

# A WARNING TO PROFESSING CHRISTIANS WHO ATTEND CHURCH YET LIVING IN WICKEDNESS

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Ezekiel 23:37, 38, 39

*That they have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands, and with their idols have they committed adultery, and have also caused their sons, whom they bare unto me, to pass for them through the fire to devour them. More over this they have done unto me: they have defiled my sanctuary in the same day, and have profaned my Sabbaths. For when they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into my sanctuary to profane it; and, lo, thus have they done in the midst of mine house.*

## INTRODUCTION

Subject: When they that attend ordinances of divine worship allow themselves in known wickedness, they are guilty of dreadfully profaning and polluting those ordinances.

Samaria and Jerusalem, or Israel and Judah, are here represented by two women, Aholah and Aholibah. And their idolatry and treachery towards their covenant God is represented by the adultery of these women. They forsook God, who was their husband, and the guide of their youth, and prostituted themselves to others. The baseness of Aholah and Aholibah towards God their husband is here pointed out by two things, *viz.* adultery and bloodshed: *They have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands.*

I. They committed adultery with other lovers, *viz.* with their idols: *With their idols have they committed adultery.*

II. They not only committed adultery, but they took their children that they bore to God, and killed them for their lovers. Their hearts were quite alienated from God, their husband, and they were so bewitched with lust after those other lovers, that they took their own children, whom they had by their husband, and put them to cruel deaths, to make a feast with them for their lovers. As it is said in verse 37, "And have also caused my sons whom they bare unto me, to pass for them through the fire to devour them."

But here is a twofold wickedness of those actions of theirs held forth to us in the words.

*First*, the wickedness of them considered in themselves. For who can express the horrid baseness of this their treatment of God, their husband?

*Second*, an additional wickedness, resulting from the joining of these actions with sacred things. Beside the monstrous wickedness of these actions in themselves considered, there was this which exceedingly increased the guilt, that on the same day they came into God's sanctuary, or that they lived in such wickedness at the same time that they came and attended the holy ordinances of God's house, pretending to worship and adore him, whom they all the while treated in such a horrid manner. And so herein defiled and profaned holy things, as in verse 38 and 39, "Moreover, this have they done unto me; they have defiled my sanctuary in the same day, and have profaned my Sabbaths. For when they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into my sanctuary, to profane it; and, lo, thus have they done in the midst of mine house."

## DOCTRINE

When they that attend ordinances of divine worship allow themselves in known wickedness, they are guilty of dreadfully profaning and polluting those ordinances.

By a divine ordinance, when the expression is used in its greatest latitude, is meant anything of divine institution or appointment. Thus we call marriage a divine ordinance because it was appointed by God. So civil government is called an ordinance of God. Rom. 13:1, 2, "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers; for there is no power but of God; the powers that be are *ordained* of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the *ordinance* of God."

But the word is more commonly used only for an instituted or appointed way or mean of worship. So the sacraments are ordinances. So public prayer, singing of praise, the preaching of the word, and the hearing of the word preached are divine ordinances. The setting apart of certain officers in the church, the appointed way of discipline, public confession of scandals, admonition, and excommunication are ordinances. These are called the ordinances of *God's house*, or of public worship. And these are intended in the doctrine. It is the profanation of these ordinances that is spoken of in the text: "They came into my sanctuary to profane it; and, lo! thus have they done in the midst of mine house," says God. This *doctrine* seems to contain two *propositions*.

## SECTION I

### *The ordinances of God are holy*

DIVINE ordinances are holy in the following respects:

I. They are *conversant* wholly and immediately about God, and things divine. When we are in the attendance on the ordinances of divine worship, we are in the special presence of God. When persons come and attend on the ordinances of God, they are said to come before God, and to come into his presence. Jer. 7:10, "Come and stand before me, in this house which is called by my name." Psa. 100:2, "Come into his presence with singing."

In divine ordinances, persons have immediate intercourse with God, either in applying to him, as in prayer and singing praises, or in receiving from him, waiting solemnly and immediately on him for spiritual good, as in hearing the word; or in both applying to God and receiving from him, as in the sacraments. They were appointed on purpose that in them men might converse and hold communion with God. We are poor, ignorant, blind worms of the dust. And God did not see it meet that our way of intercourse with God should be left to ourselves. But God has given us his ordinances, as ways and means of conversing with him.

In these ordinances, holy and divine things are exhibited and represented. In the preaching of the word, holy doctrines and the divine will are exhibited. In the sacraments are represented our faith, love, and obedience.

