

Of Worship True and False

The Perversion of Biblical Worship

Division of Graduate Studies
Northland Baptist Bible College
Sam Horn, Ph.D.

Lecture 3¹

An evil is in the professed camp of the Lord, so gross in its impudence that the most short-sighted can hardly fail to notice it. During the past few years it has developed at abnormal rate, even for evil. It has worked like leaven until the whole lump ferments. The devil has seldom done a cleverer thing than hinting to the church that part of their mission is to provide entertainment for the people, with a view to winning them. From speaking out as the Puritans did, the church has gradually toned down her testimony, then winked at and excused the frivolities of the day. Then she tolerated them in her borders. Now she has adopted them under the plea of reaching the masses.

Had Christ introduced more of the bright and pleasant elements into His mission, he would have been more popular when they went back because of the searching nature of his teaching. I do not hear Him say, "Run after these people, Peter, and tell them we will have a different style of service tomorrow, something short and attractive with little preaching. We will have a pleasant evening for the people. Tell them they will be sure to enjoy it. Be quick, Peter, we must get the people somehow!" Jesus pitied sinners, sighed and wept over them, but never sought to amuse them. In vain will the Epistles be searched to find any trace of the gospel of amusement. Their message is, "Come out, keep out, keep clean out!" Anything approaching fooling is conspicuous by its absence. They had boundless confidence in the gospel and employed no other weapon. After Peter and John were locked up for preaching, the church had a prayer meeting, but they did not pray, "Lord grant unto thy servants that by a wise and discriminating use of innocent recreation we may show these people how happy we are." If they ceased not for preaching Christ, thy had not time for arranging entertainments. Scattered by persecution, they went everywhere preaching the gospel. They "turned the world upside down." That is the only difference! Lord, clear the church of all the rot and rubbish the devil has imposed on her and bring us back to apostolic methods.

The mission of amusement fails to effect the end it desired. It works havoc among the young converts. Let the careless and the scoffers, who thank God because the church met them half-way, speak and testify. Let the heavy laden who found peace through the concert not keep silent! Let the drunkard to whom the dramatic entertainment has been God's link in the chain of their conversion, stand up! There are none to answer. The

¹ The material in this lecture (both the wording of the content and arrangement of the outline) is drawn from two messages entitled "Deviant Worship" preached by Dr. Mark Minnick to his congregation at Mt. Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, SC. The messages are available on mp3 format from his church and they are also available in print form via two articles that appeared in *Frontline Magazine* in 1997.

mission of amusement produces no converts. The need of the hour for today's ministry is believing scholarship joined with earnest spirituality, the one springing from the other as fruit from the root. The need is biblical doctrine, so understood and felt, that it sets men on fire!

*C. H. Spurgeon
Metropolitan Tabernacle
Feeding Sheep or Amusing Goats*

Evangelicalism was not destroyed by what it taught but by what it tolerated.

*Les Ollila
Chancellor
Northland Baptist Bible College*

Text: (I Kings 12:1-24)

Then Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king.² Now it came about when Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard of it, that he was living in Egypt (for he was yet in Egypt, where he had fled from the presence of King Solomon).³ Then they sent and called him, and Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam, saying,⁴ "Your father made our yoke hard; now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you."⁵ Then he said to them, "Depart for three days, then return to me." So the people departed.⁶ And King Rehoboam consulted with the elders who had served his father Solomon while he was still alive, saying, "How do you counsel me to answer this people?"⁷ Then they spoke to him, saying, "If you will be a servant to this people today, will serve them, grant them their petition, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever."⁸ But he forsook the counsel of the elders which they had given him, and consulted with the young men who grew up with him and served him.⁹ So he said to them, "What counsel do you give that we may answer this people who have spoken to me, saying, 'Lighten the yoke which your father put on us?'"¹⁰ And the young men who grew up with him spoke to him, saying, "Thus you shall say to this people who spoke to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, now you make it lighter for us!' But you shall speak to them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's loins!¹¹ Whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.'"¹² Then Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day as the king had directed, saying, "Return to me on the third day."¹³ And the king answered the people harshly, for he forsook the advice of the elders which they had given him,¹⁴ and he spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, saying, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions."¹⁵ So the king did not listen to the people; for it was a turn of events from the LORD, that He might establish His word, which the LORD spoke through Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.¹⁶ When all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying, "What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse; To your tents, O Israel! Now look after your own house, David!" So Israel departed to their tents.¹⁷ But as for the sons of Israel who lived in the

cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. ¹⁸ Then King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was over the forced labor, and all Israel stoned him to death. And King Rehoboam made haste to mount his chariot to flee to Jerusalem. ¹⁹ So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day. ²⁰ And it came about when all Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, that they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. None but the tribe of Judah followed the house of David. ²¹ Now when Rehoboam had come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin, 180,000 chosen men who were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. ²² But the word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, ²³ "Speak to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all the house of Judah and Benjamin and to the rest of the people, saying, ²⁴ "Thus says the LORD, "You must not go up and fight against your relatives the sons of Israel; return every man to his house, for this thing has come from Me."'" So they listened to the word of the LORD, and returned and went their way according to the word of the LORD.

Historical Background:

Rehoboam's unreasonable response to the counsel of wise men after assuming the throne caused a split in the kingdom. Jeroboam became the king of the newly created Northern Kingdom. Jeroboam was given assurances from God that blessing would follow loyal obedience. However, rather than trust in God, he devised a deviant worship designed to protect his own self-interest and keep the heart of the people from returning to the Southern Kingdom. Consequently, he became the source of Israel's departure into idolatry and it all started with an innovation of the true worship system given by Yahweh to Israel. It started with a "new and improved worship" designed with a particular objective in mind that was different from the objective God had designed for the worship of Israel.

Deviant worship destroyed ancient Israel after time and so it will be with any generation of believers who engage in deviant worship. The problem with deviant worship is that it does not appear to be so deviant on the surface.

Would you recognize deviant worship if you saw it? The question is an important one for those who have been given the responsibility for protecting the flock of God. We must learn to recognize deviant worship when it appears and for this reason God has given us some amazing information about not just what deviant worship looks like but even more importantly, what are the underlying motives that drive it.

I. The Characteristic Marks of Deviant Worship

Over 20 times in Kings alone, Jeroboam is described as having caused or made Israel to sin by leading them into a deviant worship.

Just as David became the positive standard by which subsequent kings were measured in the southern kingdom of Judah, Jeroboam, “who caused Israel to sin,” became the negative standard by which subsequent Kings were measured.

For two centuries, up until the nation’s departure into captivity and slavery, Israel continued down the course set by Jeroboam. When leaders deviate from Biblical standards and pollute the true worship of God, it may take decades or centuries to cleanse the corruption, if it even can be done. Sometimes judgment on the house of God is the only solution. The patterns we establish will set the standards for the generations after us.

How is deviant worship initiated among God’s people? Why does it happen? How can you recognize it? What are its results? This passage is designed by God to warn all His people throughout every age about the danger of departing from true worship.

This passage contains at least five characteristics of deviant worship.

A. It Transgresses Biblical Absolutes regarding our worship of God

The king took counsel, and made two calves of gold (12:28)

The test of Biblical worship is not sincerity alone (“in spirit”). Biblical worship is also measured by its conformity to God’s absolutes (“in truth”).

Deviant worship may violate God’s absolutes in one of three ways:

1. It may be worship of a false god (Exodus 20:3; 34:14).

This violation of the first commandment is the most extreme and easiest to detect.

2. It may be worship of the true God in a wrong way (Exodus 20:4-6; cf. Lev. 19:1-3).

This is a violation of the second commandment. Jeroboam did not introduce the worship of Baal (that was Ahab’s doing) or any particular false god. Like Israel’s first golden-calf sin in the wilderness (Ex 32:4-6), it was a perversion of the worship of Jehovah.

3. It may be worship of the true God with a wrong attitude (Prov 15:8; 21:27; 28:9)

Cain (Gen 4), the evil sons of Eli (1 Sam 2), and the priests of Israel addressed in Malachi exemplify this type of violation for God's standards of the worship of Jehovah.

Worship and ministry today are not often derived from Biblical absolutes, even in evangelical circles. Thumb through most modern books on ministry, and you will find little reference to Biblical principles of ministry, if any. Instead, principles from business, marketing, management, psychology, athletics, and public opinion polls steer most modern philosophies of ministry and church growth. Many object that there is little explicit direction from the New Testament about church worship. The truth is, there is far more than is usually acknowledged.²

- B. It is Based on an Appeal to Man's Convenience and Appetites

"Jeroboam said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. . . And he set the one (calf) in Bethel (in the south), and the other put he in Dan (in the north). (12:28-29)

God had established Jerusalem as the place He would put His name and bless with His presence. He had commanded His people to go there, and there alone, for worship three times a year – another biblical absolute. The people were now offered a more convenient opportunity for worship, along with the encouragement of their leader. But it was a deviation from a divine absolute and a pattern.

