

Broomfield



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 4 Issue 11

March 13, 2005

When Worship is an Abomination, Part 3

Habakkuk was written at a time when God, His honor, and His covenant were being trampled underfoot by the people of God. So Habakkuk begs God to do something about His people. In response, the Lord essentially says, “Because of my people's stubbornness, I am raising up the nation of Babylon whom I will use to discipline my people” (Habakkuk 1:6).

This response created a theological dilemma for Habakkuk: How could God judge His people with a nation more ungodly than they?¹ (1:12-2:1)? The book of Habakkuk is God's answer to this question.

The opening chapters of Samuel follow a similar line of thinking as Habakkuk. Samuel was written at a time when God was about to shift the focus of His worship and work away from Shiloh. Like Habakkuk, the first part of Samuel is given to explain the “Why” behind this shift. Accordingly, there are a series of comparisons between the righteous — Hannah and Samuel — and the unrighteous — Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas.

Through it all the readers walk away with the conviction that if only God's people had trusted the Lord as Hannah and served God as Samuel none of the tragedy and hardship of Samuel's day would have occurred. The Ark would not have been lost. Eli's house would not have been displaced as servants of the Lord. Saul would not have been king. And if there had been an earthly king, he would have been a righteous man like David. Instead, we are left with the abominable practices of Eli's household so pervasive that it even affected the worship of God!

I Samuel 2:12-17 shows us the abominable worship of Hophni and Phinehas. Indeed, this passage stands as a timeless warning to the church. It instructs us to not grow weary in doing well! It reminds us to remain steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord! And it teaches us to preserve the gift of worship that has been entrusted to us!

The Apostle Paul instructs us to learn from their mistake!

Romans 15:4, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”

Accordingly, let us not endure the sins of Hophni and Phinehas! But with perseverance and the

¹ Compare Habakkuk 1:12-2:1

encouragement of the Scriptures let us maintain our hope, spiritual vigilance and devotion to the Lord.

This raises some important questions: Well, what were their sins? What is it that led Hophni and Phinehas in their descent into abominable worship?

The Cause

1 Samuel 2:12-13 addresses and answers these questions. However, I want to examine this text backwards, moving from the most innocuous of their sins to the most damning. So let us examine the cause of their abominable worship.

1 Samuel 2:12-13, “Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD². And the priests’ custom with the people was, that, when any man offered sacrifice, the priest’s servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand.”

First off these men were ignorant leaders. Verse 13 tells us that they did not know the Lord or the customs of the priests. This is quite a shocker! In a culture in which God ordained that the role of a priest was the instruction of the people when it came to worship³ here we read that Hophni and Phinehas were not familiar with the regulations and responsibilities of a priest.

It is no wonder that God's worship was compromised! The ones responsible for carrying it out didn't have a clue! They obviously weren't trained when it came to their office. They didn't understand their role in Judaism. And they rarely if ever read the word of God!

And thus, because they were ignorant of the way of the Lord, they did it their way- and God's people paid the price!

From this we see the first cause of abominable worship flows from ignorance of the way of the Lord!

Can you imagine living in an age where those in charge of worship were unfamiliar with God's instruction when it came to worship? The end result of worship was not, “Was God worshipped according to His will” but “did we — like Hophni and Phinehas — get out of worship what we wanted?”

That which drove worship was NOT the will of the Lord, BUT the whim of man. They worshipped according to their likes and dislikes. They placed their wants and desires above God’s. They operated by their felt needs. +Biblically, this method of worship is unthinkable!

And yet we live in a day where the method of Hophni and Phinehas governs. Today the worship that is offered in many churches is put together by a worship committee that is unfamiliar with the word of God and its requirements when it comes to worship. We live in a day where a bands goal is not the adoration of God, but the provision of a means for a people to be moved. And thus today, not only do our services no longer contain the language of worship, but that which must move every service of worship is missing.

² Note that the punctuation of this verse often leads to inferences that the text does not necessarily support. A better reading here is that “they did not know the LORD and the custom of the priests with the people.” (NASB)

³ Compare Malachi 2:7, In fact, this was such an important part of Judaism that the local priest in most towns served as the school instructor for the local populace.

Taking Grace for Granted

R. C. Sproul tells a story about his first year teaching in seminary. In one of his classes he assigned three papers that had specific due dates throughout the semester. On each due date, progressively more and more students handed their paper in late because R. C. Sproul understood that it was test week for other classes and he didn't want to be a “meany.”

