

Gospel Worship



Gospel Worship

or

The Right Manner of Sanctifying
the Name of God in General

and particularly in these three great ordinances:

1. Hearing the Word
2. Receiving the Lord's Supper
3. Prayer

by **JEREMIAH BURROUGHS**

*Gospel preacher to two of the greatest congregations
in England: Stepney and Cripplegate*



Edited by Dr. Don Kistler



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. . . for instruction in righteousness . . .

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THE LIFE OF
Jeremiah Burroughs

(1599–1646)

*T*his very amiable divine was born in the year 1599. He was forced to leave the university, and afterwards the kingdom, on account of his non-conformity. After he later finished his studies at the university, he entered the ministerial work and was chosen colleague to Edmund Calamy at Bury St. Edmunds. In 1631 he became rector of Tivetshal in the county of Norfolk, but upon the publication of Bishop Wren's articles and injunctions, in 1636 he was suspended and deprived of his living. He sheltered himself for some time under the hospitable roof of the Earl of Warwick, but, on account of the intolerant and oppressive proceedings of the ecclesiastical rulers, the noble Earl, at length, found it was impossible to protect him any longer. Shortly after, to escape the fire and persecution, he fled to Holland and settled at Rotterdam, where he was chosen teacher to the congregational church of which Mr. William Bridge was the pastor.

Upon his arrival, he was cordially received by the church, and continued to be a zealous and faithful laborer for several years, gaining a very high reputation among the people. After the commencement of the civil war, when the power of the bishops was set aside, he returned to England, says Granger's *Biographical History*, "not to preach sedition, but peace, for which he earnestly prayed and labored."

Mr. Burroughs was a highly honored and esteemed person, and he soon became a most popular and admired preacher.

After his return, his popular talents and great worth presently excited public attention, and he was chosen preacher to the congregations of Stepney and Cripplegate, London, then accounted two of the largest congregations in England. Mr. Burroughs preached at Stepney at seven o'clock in the morning, and William Greenhill at three in the afternoon. These two persons, stigmatized by the historian Anthony Wood as notorious schismatics and independents, were called by Mr. Hugh Peters, one "the morning star," the other "the evening star of Stepney."

Mr. Burroughs was chosen to be one of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, and was one of the dissenting brethren, but a divine of great wisdom and moderation. He united with his brethren, Messrs. Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, William Bridge, and Sydrach Sympson, in publishing their own "Apologetical Narration" in defense of their own distinguishing sentiments. The authors of this work, who had been exiles for religion, to speak in their own language, "...consulted the Scriptures without any prejudice. They considered the Word of God as impartially as men of flesh and blood are likely to do, in any juncture of time; the place they went to, the condition they were in, and the company they were with, affording no temptation to any bias."

They asserted that every church or congregation has sufficient power within itself for the regulation of religious government, and is subject to no external authority whatever. The principles upon which they founded their church government were to confine themselves in everything to what the Scriptures prescribed, without paying any attention to the opinions or practices of men; nor to tie themselves down too strictly to their present resolutions, so as to leave no room for alterations upon a further acquaintance with divine truth. They steered a middle course between Presbyterianism and Brownism: the former they accounted too arbitrary, the latter too rigid, deviating from the spirit and simplicity of the gospel.

These are the great principles of the Independents of the present day.

Richard Baxter, who knew his great worth, said, "If all the Episcopalians had been like Archbishop Ussher, all the Presbyterians like Stephen Marshall, and all the Independents like Jeremiah Burroughs, the breaches of the church would soon have been healed." The last subject on which Burroughs preached was his *Irenicum*, an attempt to heal the divisions among Christians. This title has been published by Soli Deo Gloria Publications. His incessant labors, and his grief for the distractions of the times, are said to have hastened his end. He died of tuberculosis on November 14, 1646, at the age of 47. The historian Granger says, "he was a man of learning, candor, and modesty, and of an exemplary and irreproachable life." Thomas Fuller has classed him among the learned writers of Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Williams's *Christian Preacher* says that his *Exposition of Hosea* is a pleasing specimen, to show how the popular preachers of his time applied the Scriptures in their expository discourses to the various cases of their hearers. He published several of his writings while he lived, and his friends sent forth many others after his death, most of which were highly esteemed by all pious Christians.