The driving philosophy in church ministry today is unabashed pragmatism. Many churches' most popular meetings are Friday or Saturday night alternative services. They are a more convenient substitute for the Lord's day. They appeal to the appetite by offering the opportunity to "get it out of the way" at a more convenient time, freeing up Sunday for recreation.

The New Testament focus on the uniqueness of the first day of the week, the Lord's day, is unmistakable. Equally unmistakable is the New Testament pattern of the purpose in the church's coming together (the apostle's doctrine, fellowship, the Lord's supper, and prayer Acts 2:42). Central to the New Testament worship is not "me and my little need" but

² Dr. Minnick includes a number of relevant applications here and elsewhere in his original message. Due to the constraints of time and space regrettably I have had to edit his material for the purposes of this class. Among the issues he addresses are music, reverence, and the centrality of preaching. I would strongly urge you to refer to the printed version of the sermon in Frontline for the full impact of his application.

God Himself. A deviant worship is characterized by a concerted effort to shape itself to the appetites and conveniences of the people, rather than by a concern to conform itself to the priorities and patterns of the Word of God.

C. It Justifies itself by misapplying Scripture

Jeroboam said unto them, behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt (12:28)

Incredibly, Jeroboam appealed to the very words recorded in Exodus 32:4 as a justification and example for what he was doing – words which actually sounded the sternest possible warning against what he was proposing! Much that passes for worship today is justified from passages that teach exactly the opposite.

D. It Disregards Scriptural Qualification for Ministers

Jeroboam made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of people, which were not of the sons of Levi (1 Kings 12:31; cf. 13:33-34)

Jeroboam needed priests to administer this worship, but many of the Levites had fled from the Northern Kingdom and settled in Judah. Consequently, he took anyone who was willing, and did not insist that he be a Levite – again in direct disregard to yet another Biblical absolute.

Few today have scruples over ministerial standards. Many argue that external appearances, such as those listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, are unimportant. All that matters is internal character and sincerity. Are we wiser than God? We can judge internal character only by external actions. The Biblical standards for ministry are not designed to determine who is worthy of the ministry (no one is), but to insure his credibility with those to whom he ministers.

We have thrown out every external symbol and qualification under the guise of giving the benefit of the doubt to men's hearts. Consequently, modern American Christianity is riddled with men in the ministry who are, often by their own admission, primarily showmen or entertainers, preachers who are openly covetous, who are doctrinally suspect or who outrightly deny fundamental truth, who are divorced and remarried, who have been adulterous and restored, or who are openly homosexual. Any criticism of such men is decried as legalistic and judgmental, despite their blatant disregard of Biblical absolutes regarding God's ministers.

E. It Devises Innovations on Biblical Patterns

*And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, **like unto the feast that is in Judah**, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves **he had made**: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which **he had made**. So he offered upon the altar which **he had made in Bethel** the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month **which he had devised of his own heart**; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel (12:32-33)*

The purpose of or worship will drive the means and the methods we choose. What is the Biblical purpose of genuine worship of the true God? Someone has penned that the design of worship is “to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God; to feed the mind with the truth of God; to purge the imagination by the beauty of God; to open the heart to the love of God; and to devote the will to the purpose of God.”

May God help us recognize and reject deviant worship and in our private and corporate worship, to pursue Him alone with a pure heart.

II. **The Underlying Motives of Deviant Worship**

“You can’t judge people’s motives!” A frequent and familiar protest. But not an entirely accurate one. We are all aware of the difficulty of discerning motives and the danger of judging them. But what if we do not need to surmise or speculate? What if we *know* the motivations behind an act or a decision because those who are involved *tell* us why they are doing what they are doing?

Scripture is filled with the examples of assessing and judging not only actions but also motives *when they are revealed and known*. You have to be very careful about judging motives when they are unknown or undeclared. But the same passage that outlines certain characteristics of deviant worship also reveals its motives, holding them up for our scrutiny and for our instruction.

***1 Kings 12:26** And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: ²⁷ If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.*

A. It is Motivated by a Fear of the Consequences of a right course of Action

How many of us have had a direct revelation from God predicting our future? Jeroboam did. Take a moment to read 1 Kings 11:26-40, and you will discover that the prophet Ahijah told Jeroboam explicitly that God would divide the kingdom, give him ten tribes, and – if he obeyed God and walked faithfully in His ways – bless him with a dynasty just like David’s.

