking to Him flippantly, about offering unworthy sacrifices, and about complaining about the duty of His temple service—which was a privilege that propitiated the wrath of God against their sins. In fact, Yahweh even

identifies *Himself* with His altar. He asserts in verse 11 that His name will be great among the nations. “But you,” My people, and more than that: My priests—verse 12, “you are profaning it, in that you say, ‘The table of the Lord is defiled.’” “You profane My name by profaning My table.” The way you feel about the worship of God is the way you feel about God! And so the way you *treat* the worship of God is the way you treat God! At its heart, worthless worship shows contempt for God’s *name*. It is God Himself that the priests despise!

And the same will be true for us. People live out their theology. Your actions are shaped by what you really believe about God. You will always act in line with what you believe. And if a sober survey of your life tells you that you’re engaging in unworthy worship—the answer is not to just grit your teeth, try harder, pray longer, read earlier in the day, or attend church more often. No, the answer is to see God as great! as He sees Himself! It’s to saturate the eyes of your heart with the vision of the glory of God revealed in the face of Christ!

The great Puritan John Flavel understood that. He put it this way: “Is Christ set down on the right-hand of the Majesty in heaven? *O with what awful reference should we approach him in the duties of his worship!* Away with light and low thoughts of Christ! Away with formal, irreverent, and careless frames in praying, hearing, receiving, yea, in conferring and speaking of Christ! Away with all deadness, and drowsiness in duties; for he is a great King with whom you have to do. O that you did but know what a glorious Lord you worship and serve! Who makes the very place of his feet glorious, wherever he comes! You may be free, but not rude, in his presence. Though he be your Father, Brother, Friend; yet the distance betw[een] him and you is infinite.”

You see, if the source of worthless worship is regarding God’s name too lightly, we need to cultivate our affections to love His name—to behold the beauty of His majesty! to treasure His glory! He’s actually worthy of this from us. This is where the war against sin must be waged, GraceLife: at the level of spiritual sight—at the level of regard for God’s name. I am not calling you to willpower religion. I am not calling you to *mere* duty. I’m saying go to battle with your sin, fighting to get a more exalted view of God! to cultivate a deeper appreciation for the honor of His name! Because *that* is the source of *worthy* worship.

And of course that glory is nowhere more wondrously displayed than in the cross of Jesus Christ. And friends if there are any of you here today who have discerned that all your religious activity has amounted to nothing more than worthless worship, I invite you to look to the One who lived a life of worship that was perfectly consistent with the demands of the honor and holiness of God’s name. I invite you to look to the Lamb of God who offered His body as the once-for-all, sufficient sacrifice, and who poured out His blood to satisfy the Father’s wrath against unworthy worshipers; and who rose again triumphant over death, powerful to forgive the sins of all who turn from their sin and trust in Him alone for righteousness before a holy God. Unbeliever, come to Christ this morning. Trust the perfect worshiper, Jesus Christ.

And to those of you who are in Christ, who recognize that, “I am an imperfect worshiper—I’m not an unbeliever, but I have not measured up to the standard of God’s Word,”—you’re right: you haven’t measured up. But dear Christian: Christ has measured up. Jesus has met that awful, unapproachable standard, for you, in your place, as your Substitute. And I want you to draw strength from knowing that His perfect record of worshiping God in spirit and truth, with all His heart, soul, mind, and strength is credited to your account by virtue of your union with Him by faith; so that where the Father should see the filthiness and putrefaction of your unworthy worship, He looks upon you and sees the spotless robe of the perfect obedience of His beloved Son, in whom He is well-pleased.

Fight the battle for worthy worship in the strength that you have already been accepted for the sake of Christ, whose sacrifice of Himself has pleased God once for all. And then fight to bring your practice in line with your position. Find strength from grace to live a life of worthy worship.