THE WORKS OF
Jeremiah Burroughs

1. Moses' Choice, 1641
2. *Sion's Joy*, a sermon preached to the Honorable House of Commons, at their public Thanksgiving, September 7, 1641
3. *An Exposition of the Prophecy of Hosea*, 1643
4. *The Lord's Heart Opened*, 1643
5. *Irenicum*, to the Lovers of Truth and Peace, 1646
6. *Two Treatises*: the first of Earthly-mindedness; the second of *Conversing in Heaven and Walking with God*, 1649
7. *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, 1650
8. *Gospel Worship*, 1650
9. *Gospel Conversation*, 1650
10. *The Evil of Evils, or the Exceeding Sinfulness of Sin*, 1654
11. *The Saints' Treasury*, 1654
12. *Three Treatises*: of Hope, of Faith, and of the Saints' Walk by Faith, 1655
13. *Gospel Reconciliation, or Christ's Trumpet of Peace*, 1655
14. *The Saints' Happiness*, 1660
15. *A Treatise of Holy Courage in Evil Times*, 1661
16. *Gospel Remission, or, True Blessedness consists in Pardon of Sin*, 1661
17. *Four Useful Discourses*, 1675

(Adapted from Benjamin Brook's *Lives of the Puritans*, Volume 3, pages 18–25)

SERMON I

The Introduction

“Then Moses said unto Aaron, it is what the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.”

LEVITICUS 10:3

*T*hese words are the speech of Moses to Aaron, his brother, endeavoring to quiet and comfort his heart, which was (no question) exceedingly troubled by the great and sore affliction that was upon him in the strange death of his two sons, Nadab and Abihu. The story is this: after Aaron's sons were consecrated to the priestly office, coming to attend their office the very first day after their consecration to offer incense to God, they ventured to offer incense with strange fire, with other fire than God had appointed. Upon that, the fire of God's wrath broke out upon them and slew them both presently in that very sanctuary before all the people. It was a solemn time, being the beginning of the solemn consecration of the priesthood. Upon this, the spirit of Aaron could not but be exceedingly troubled to see his two sons thus struck. Now Moses came to him and said, “This is what the Lord spoke, ‘I will be sanctified in them that draw nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified.’” And upon this, Aaron held his peace.

We read that once fire came down from heaven in a way of mercy to consume the sacrifices, but now fire came down

from heaven in a way of judgment, to consume the sacrificers, Nadab and Abihu. They were Aaron's sons, the sons of a godly man, the sons of the high priest. They were his eldest sons; for Aaron had other sons besides Nadab and Abihu. He also had Eleazer and Ithamar; but these were his eldest sons. They were two young men, struck in the very prime of their age. They were two who were newly consecrated in the priest's office, for so you find in the ninth chapter. They were two men of renown in the country and before all the people of Israel, two men whom God had greatly honored before, as you shall find in the beginning of Exodus 24.

Nadab and Abihu were men of great reputation and great renown whom God had honored in former times. When God called Moses and Aaron to come up to Him with the elders, He singled out Nadab and Abihu among the rest and named them. He said, "Come up unto the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel." Moses and Aaron, and Nadab and Abihu alone are named, and then seventy of the elders in general; but Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu are specifically named, as if these were the four eminent men of renown among all the people of Israel. He named none of the seventy elders but these two, besides Moses and Aaron. Therefore, these two who were consumed by strange fire were renowned men and newly consecrated into their office.

QUESTION. What was their sin?

ANSWER. Their sin was in offering strange fire, for the text says that they offered strange fire that God had not commanded them. But had God ever forbidden it? Where do we find that God had ever forbidden them to offer strange fire, or appointed that they should offer only one kind of fire? There is no text of Scripture that you can find from the beginning of Genesis to

this place where God had said in so many words expressly, "You shall offer no fire but one kind of fire." And yet here they are consumed by fire from God for offering strange fire.

I find in Exodus 30:9 that they were forbidden to offer strange incense, but I do not find that they were forbidden to offer strange fire. In Leviticus 6:13, and divers verses in that chapter, we find that God had appointed that they should constantly keep the fire on the altar burning and never let it go out. It seems that it was God's intention that they should make use of that fire and that fire only. God would have them to pick out His meaning. God sent fire down from heaven upon the altar. In the latter end of the ninth chapter, God sent down fire from heaven and gave them a charge to keep that fire on the altar constantly and to never let it go out. So it seems that God would have them pick out His meaning, that because He had sent down fire from heaven upon the altar and gave them power to keep it constantly, God would have them understand therefore that what incense or sacrifice He would have them use should be only that fire and no other. It should be noted, though, that God never did say to them directly in these words, "You shall make use of this fire and no other," but God would have them to understand this. That's their sin, therefore, in offering strange fire.