When the final paper came due, half the class was late. Dr. Sproul firmly announced that every paper that was late would get an F. And that is when some cried, “Unfair!” And when they demanded fairness, he gave them fairness with an “F” on their previous late papers.

Dr. Sproul's point in telling this story was to illustrate the sinfulness of our hearts and how we tend to take grace for granted. We expect grace.

Ever since I heard that illustration, I have wondered if maybe, when it comes to worship we aren't guilty of taking God's glory for granted as well! I'll never forget the exhortation that the late Dr. Robert Rayburn gave his worship classes in seminary. In essence he said, “There is no more important activity than worship. Accordingly, your greatest priority as a minister of God must be the worship of God.”

And yet amazingly and sadly, the attitude of Hophni and Phinehas pervades so many of our assemblies today. We believe that God really doesn't care what we do. We believe that He is more interested in what is on the inside. We have relegated the most important activity of the church — her worship — to a worship team or a band who is “unfamiliar with the custom of the priests.”

The worship in our churches today is not that of informed worship:

Psalm 47:7, “For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.”

Rather our worship is — in the words of a worship leader — “Sit back! Relax! And enjoy the show!”

Now brothers and sisters, this is the irony. Not only is this kind of worship unacceptable to God, but as we'll see in more detail, it has a detrimental effect upon the people of God.

Psalm 115:4, “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.”

Psalm 115:8, “They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.”

.From this Psalm we conclude that you will become like that which you worship! Accordingly, if our worship is out of plum with the word of God then we will reflect that error in our lives! Oh how our worship must be in accord with God's word!

Alienated Leaders

And so from this we see the first cause of abominable worship: “Ignorant Leadership!” And yet, there is more, the second is alienated leaders.

1 Samuel 2:12, “Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; **they knew⁴ not the LORD.**”

⁴ יָדָע yada γινωσκω ginosko in the LXX

This is another weighty statement. The word for “know” is used in Scripture in reference to a love-relationship.⁵ In other words, “to know” in the Bible speaks to more than simply a mental awareness of something. It indicates a close, intimate bond. And so we read, “Cain knew his wife and she conceived” (Genesis 4:17).

It is obvious that Cain had more than a casual knowledge of his wife. Indeed, his knowledge of her resulted in the birth of a son.

Amos 3:2, “You only have I known⁶ of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.”

This doesn't mean that God is limited when it comes to His knowledge of those on this earth — He is Omniscient. Rather this means that of all the people's of the earth, only with Israel did God enter into a special, love-relationship!

Jeremiah 4:22, “For my people is foolish, they have not known⁷ me; they are sottish [stupid] children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.”

Again it is not that God's people had no comprehension as to their God. Rather, it is that they no longer enjoyed nor desired a love-relationship with Him.

Accordingly we read in Isaiah of God's ultimate plan in judging Israel with the exile.

Isaiah 60:16b, “and thou shalt know⁸ that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob.”

Thus when we read here that Hophni and Phinehas did not “know the Lord,” we derive the second reason for the compromise of God's worship: (1) Alienation, (2) The Loss of a Love-relationship with God!

James decried this type of “knowledge” when he wrote, “Thou believest⁹ that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19)

In other words, it is not enough to know theology and have the best theological education money can buy. It is not enough to memorize large portions of Scripture. It is not enough to believe this doctrine or that. We must be a people who have intercourse with God. We must enjoy a love-relationship with the Lord. Without this, our worship is an abomination!

And yet in the context of the worship of God and God's leaders, this truth is so quickly compromised. Ministry brings with it multiple and competing obligations, responsibilities, and desires. It is easy to shift into cruise control when it comes to our walks with God. After all there is so much to do in so little time. We start to think this way, “If this or that doesn't get done, what will happen?”

⁵ While this is not the most common word for knowledge (יָדָע yada), nevertheless “It may be said that this word is used quite like its common Hebrew cognate. But as it is used in the more restricted compass of BA, all of the Hebrew usages (e.g. carnal knowledge) are not represented.” TWOT

⁶ יָדָע yada

⁷ יָדָע yada

⁸ יָדָע yada

⁹ πιστεῦω pisteuo mere acknowledgment of some fact or event: intellectual faith

Spurgeon said, “To have prayed well, is to have ministered well!” Thus, if you neglect the Lord, and forsake your private times of devotion and praise you have neglected the ministry! You have settled for the Word of God and not the God of the Word!