II. The *end* of God's ordinances is holy. The immediate end is to glorify God. They are instituted to direct us in the holy exercises of faith and love, divine fear and reverence, submission, thankfulness, holy joy and sorrow, holy desires, resolutions, and hopes. True worship consists in these holy and spiritual exercises, and as these divine ordinances are the ordinances of worship, they are to help us, and to direct us in such worship as this.

III. They have the sanction of *divine authority*. They are not only conversant about a divine and holy object, and designed to direct and help us in divine and holy exercises, but they have a divine and holy author. The infinitely great and holy God has appointed them, the eternal Three in One. Each person in the Trinity has been concerned in their institution. God the Father has appointed them, and that by his own Son. They are of Christ's own appointment, and he appointed, as he had received of the Father. John 12:49, "I have not spoken of myself, but the Father which sent me, he gave me commandment what I should say, and what I should speak."

And the Father and Son more fully revealed and ratified them by the Spirit. And they are committed to writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

They are holy, in that God has hallowed them, or consecrated them. They are conversant about holy things. And God ordained them that in them we might be conversant about holy things. They are for a holy use. And it is God who, by his own immediate authority, ordained them for that holy use, which renders them much more sacred than otherwise they would have been.

IV. They are attended *in the name* of God. Thus we are commanded to do all that we do, in word or deed, in the name of Christ, Col. 3:17, which is to be understood especially of our attendance on ordinances. Ordinances are administered in the name of God. When the word is preached by authorized ministers, they speak in God's name, as Christ's ambassadors, as co-workers together with Christ. 2 Cor. 5:20, "Now we are ambassadors for Christ." Chap. 4:1, "We are workers together with him." When a true minister preaches, he speaks as the oracles of God, 1 Pet. 4:11. And he is to be heard as one representing Christ.

So in administering the sacraments, the minister represents the person of Christ. He baptizes in his name, and in the Lord's supper stands in his stead. In administering church-censures, he still acts, as the apostle expresses it, in the person of Christ, 2 Cor. 2:10. On the other hand, the congregation, in their addresses to God in ordinances, as prayer and praise, act in the name of Christ, the Mediator, as Having him to represent them, and as coming to God by him.

## SECTION II

*God's ordinances are dreadfully profaned by those who attend on them,  
and yet allow themselves in ways of wickedness.*

PERSONS who come to the house of God, into the holy presence of God, attending the duties and ordinances of his public worship, pretending with others, according to divine institution, to call on the name of God, to praise him, to hear his word, and commemorate Christ's death, and who yet, at the same time, are wittingly and allowedly going on in wicked courses, or in any practice contrary to the plain rules of the Word of God, therein greatly profane the holy worship of God, defile the temple of God and those sacred ordinances on which they attend. The truth of this proposition appears by the following considerations.

I. By attending ordinances, and yet living in allowed wickedness, they show great *irreverence* and contempt of those holy ordinances. When persons who have been committing known wickedness, as it were the same day, as it is expressed into the text, and attend the sacred solemn worship and ordinances of God, and then go from the house of God directly to the like allowed wickedness — they hereby express a most irreverent spirit with respect to holy things, and in a horrid manner cast contempt upon God's sacred institutions, and on those holy things which we are concerned with in them.

They show that they have no reverence of that God who has hallowed these ordinances. They show a contempt of that divine authority which instituted them. They show a horribly irreverent spirit towards that God into whose presence they come, and with whom they immediately have to do in ordinances, and in whose name these ordinances are performed and attended. They show a contempt of the adoration of God, of that faith and love, and that humiliation, submission, and praise, which ordinances were instituted to express. What an irreverent spirit does it show, that they are so careless after what manner they come before God! That they take no care to cleanse and purify themselves, in order that they may be fit to come before God! Yea, that they take no care to avoid making themselves more and more unclean and filthy!

They have been taught many a time that God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity, and how exceedingly he is offended with sin; yet they care not how

unclean and abominable they come into his presence. It shows horrid irreverence and contempt, that they are so bold, that they are not *afraid* to come into the presence of God in such a manner, and that they will presume to go out of the presence of God, and from an attendance upon holy things, again to their sinful practices. If they had any reverence of God and holy things, an approach into his presence, and an attendance on those holy things, would leave that awe upon their minds, that they would not dare to go immediately from them to their ways of known wickedness,

It would show a great irreverence in any person towards a king, if he should not care how he came into his presence, and if he should come in a sordid habit, and in a very indecent manner. How much more horrid irreverence does it show, for persons willingly and allowedly to defile themselves with that filth which God infinitely hates, and so frequently come into the presence of God!