Now fire came from the Lord and consumed them. Some think that this fire came from the altar, but surely it could not be any ordinary fire that consumed Nadab and Abihu at this time; for you find in the next verse that the bodies of Nadab and Abihu were not consumed by the fire. No, nor their clothes either. They were killed by the fire, and yet their clothes were whole. Therefore it was not an ordinary fire. It was some celestial fire that struck them and slayed them, for so the text says in verse 4: "Come near; carry away our brethren from before the

sanctuary out of the camp; and so they went and carried them in their coats out of the camp.” So their clothes and bodies were not consumed, yet they were killed by the fire. They were struck with a sudden death, and that in the presence of the Lord, such a death as God had never threatened in the Word before.

God had never threatened the priests and said, “If you offer strange fire, you shall be consumed by fire,” but God smote them with death by fire. They did not have time to seek God, no, not so much (as we used to say) as to say, “Lord, have mercy on me.” They had no time to promise amendment at all.

Now upon this heavy judgment, the heart of Aaron could not possibly be anything but very troubled; yea, and the spirit of Moses too, for Moses was their uncle. They could not but be exceedingly grieved. But Moses, being the brother of Aaron, and seeing that his spirit (no question) was exceedingly troubled, being under such a sad affliction, and that such a godly man as Aaron was should have such a sad judgment befall his children, Moses came and spoke comfortably to him and labored to support his spirit.

How did he do it? He did not come as you ordinarily used to visit your brethren: “Oh! You must be content with this!” No, but he came and applied the Word of God, and showed how God must be sanctified. And by that, he came to quiet the heart of his brother, Aaron. “This is that which the Lord has spoken,” Moses said. He sought to stay the heart of his brother with that which God spoke.

QUESTION. But where do we find that God spoke this?

ANSWER. It’s hard to find in any Scripture these words before this time; and therefore Augustine thinks it was only the word God had spoken, but not written. And so they had it from hand to hand by tradition as they did many other things, like the

prophecy of Enoch that the Apostle Jude speaks of. You do not find it written in the Book of God, and yet the apostle speaks of it; so that indeed it was from hand to hand. Yes, and we find it in the New Testament also. Paul speaks of a thing that Christ was to have said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." You do not find it recorded in the gospels that Christ said so. So this is that which the Lord said, though it was not written from the beginning of Genesis to this very place. Otherwise, though it is not recorded in expressed terms, yet something is recorded to the same purpose and effect. It may seem to have reference to Exodus 29:43. There we have a Scripture which comes as near to it as any I know of, "...there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory." That's as much as saying, "I will be sanctified by those who come near Me. In those who come to worship Me in My tabernacle, I will be sanctified in all things that concern My worship. I will be sure to be sanctified there."

"I will be sanctified," that is, "I will be hallowed." It is the very same word that you have in the Lord's Prayer, "Hallowed be thy name," only that's the Greek word and this is the Hebrew. But if you would translate this into Greek, you must translate it by the same that Christ spoke when He taught His disciples to pray, "Hallowed be thy name." Hallowed and sanctified are all one. "Lord, let Thy name appear to be holy."

"I will be sanctified," that is, "I will have My name appear to be holy. I will make known unto My people, and to all the world, that I am a holy God." That's the meaning of "I will be sanctified." I will be known to all the world as a holy God.

"And before all the people I will be glorified." So it is in the latter part of the verse. It is as if God should say, "I account it to be My glory that I should be manifested to be holy before all the world."

“I will be sanctified,” that is, “I will have My people to demean and carry themselves so as to hold forth their acknowledgment of My holiness, so that, by their behavior, I may appear to be a holy God. I will be sanctified by them, or otherwise, if they shall not in an active way sanctify My name, that is, if they shall not demean themselves so as to hold forth the glory of My holiness, then I will be sanctified upon them. I will demean and carry Myself towards them so that by My actions upon them I will make it appear what a holy God I am.”

So God is sanctified in two ways. One is by the holiness of His people in their conduct towards Him, holding forth the glory of God’s holiness. So you have it in 1 Peter 3:15: “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.” The saints sanctify God in their hearts when they fear God as a holy God, and reverence Him and love Him as a holy God. They sanctify Him in their lives when their lives hold forth the glory of God’s holiness. Then God is sanctified.

But then, if we do not do so, God sanctifies Himself in ways of judgment upon those who do not sanctify His name in ways of holiness. Thus you have it in Ezekiel 28:22: “And say, thus saith the Lord God, Behold I am against thee, O Sidon, and I will be glorified in the midst of thee, and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall have executed judgment in her, and shall be sanctified in her.” This is all one with “I will be glorified in the midst of them.” And in Ezekiel 38:16 and 23 you have verses to the same purpose: “And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days: and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes” (verse 16). “Thus will I magnify myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the Lord” (verse 23). In the way of

the execution of judgment, thus I will sanctify myself, so I will be sanctified in those that draw nigh unto me.”