And do you know what happens if you neglect the ministry long?

Consumed Ministry

It is so easy to compromise when it comes to the Kingdom of God. Many a minister lives here. They have long since forsaken God in private on their knees. And so rather than serve in the Spirit of Christ, they serve in their own strength when they do hospital visitation, counseling, lead worship, preach sermons, and visit the shut-ins. This is the life of Hophni and Phinehas who served in the Kingdom of God and yet, “knew not the Lord!”

Let me be forthright here (and this is directed at all of us, not just ordained ministers) kingdom ministry is as a fire that consumes anything and everything in its path. If you bring to the fire of ministry good intentions — they will be consumed. If you bring sacrificial service in the name of Christ — it will be consumed. If you bring well-crafted sermons — they will be consumed. If you bring time, energy, and money — they too will be consumed. If you bring egos — they'll be consumed.

Is it any wonder that so many are “burned out” when it comes to ministry?

So how do we minister without being consumed? How do we minister without bitterness, anger, and resentment in our hearts?

One must bring to the “fire of ministry” Christ and Christ alone. One must make it your aim to bring only Christ. One must serve the Lord only for the sake of the Lord. And you will be as the burning bush — on fire and yet never consumed!

In light of this, do you know the greatest thing you could ever do for a church leader/parent/spouse/fellow laborer in the Lord?

It is NOT to compliment them, thank them for a job well-done, or even to express appreciation for their being a tool in God's hand — although these ought to be there if applicable. Rather it is to pray that they ever and always are broken before the Lord, become men and women who long for Christ more than anything in this life, and not compromise their walk on account of the “busyness” ministry.

Hophni and Phinehas did not know the Lord, they had nothing to give but themselves! Accordingly, they corrupted God's worship to suit themselves — and God's people paid the price. And yet there is one more cause of abominable worship: rebellious leaders.

Rebellious Leaders

1 Samuel 2:12, “**Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial**¹⁰; they knew not the LORD.”

¹⁰ בליעל b@liya'al This is rendered worthless in the NASB, NIV, and NKJV. There is a word play going on in this book with this word. Here Hophni and Phinehas are described as “sons of Belial.” Yet in 1 Samuel 1:16 Hannah implored Eli, “Do not consider your maidservant as a worthless woman [a daughter of Belial]...” Do you understand the comparison? Hannah

Once again, this is a strong statement filled with significance. The word for *Belial* is used 27 times in the Bible obviously in a negative way. The LXX translates this word as “lawless” or “witless.” The term later would be used of Satan himself.¹¹ As a term of derision, it is used in parallel with a “wicked man.”

Proverbs 6:12-14, “A naughty person¹², a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth. He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers; Frowardness is in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord.”

A worthless man is not content to rest easy. He must ever and always be working and scheming that controversy might arise. In fact, Belial is used in parallel with “a perverse man” and “a man of violence”

Proverbs 16:27, “An ungodly man¹³ diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire. A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends.”

The picture here is of a muckraker who brings about turmoil for sport. He is not content unless others are discontent. According to Nahum, he is a counsellor of villainy.

Nahum 1:11, “There is one come out of thee, that imagineth evil against the LORD, a wicked¹⁴ counsellor.”

Here the picture is of a person who encourages rebellious thoughts against God. A Son of Belial is therefore pictured as one who encourages anger, bitterness, and rebellion against the Lord. Accordingly, we are not surprised to read that “a worthless man” is one who mocks justice.

Proverbs 19:23, “An ungodly¹⁵ witness scorneth judgment: and the mouth of the wicked devoureth iniquity.”

In other words, the worthless man always finds a way to criticize what is right and just. It is not enough that he is opposed to God. He must live in a world that does the same. Such is the nuance of “Belial” and thus worthlessness. That Hophni and Phinehas are described as “sons of Belial” indicates that NOT ONLY that they did not understand their calling as priests, and were alienated from God, but they lived that others might do the same!

Christ had the same criticism of the scribes and Pharisees.

Matthew 23:15, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.”

Such was the case for Hophni and Phinehas. They lived in rebellion against God, and yet were not content unless others joined them!

essentially is saying to a man who was looking down upon her for her fervency in Christ, “Don't confuse me with your sons!”

