

False Worship and Spiritual Adultery Ezekiel 6 & 11

From John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Twenty Chapters of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, trans. Thomas Myers (Edinburgh, Scotland: Calvin Translation Society, 1843), Vol. I, 222, 230-231, 293, 372-373, emphasis added; updated to modern American English.

True and False Worship

Ezekiel 6:4

“And your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken; and I will cast down your slain *men* before your idols.”

Hence it appears **how greatly obedience pleases God**, and how true it is that it is better than sacrifices (1 Samuel 15:22; 1 Kings 12). For it is certain that the *Israelites* extolled their own fictions exorbitantly, as if they were worshipping God correctly.

In the beginning, indeed, Jeroboam cunningly devised those new rites, that he might alienate the ten tribes from the family of David, and at length the error spread, so that they thought that God approved that impious worship. But we see that God abominates them. **We should always hold this principle, that although men think that they obey God when they thrust in their own fictions, yet they produce no other effect than to provoke the wrath of God against them.**

The nature of true repentance

Those who seriously repent do not acknowledge their fault lightly, but think within themselves in what ways, and how long, and how perversely, they have provoked God's wrath.

False worship is spiritual adultery.

Ezekiel 6:9

“And they that escape of you shall remember Me among the nations where they shall be carried captives, because I am broken with their whorish heart, which has departed from Me, and with their eyes, which go a whoring after their idols: and they shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations.”

He says, *Through their adulterous heart which departed from Me, and through their adulterous eyes after their idols.* This image occurs everywhere throughout the Prophets; and because I have often explained it, I now pass it slightly by.

For the superstitious are said to commit whoredom with their idols, that all idolatry may be rendered more detestable. For those who adulterate the worship of God by their fictions, yet think that they offer an acceptable obedience. Since, therefore, the blind and unbelieving so please themselves by their corruptions, hence Scripture compares them to adulterers.

The name of devotion among the Papists is at this time so plausible that it buries all the light of sound doctrine. For by this one word they reject whatever is offered them in the law and the gospel: and so also concerning “**good intentions**” as they call them. Since, therefore, the incredulous so intoxicate themselves with their own comments, God distinctly mentions fornicators, and says, **that all who recede from the pure rule of the law contaminate themselves with debaucheries.**

True worship is like spiritual chastity.

At the same time, as I have often said, the prophets allude to **a sacred and spiritual marriage in which God has bound Himself to His Church.** For chastity of soul means the pure worship of God. When, therefore, men fall off from that sincerity, it is just as if a woman should desert her husband and follow adulterers. Now that the Prophet may express this mad desire more clearly, he adds eyes to the heart. By these words he understands furious lust, not only because they were devoted to their idols with all their heart, but they were drawn that way by their eyes, as if their eyes had been torches to inflame their mind. He retains, however, his own image, because adulterers by their wandering glances generate the flames of lust, and so their heart is set on fire. For this reason therefore he says, *they were adulterous both in eye and heart.* . . .

Those who have divided hearts are double-minded and unstable in all their ways (James 1:8; cf. James 4:8).

Ezekiel 11:19-20

“And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes, and keep My ordinances, and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.”

In this place one heart is opposed to a divided one, for the Israelites were distracted after vague errors. They ought to listen to God’s precepts and subject themselves to His law. Had they done this, they would have been content with Him alone and would have addicted themselves entirely to true piety.

But their heart was distracted, as when a woman does not preserve her fidelity to her husband, but is led away by her lusts, nothing is at rest in her. So also when the people revolted from the law of God, it was like a wandering harlot.

Unbelievers lack simplicity and sincerity in their religious faith and practice.

We see, therefore, that **the hearts of all the impious were divided and distracted, and that nothing in them was simple or sincere.**

True religion is marked by purity (i.e., separation from worldly wisdom and human traditions) and simple obedience to God’s Word and its teachings.

Now God promises that He would take care that the people were not drawn aside after their superstitions, but remained in **pure and simple obedience to the law.**

If any one objects, that the faithful endure a perpetual contest with the lusts of the flesh, and hence their heart is divided, the answer is easy, that one heart is understood in the sense of regeneration. For although the faithful feel a great contest within them, and their heart is by no means whole, since it is agitated by many temptations, yet as in the meantime they seriously aspire to God, their heart is said to be entire, because it is not double or feigned.

We understand then what the Prophet means, and at chapter 36, (Ezekiel 36:26) where he repeats the same sentiment, for one heart he puts a new spirit, as also he says a little afterwards, *I will put a new spirit in their bowels, or inward parts*. As by the word heart he means affections, so also by the spirit he signifies the mind itself and all its thoughts. The spirit of a man is often taken for the whole soul, and then it comprehends also all the affections. But where the two are joined together, as the heart and spirit, the heart is called the seat of all the affections, it is in truth the very will of man, while the spirit is the faculty of intelligence. For we know that there are two special endowments of the mind: the first is its power of reasoning, and the next its being endued with judgment and choice. Afterwards we shall say how men have the faculty of choosing and yet lack free will.

But this principle must be held, that the soul of man excels first in intelligence or reason, then in judgment, on which choice and will depend. We see, therefore, that by these words the Prophet testifies that men have need of a complete renovation that they may return into the way from which they once began to wander.

Prayer

Grant, Almighty God, since You have delivered to us a sure rule of worship, which cannot deceive us, and since Your Son became for us a perfect master of all wisdom and of solid piety, that we may obediently follow whatever He prescribes for us, and turn neither to the right hand nor the left; but being content with that simplicity which we have learned from His Gospel, may go on in the course of our holy calling, until at length, that pursuit being finished, we may arrive at the perfect state of Your glory, and may so enjoy it that we may be transformed into it, as You have promised us by the same Jesus Christ our Lord.—Amen.