“In those that come nigh me,” that is, especially the priests who approach God (Ezekiel 42:13). They approach God especially, but it is meant generally of all those who deal in God’s worship. “Whosoever shall come to Me, let them look to it. They must sanctify My name; they must so demean themselves in My worship as to hold forth My name to be holy. Otherwise, I will manifest Myself against them in the ways of judgment; for I will appear to be a holy God. I will have the glory of My holiness in one way or another from those who come near Me.”

It is as if God should say, “Though it’s otherwise with men, they indeed will be ready to favor those who are near them. But I will not do so.”

Men will sooner pass by the offences of those near them than those who are not. Suppose that a stranger were to commit an offense. You would be severe towards him. But suppose that it were one of your own children or kinsmen; what would you do then? Do we not see that men will rather favor their own kindred than strangers, though the offense is the same? “But I will not do so,” says God.

Suppose it is one of your own family. Will you not be ready to excuse them? Suppose it were your own child who should commit such an offense. Oh, what friends would you make to take him off of punishment? Though men would do so towards their own, yet be bitter and severe towards strangers, it will not be so with God. “Let those who are near to Me look to it. I will be sanctified by them. I will be sanctified in those who draw near to Me.”

Now when Moses said that God would be sanctified in those who draw near Him, it was as if he had said, “Aaron, though I confess that the hand of God is heavy upon you this day, yet it

is fitting for you to submit to God. It is fitting that God should be glorified, whatever becomes of you. You are dear to God, but God's name is dearer to Him than you are. Whatever the lives of your sons were, yet it is fitting that God should be honored and His name sanctified, whatever becomes of your sons or your comforts—therefore, let your heart be quieted. You have had a great loss and affliction upon you, but God has had glory. God has glorified Himself.”

“How has God glorified Himself? Very much by this way, for God, by this way, has done an act to make all the people of the land fear Him, to cause them to worship Him with all reverence. All the people of the land, seeing such a judgment as this and hearing of it, will learn forever to fear and reverence this God. They will say, ‘How shall we appear before this holy God? We need to take heed in His presence and worship Him according to the way that He would be worshipped.’” It is as if Moses had said, “This honor that God has by this means in the hearts of His people, you should account it a greater good than the lives of your children, whatever they are.” This is the scope of Moses' speech to Aaron.

Now upon this, the text says, “Aaron held his peace.” He was silenced. It may be that before this he was expressing himself in grief and sorrowing much in words; but now he was quiet and had nothing to say. He, by his silence, acknowledged that his children were dear to him, but that it was fitting that God should be glorified whatever becomes of his children. And therefore, Aaron held his peace.

But the word that is translated “held his peace” has more in it than mere silence, for the Hebrews have another word to signify mere silence of speech. This signifies a staying of the heart, so that it does not proceed in any trouble of spirit, a

silence in the very heart. It is a staying of it, a staying of the motions of the heart.

I find the same word to be used in Scripture when Joshua said to the sun, “Stand still; stay thyself on Gibeon” (Joshua 10:12). It is the same word that is here translated, “and Aaron held his peace.” That is, he was stayed from further vexing or troubling himself, from being disquieted. Whereas his heart was in a strong, violent motion, Moses’ speech stopped him, and stopped his heart so as to make it stand still in a wonderful manner, as the sun did when Joshua spoke to it and it stood still. It is as if the Lord had said to his heart, “Aaron, your heart is in a mighty strong motion; but consider that I must be sanctified in those who draw near Me. So let all those motions of your heart be stopped and be quiet.”

Thus you see the meaning and scope of the Scripture. In this Scripture you have these three special and notable points:

1. In worshipping God, there is a drawing nigh unto Him.
2. When we draw nigh to God, we should take heed to ourselves that we sanctify God’s name.
3. If we do not sanctify God’s name in our drawing nigh to Him, then certainly God will sanctify His own name upon us.

These are the three points that I intend to handle, and the second especially I intend to handle at length among you. I confess that upon another occasion, in one sermon, I have spoken out on these words; but now I intend not only in general to show you how you should sanctify God’s name in worship, but likewise in the particular acts of worship, such as sanctifying His name in prayer, in receiving the Sacrament, in hearing the Word, in the several chief parts of worship how His name should be sanctified. In all these you draw nigh unto God. And for that end, I have pitched my thoughts upon this Scripture.

But before I come to these three great points, the principal points in the words read to you, I shall take up twenty observations that are scattered, as it were, that are of great use, and will help us further to make use of this Scripture in the other points that I shall come to afterwards and more largely.