¹¹ Compare 2 Corinthians 6:15, and 2 Thessalonians 2:3

¹² בליעל b@liya

¹³ בליען b@liya'al

¹⁴ בליען b@liya'al

¹⁵ בליען b@liya'al

Notice therefore the third and final reason for abominable worship is rebellious leaders. And by application we see abominable worship has rebellious worshippers. Such the Father does NOT seek to be His worshippers.

This raises a very important qualification. This is not to say that there won't come times in our lives when we worship the Lord as ones struggling. Indeed there are times when we have Jonah-like struggles with the will of the Lord, His providence, and His lot for our lives. We ought to bring these struggles to the Lord. And we ought to bring them to the Lord in worship!

However, the problem is when a Jonah-like struggle with the Lord remains unresolved and thus it bleeds into other parts of our life. The result is that no longer do we sit — figuratively — under the shade of a gourd lamenting the day of our birth, rather our battle becomes public. We are miserable — because we want others to be miserable with the Lord. We doubt — we want others to doubt. We are angry and we inspire rebellion against God in other.

The Beloved Preacher

Several years ago a well-beloved preacher moved to another church. When I talked with members of the congregation they remembered his ministry there this way: “Our pastor was such a wonderful caring man, except he seemed to keep sick people sick.”

Unfortunately this description fits many in the church today. How many of us are like this dear pastor. We feed on the failure of others. We like to hear of others struggling. We rejoice when another Christian fails.

I would suggest to you that this is the essence of Belial! This was the modus operandi of Hophni and Phinehas! It is the rebellion outlined in this text. It is abominable worship!

Worshipping in Spirit

John chapter 4 gives us the heartbeat of God.

John 4:23-24, “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

It is obvious that “worshipping in truth” is the call to worship according to the word of God — which is truth. However, the question arises when it comes to what the Lord means here by “worshipping in spirit?”

As we have dealt with this in other contexts, I'm not going to address the question here in full. Suffice it to say that “worshipping in spirit” is NOT worshipping as ones who are saved — this is presupposed throughout Scripture, and therefore would not be needed here as a qualification for what constituted acceptable worship. RATHER, it is worshipping with integrity- where our adoration is not just a show but is genuine. Our contrition is real. Our expression of love is from the heart. The word is received with the longing for obedience. We pour our hearts out genuinely before the Lord.

This is the point of our text. Hophni and Phinehas' worship was unacceptable because while they

proclaimed God with their mouth, their heart was far from Him.¹⁶ Far from seeking the glory of God, in rebellion they worshipped seeking the glory of man. They sought their own benefit. They willed that their will was to be done. And we have become their children if we likewise approach the worship of the Lord.

How do you cultivate genuine and sincere worship?

We've already seen the answer, sincere worship first is informed worship — worship that is moved and motivated by the truth of the word of God.

Are you and I people of the word?

Oh, we must be!

But secondly, sincere worship is the worship not of a(n) servant, slave, addict —longing for another blessing, or traumatized individual but of a lover, and so a child of God!

Accordingly, the worship we offer must be from ones who "Know the Lord!" We must enjoy a love relationship with God. We do not approach Him to get, BUT to give Him our love, affection, devotion.

Finally, sincere worship is the worship of submission. Much can go wrong in life such that the child of God may come to the point where — like Job — they think they have a "claim" against God. While I am not suggesting that we ignore this "claim" and fake it till we make it, indeed we must address the issue head on BUT on our knees before God. The problem is when in our rebellion we excite others to file a "claim" against God. Hophni and Phinehas violated all of these and so corrupted the worship of God!

Oh family of God, let us purpose this morning not to repeat their error!

¹⁶ Compare Isaiah 29:13

Subscription Information

A subscription to the *Broomfield Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word* is on a free basis. To subscribe or unsubscribe send a post card to *Broomfield Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word*®, Post Office Box 691, Windsor, Colorado 80550. Or you may send your request by email to [Nels Nelson](mailto:Nels.Nelson@broomfieldopc.com). *The Broomfield Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word* is published regularly.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Broomfield Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Broomfield Presbyterian Church is located at Kohl Elementary School, 10th Street and Kohl, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Broomfield Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. There recording for this sermon can be found at [Compromised Worship](http://broomfieldopc.com/sermons/CompromisedWorship). The web address for all sermons at Broomfield can be found out as follows: <http://broomfieldopc.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on March 13, 2005. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.