In chapter 12, Jeroboam saw the exact fulfillment of what the Lord had promised through Ahijah. But despite all that, he still feared what could, from a purely human perspective, reasonably be expected to happen if he pursued a right course of action.

So, deviant worship is motivated by fear. But what is at the root of a fear that leads people to disobey, even in the face of explicit promises from God to the contrary?

B. It is Motivated by Unbelief

Jeroboam’s motivation in establishing and encouraging a deviant worship, out of fear, can be summed up in one word: unbelief.

Not outright unbelief in God, but unbelief in the trustworthiness of God’s word. God told Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:38) that if he would walk in God’s ways, He would guarantee his reign and establish a dynasty for him just as He had for David. Jeroboam was unconvinced.

Anxious that religious unity at Jerusalem would heal the division of the kingdom, he concocted his own plan to safeguard his power and position: the creation of new sites and distinctive rites of worship.

The new worship had to incorporate certain elements of the old worship or it wouldn’t be accepted; but it also had to introduce innovations that would be exciting and stimulating and would seem to be superior to the old ways.

The new worship had to be represented as having its roots in the people’s religious past; at the same time, there had to be distinctive, novel elements that would differentiate the new worship from the old so that the people would be attracted to it.

When God give people His Word and they deviate from it, at the root of that deviation is unbelief. This was the case with Eve in the garden. It is still the case today every time we deviate from the revealed Word of God.

When you hear someone say, “If you continue doing this – and the “this” is biblical – it will mean your failure and demise,” that is the voice of unbelief. Hasn’t God promised certain things to people who do right? Hasn’t God promised for instance, that when a faithful prophet or preacher or teacher or witness utters His words, they will not return to Him empty (Isa. 55:11)? Only unbelief fears the failure of Biblical preaching that heralds the truth of God’s word without apology or admixture.

Where does such fear and unbelief come from, especially in a people who ought to know better? Fear and unbelief are the by-products of a defective theology.

C. It is Motivated by a Defective Theology

The real problem is not all the strange things people are doing today in the name of worshipping God. The real problem is this: what kind of theology permits people to justify such aberrations?

What kind of a view of God makes people think that God would be pleased with such blatant deviations from His word?

Deviant worship, and the fear and unbelief that motivates it, is the result of a deficient view of who God is, what He is like, and what He requires. Regardless of how sincere some of it may be, at the bottom of much of what is taking place in contemporary American Christianity is a defective theology.

Imagine addressing the National Association of Evangelicals at length and pointing out to them that they have jettisoned theology and that the cure is to return to the Bible, but never once citing a single verse of Scripture. That is precisely what David Wells, a new-evangelical professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, did less than three years ago in an address titled, “The Bleeding of the Evangelical Church.” The address is excellent – as far as it goes. But it is Exhibit A of the problem.

How do you appeal to the need for Christians to return to the Bible without citing a single passage from the Bible for your substantiation or authority? Even in groping toward the Scripture for the solutions to its problems, mainline evangelicalism cannot seem to bring itself to return and submit to the Bible’s authority in practice, not just in lip service.

This has not been an overnight development, but a long-term process. Even the evangelicals who see the problem are saturated with the thinking that led to the problem in the first place – thinking that turns to human reasoning and marketing psychology rather than to the Scripture. So they give addresses and write books exposing the problem and calling on a

return to the Bible as the only solution; yet rarely will they appeal to the conclusive authority of the Word of the Lord.

Addressing the elders of the Ephesian church (Acts 20:17-35), the apostle Paul warned them of wolves from without. But he also cautioned them that some would rise up even from their own midst who would begin teaching 'perverse things, to draw away disciples after them' (v. 30). The word 'perverse' refers to something that is twisted or distorted.

Such people do not bring by teaching totally outlandish and absurd things. Rather, they take a truth or principle or passage of Scripture as their basis, but then twist and distort it from its original intent so as to give an appearance of legitimacy to their position or practice – just as Jeroboam did when he cited Exodus 32 to justify his deviant worship.

How can you identify such teachers and preachers? For one thing, the positions and practices they propose will be characterized by the marks of deviant worship outlined above.

Conclusion:

May the Lord help us to examine our own motivations; may He give us discernment to perceive and weigh Biblically the philosophies that drive the bulk of modern American Christianity; and may He preserve us from falling prey to the elements of a deviant worship.