1. In God's worship, there must be nothing tendered up to God but what He has commanded. Whatsoever we meddle with in the worship of God must be what we have a warrant for out of the Word of God. This speech of Moses' is upon the occasion of the judgment of God upon Aaron's sons for offering strange fire. They offered fire that God had not commanded. Hence I say that all things in God's worship must have a warrant out of God's Word. It must be commanded; it's not enough that it is not forbidden. I beseech you to observe it. It is not enough that a thing is not forbidden, and you cannot see what harm there is in it. But it must be commanded. I confess that in matters that are civil and natural this may be enough. If it is according to the rules of prudence and not forbidden in the Word, we may make use of this in civil and natural things. But when we come to matters of religion and the worship of God, we must either have a command, or something out of God's Word drawn from some command, wherein God manifests His will, either by a direct command, or by comparing one thing with another, or drawing consequences plainly from the words.

We must have a warrant for the worship of God. One would have thought that these priests were offering incense to the true God, so what harm was there in taking other fire? But there was no command for it, and therefore it was not accepted. It's true that there are some things in the worship of God that are natural and civil helps; and there we do not need to have a command. For instance, when we come to worship God the

congregation meets. They must have a convenient place to keep the air and weather from them. Now this is only a natural help, and so far as I use the place of worship as a natural help, I need have no command. But if I put anything in a place beyond what it has in its own nature, there I must look for a command; for if I account one place more holy than another, or think that God should accept worship in one place rather than another, this is to raise it above what it is in its own nature.

So when any creature is raised in a religious way above what it has in it by nature, if I do not have Scripture to warrant me, I am therein superstitious. It is a very useful rule to help you. If any creature that you make use of in a way of religion beyond what it has in its own nature, if you do not have some warrant from the Word of God (whatever specious a show there may be in it), it is superstition.

There was a place that was holy, but it had an institution from God. As for garments, to use those that are decent, the light of reason is enough. But if I put anything upon them beyond what there is in them in their own nature, as has been done with a surplice, does that have any more decency in its own nature, or was it not only man's institution? Now when man shall put a religious respect upon a thing by virtue of his own institution, when he does not have a warrant from God, that is superstition! We must all be willing worshippers, but not will-worshippers.

We must come freely to worship God, but we must not worship God according to our own wills. Therefore, whatever we do in the worship of God, if we do not have a warrant for it, when this is said, "Who required this at your hands?" it will stop our mouths another day.

In Matthew 15:9 we read, "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." It is

a vain thing to worship God when there is nothing but a commandment of man for this worship. If you would worship God, you must have a commandment of God for the worship. And in Isaiah 29:13, there is a place to the same purpose that shows how the Lord is offended with any man who shall teach His fear by their own precepts: "Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precept of men."

Mark it. Now if this is so, may the Lord have mercy upon us in this thing. You have cause to be humbled, every one of you, I believe, in some degree of other; this congregation very much, and most other congregations that have had the fear of God taught them by the precepts of men.

How many things have there been in the worship of God that you can show no warrant for in the Word? A great many things are merely men's inventions. However, they are now cast out, because authority came and cast them out, and so you submitted to it. But that's not enough for you to submit to it because authority would have it so. You ought to be humbled before God for all your will-worship, for all your yielding to anything in the worship of God that was taught by the precepts of men.

You see how severe God was to Nadab and Abihu for just taking other fire than that which God had appointed, though there was no direct command against it. If the Lord has spared you and not manifested any displeasure upon you, you have cause to acknowledge God's mercy, and to be humbled for all your false worship. Certainly God expects this land to be humbled for its will-worship; otherwise we sow among thorns. All the reformation that is among us is meaningless if there is not a humiliation for all our false worship. It is not enough that

we now set up the true worship of God, but we must be humbled for our false worship. That's the first note: In the worship of God there must be nothing but what God commands.

2. In the matter of worship, God stands upon little things. Some things may seem to be very small and little to us, yet God stands much upon them in the matter of worship; for there is nothing wherein the prerogative of God more appears than in worship. Princes stand much upon their prerogatives. Now God has written the law of natural worship in our hearts. But there are other things in the worship of God that are not written in our hearts, that only depend upon the will of God revealed in His Word, which would not be duties except that they are revealed in His Word. And these are of such a nature that we can see no reason for them except that God would have them so. For example, there are many kinds of ceremonies to manifest the honor to princes, that have no reason at all but merely because it is a civil institution so appointed. So God would have some ways of honoring Himself that the creature may not see a reason for but merely that it is the will of God to have them so.

God stands much upon little things, though men would think it a little matter whether they use this fire or that fire. Men will say, "Will not this burn as well as that?" But God stands on it. And so it was for the ark. Uzzah did but touch the ark when it was ready to fall. Now we would think it to be no great matter; but one touch of the ark cost him his life. There is not any one small thing in the worship of God but God stands mightily upon it.

In the matter of the Sabbath, that's His worship. For a poor man to gather a few sticks, what great matter is it? But God stands upon it. And so when the men of Beth-shemesh did

but look upon the ark, it cost 50,070 men their lives. If it is a matter of a holy thing that concerns His worship, He would not have it abused in anything. Let us learn to make conscience of little things in the worship of God and not to think, "Oh, how particular these people are about these small things!" You do not understand the nature of divine worship if you are not particular about it. God is particular, and stands upon little things in the matter of His worship.

3. There are no privileges or dignities of men that can secure them from God's stroke. First, Moses, the man of God, was their uncle. Aaron, that great instrument of God's glory, was their father. They were men who were newly consecrated to the priest's office. They were renowned, men who God put much glory upon; yet if they will venture to offend God in this little thing, God's wrath breaks out upon them and kills them presently. Let us take heed, then, of venturing, and do not think that any services that we have done heretofore can bear us out. If the greatest cannot be borne with all their privileges, how dare we poor worms venture upon the displeasure of God? You who are a worthless creature, of no use at all in the world, do you dare provoke this God, when the Lord is so angry with men who are of great use and service as to let out His wrath upon them suddenly?

If you should see a prince not spare his favorite or his nobles who are about him, but upon one offense (that we think is but a little offense) the prince's anger should be so much against them as to cost them their lives, what cause is there for poor people to tremble then when they have done that which may incur the anger of their prince? You see that all outward privileges and greatness will not excuse a man from the stroke of God's justice. They should not excuse anyone from the stroke of man's

justice. It's true that among men poor people go to prison if they offend; but if great men offend they escape. But it is not so with God, for Nadab and Abihu were great and renowned men.

4. The more the dignity of men is, the more is their danger if they do not look to it. This note I gather from hence, that Nadab and Abihu were the two eldest sons of Aaron; and we find in Scripture that Eleazer and Ithamar, the two other sons of Aaron, escaped and were not thus consumed. Why? Because the two elder sons had the dignity and privilege to come and offer the incense, and, having greater dignity than the younger, but not being careful to behave themselves as they ought to do, the Lord smote them and the younger two escaped.

And so, many times, those who are in a meaner condition escape while those who are in a higher condition are struck. Let men who are in a higher condition look to themselves, for their danger is greater. And you who are in a meaner condition, do not envy those who are in a higher one, for you may be more safe in that mean condition which you are in than they are in theirs.

5. The beginnings of things of high concern sometimes meet with great difficulties and interruptions. This note I gather from hence, that Nadab and Abihu were struck at the very beginning of their priesthood. Suppose that there was a new public office erected in a commonwealth that concerned the public good of the kingdom; and in the very first erecting of the office, some hideous accident took place that rang throughout the whole kingdom, as if God from heaven had done something against them in that office.

Suppose that the first time the judges were to come to the bench, God struck them dead from heaven at the very bench.

It would be a mighty matter to darken the glory and honor of that office. So one would think that it would have been a mighty matter to have darkened the glory and the honor of the priesthood. But God does not stand upon that. Many times the beginnings of great things are darkened by sad accidents; and therefore let us not be offended though we see some sad accidents fall out at the beginnings of great things, for though accidents fall out sadly at first, yet God may prosper it afterwards, as He did the priesthood.

6. Those who enter into public places, and especially such places as concern the worship of God, need to have the fear of God much upon them when they first enter into those places. This would be a very good point to preach to an audience of ministers. You see that the Lord smote Nadab and Abihu for this little miscarriage (as we would think) at their first consecration. But this note especially concerns ministers, and therefore I will pass over it.

7. God would have us all to pick out His mind from dark expressions in His Word. Though He does not express His will fully and in expressed terms, yet if there is anything in His Word whereby we may come to gather the mind of God, God expects that we should gather His mind out of His Word. If we do not, it's at our own peril.

OBJECTION. You will say, "How could they have known that it was God's mind that they should not offer any fire but that on the altar?"

ANSWER. They should have reasoned thus with themselves: "Has God let fire come down from heaven upon the altar, and has He commanded that it should be preserved on the altar

for His service? Surely this must be God's mind, then, that we should make use of this fire rather than any other fire."

God expects that they should have reasoned thus; but because they did not pick out God's mind by reasoning after this manner, therefore the hand of God came out upon them. They offended, and it may be that it was through ignorance, but it was at their peril. If they were ignorant of the mind of God when it might be known, though it was only darkly revealed and had to be picked out from several places compared together, it was at their peril.

It is a point that we have a great need for, for such is the vain heart of man that if there is anything that God would have that is not suitable to his own ends, he will stand wrangling and objecting against it. "How does it appear? Can you bring expressed Scripture for it? Bring me expressed Scripture in words to prove it and then I will believe it." And so he will stand out until you bring so many words of Scripture that forbid such a thing or command such a duty.

Now, brethren, if you are of the temper that you will forbear nothing, nor set up anything but what you have directly expressed words of Scripture for, you may run at your own peril into woeful dangers, into woeful sins. Know that God has so revealed a great part of His mind as it is only to be known by gathering one thing from another. And God expects this from you, that if upon examination of Scripture one thing appears more likely to be His mind and will than another, you are bound to go that way which is more likely.

I have told you before that in matters of worship we must have warrant from the Word; but it does not follow that we must have a direct, expressed warrant for everything. As it is many times in some kind of picture, the great art is in the cast of the looks. You cannot say it's in the drawing of this line or the

other line, but altogether. It is the cast of the looks that causes the beauty of the picture. So in the Scripture you cannot say that this one line or the other line proves it, but let them all be laid together and there will a kind of aspect of God's mind. We may see that this is the mind of God rather than the other, and we are bound to go that way.

Nadab and Abihu might have seen that they should rather have taken fire off the altar than any other fire, but they presumed because they did not have expressed words. You can see that it was to their peril. Oh, take heed of standing out and wrangling against what is required because you do not have expressed words! The Lord has laid things so, and especially in the New Testament, for the ordering of the church in the New Testament. You do not have expressed commands for an abundance of things, but sometimes you have an example in some things, and not always a clear example, either. But compare one thing with another, and that which seems to be nearest the mind of God should be enough of a bond to tie us to go according to what the mind of God seems most probably to be in the Scripture. A humble heart will soon be convinced when another man is not.

We find clearly that such things as are most suitable to men's own ends, a little matter will serve to persuade men to it, though one might argue against it. I could easily show it, but I do not think it is so convenient in the pulpit to meddle with such things as these are. Those things that are suitable to men's own ends and ways they will close with, but other things that cross the flesh, that are most opposed to looseness and would bring men most under the government of Christ, those things men stand out against. They must have clear and expressed words, expressed and clear warrant out of the Word in so many terms,

or otherwise by no means will they so much as yield to it. That's a point that, if God would but settle it upon our hearts, might be of very great use. A gracious heart will see the truth through a very little crevice. But it is marvelous to consider what a task it is to convince man of some part of God's will before he is humbled, and how easy it is to convince a man after he is humbled.

8. Sinners may meet with some judgments of God that were never threatened in His Word. God never threatened beforehand and said, "Whoever offers strange fire, I will consume them with fire from heaven." But they met with a judgment that was not threatened. Consider this: it may be that when we come and speak out of the Word and show you plainly how God threatens such and such sins, you are afraid then. But know that if you venture upon ways of sin, you may meet with dreadful judgments executed that were never yet threatened. Besides all those judgments that are threatened in the Book of God, you may meet with judgments unheard of, unexpected. As God's mercies go beyond what He has expressly revealed in His Word, "...for never was it heard since the beginning of the world what God has laid up for them that love Him," so God has judgments beyond what is in His Word.

Sometimes when the ministers of God open the threatenings that are in God's Word, you think that they are terrible; but know that God, in the treasury of His judgments, has more dreadful things than have ever been revealed in His Word. Therefore, learn to tremble not only at what is revealed in God's Word against your sin, but tremble at what there is in that infinite justice, power, and wisdom of God to find out and execute upon sinners. For you who are sinners, and especially if you are bold and presumptuous sinners, you may expect to meet with whatever evil an infinite wisdom is able to devise, and that an

infinite power is able to bring upon you. You commit such and such a sin. Perhaps you do not know of any particular judgment that is threatened against it, but think thusly: "I who provoke God by my sins, what may I look for? It is more than I know to the contrary but that whatsoever the infinite wisdom of God is able to find out, and whatever misery I am capable of, that the Lord may bring upon me." Consider this and take heed of sin.

9. God is very quick with some in the ways of His judgment. It may be that He may spare others for a long time, but concerning you He may say, "You shall not offend twice." If you will venture the first act, God may strike you with death. He did so here with Nadab and Abihu, for they were but newly consecrated. I find by the interpreters that they were to be in consecration for seven days, and this was the first day that they came to their place. And in the very first act that they did, God smote them. Let us tremble. The Lord is quick towards some and He is patient towards others; but do not presume that because He is patient towards others He will be patient with you. He may take you in the very first act of your sin and be quick with you.

10. The holiness of a duty will never bear a man out in the miscarriages of a duty. This was a holy duty. These were the true priests of God who came to offer incense to the true God. It was right incense that they offered. There was only this one miscarriage: they did not have the same fire that God would have them have. For this miscarriage God came upon them, and all the good there was in the duty would not bear them out.

Consider this, you who perform many holy duties. Take heed of giving way to yourselves in any miscarriage. Do not think that because your duties are very good and holy, by doing them you may venture upon a mixture. Take heed of mixing

any evil, any miscarriage in a holy thing. Though you have performed a thousand holy duties, yet that will not bear you out in the miscarriage of them.

11. The Lord is very terrible out of His holy places. The note is the same that you have in Psalm 68:35: "The Lord is terrible out of his holy places." When we have to deal with God, who can stand before this holy God? "Our God is a consuming fire." The Lord manifests Himself here most dreadfully to strike these two priests with fire, as in Ezekiel 9:6. "Begin at my sanctuary," says God. God is terrible, terrible towards those who shall dare to approach Him and yet are wicked or ungodly in their approaching. He is terrible to those who are near to Him. God would have us all to tremble at His presence.

12. God's judgments are often very suitable to men's sins. Here they sinned by fire and they were consumed by fire. They offended by strange fire and God struck them by a strange fire. Oftentimes the judgments of God are very suitable to the sins of men. As here it is by fire, so another time we find it by water. Pharaoh sinned by drowning the infants of the people of Israel in the waters, and God drowned him in the sea. "If you will be drowning by water, you shall have water enough," said God. And so here, "If you will be meddling with strange fire, you shall have strange fire," said God.

God many times proportions judgments to sinners so that His righteousness might more appear. Those very creatures we sin with, many times God makes them, or others of the same kind, to be the executioners of His wrath. So it was with the Jews. They sold Christ for thirty pieces of silver, and thirty of them were sold for a penny afterwards. Consider the story of Adonibezek in the first of Judges, who was so cruel in such a

way as to cut off the thumbs and toes of kings. Even so he was served in the like kind. It's ordinary for men who are of cruel, fiery spirits to meet with cruel, fiery spirits, too.

And I would apply it in this particular. You who are stout children with your parents, if God lets you live, you may meet with the very same in your children. And when you who are parents meet with stubborn children, you should reflect, "Does not God come righteously upon me?" And you who are servants, who are stout to your masters, when you come to have servants, they will be so to you. Perhaps you were unfaithful to your governors. When you come to have servants, it's a thousand to one that they will be so to you. Now you should strike your hand upon your heart and say, "It's just with God that it should be so, and that He should come upon me in my own kind."

13. They offered strange fire. Let's take heed, all of us, how we bring strange fire into God's service.

QUESTION. Bring strange fire into God's service, what is that?

ANSWER. I find divers writers speaking about this. Ambrose said that lusts and covetousness are this strange fire. That which I would have you consider is this: Above all strange fire, take heed of the strange fire of passion and anger, and especially in the worship of God. At any time when you find your hearts heated and fired with anger, when you are about to worship God, remember this Scripture. Nadab and Abihu were consumed by God, with fire from God, for coming into God's presence with strange fire!

Perhaps your hearts have been burning hot with passion when you have been coming into God's presence. You are to pray with fervency, for so the Scripture says. We are indeed to be heated in prayer by the Holy Ghost in our hearts, but

certainly not to come with the fire of passion and anger. “Lift up your hands without wrath and doubting.” If you have been passionate, and your hearts have been heated that way, be sure to get your hearts cold before you go to prayer. And so when you come to hear the Word, if your hearts have been heated with passion, be sure you get them cold before you come to hear the Word. “Receive with meekness the engrafted word that may save your souls.”

And so when you come to the Lord’s Supper, take heed of coming with wrath and malice, for then you come but to offer strange fire. It’s a special consideration for ministers who come to preach. They should take heed of bringing strange fire into their pulpits, that is, of venturing their own passions. I have been convinced of this rule since I knew anything of preaching. That man who is appointed to reveal God’s wrath needs to conceal his own. That’s certainly a rule for all preachers, for the Lord sends His preachers to make known His wrath against men’s sins; but the more they make known His wrath, the more they should conceal their own. And so by that means, when they come in the most open way to manifest God’s wrath, the more their preaching would be accepted.

Now it’s true that a carnal heart would be ready to think that when a preacher speaks out of true zeal to God, he will be ready to say that he is aiming at him. Take heed of that. I believe you have had but little occasion of such a temptation in this place. But however, this I know: it is the duty of the ministers of God to be sure to bring nothing but the fire of the Spirit of God, the fire that they have from the altar, their tongues being touched with one of these coals. They should not come with their own passions to further the righteousness of God. No, the wrath of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God.