II. By making a show of respect to God in ordinances, and then acting the contrary in their lives, they do but *mock* God. In attending ordinances, they make a show of respect to God. By joining in prayer, in public adorations, confessions, petitions, and thanksgivings, they make a show of high thoughts of God, and of humbling themselves before him; of sorrow for their sins, of thankfulness for mercies, and of a desire of grace and assistance to obey and serve God. By attending upon the hearing of the word, they make a show of a teachable spirit, and of a readiness to practice according to the instructions given. By attending on the sacraments, they make a show of faith in Christ, of choosing him for their portion, and spiritually feeding upon him.

But by their actions they all the while declare the contrary. They declare, that they have no high esteem of God, but that they despise him in their hearts. They declare, that they are so far from repenting of, that they intend to continue in, their sins. They declare, that they have no desire of that grace and assistance to live in a holy manner for which they prayed, and that they rather live wickedly. This is what they choose, and for the present are resolved upon. They declare by their actions that there is no truth in what they pretend in hearing the word preached, that they had a desire to know what the will of God is, that they might be directed in their duty. For they declare by their actions, that they desire not to do the will of God, and that they do not intend any such thing. But intend, on the contrary, to disobey him. And that they prefer their carnal interests before his authority and glory.

They declare by their actions that there is not truth in what they pretend in their attendance on the sacraments that they desire to be fed with spiritual nourishment, and to be conformed and assimilated to Christ, and to have communion with him. They show by their practices that they have no regard to Christ, and that they had rather have their lusts gratified, than to be fed with his spiritual food. They show, that they desire not any assimilation to Christ but to be different from him, and of an opposite character to him. They show that instead of desiring communion with Christ, they are his resolved and allowed enemies, willfully acting the part of enemies to Christ, dishonoring him, and promoting the interest of Satan against him.

Now, what can this be else but mockery, to make a show of great respect, reverence, love, and obedience, and at the same time willfully to declare the reverse in actions. If a rebel or traitor should send addresses to his king, making a show of great loyalty and fidelity, and should all the while openly, and in the king's sight, carry on designs of dethroning him, how could his addresses be considered other than mockery? If a man should bow and kneel before his superior, and use many respectful terms to him, but at the same time should strike him, or spit in his face, would his bowing and his respectful terms be looked upon in any light than as done in mockery? When the Jews kneeled before Christ, and said *Hail, King of the Jews*, but at the same time spit in his face, and smote him upon the head with a reed, could their kneeling and salutations be considered as any other than mockery?

Men attend ordinances, and yet willingly live in wicked practices, treat Christ in the same manner that these Jews did. They come to public worship, and pretend to pray to him, to sing

his praises, to sit and hear his word. They come to the sacrament, pretending to commemorate his death. Thus they kneel before him, and say, *Hail, King of the Jews*; yet at the same time they live in ways of wickedness, which they know Christ has forbidden, of which he has declared the greatest hatred, and which are exceedingly to his dishonor. Thus they buffet him, and spit in his face. They do as Judas did, who came to Christ saying, *Hail, Master*, and kissed him, at the same time betraying him into the hands of those who sought his life.

How can it be interpreted in any other light, when men come to public worship, and attend ordinariness, and yet will be drunkards and profane swearers, will live in lasciviousness, injustice, or some other known wickedness? If a man should pray to God to keep him from drunkenness, and at the same time should put the bottle to his own mouth, and drink himself drunk; the absurdity and horrid wickedness of his conduct would be manifest to every man. But the very same thing, though not so visible to us, is done by those who make profession of great respect to God, and pray God from time to time to keep them from sin; yet at the same time have no design to forsake their known sins, but intend the contrary.

God sees men's designs and resolutions more plainly than we can see their outward actions. Therefore for a man to pray to God to be kept from sin, and at the same time to intend to sin, is mockery as visible to God as if he prayed to be kept from some particular sin, which he was at the same time willingly and allowedly committing.

These persons are guilty of a horrid profanation of God's ordinances. For they make them occasions of a greater affront to God, the occasions of showing their impudence and presumption. For he who lives in willful wickedness, and does not enjoy the ordinances of God, is not guilty of so great presumption as he who attends these ordinances, and yet allows himself in wickedness. This latter acts as though he came into the presence of God on purpose to affront him. He comes from time to time to hear the will of God, and all the while designs disobedience, and goes away and acts directly contrary to it.

A servant would affront his master by willfully disobeying his commands in any wise. But he would affront him much more, if he should on every occasion come to him to inquire his will, as though he were ready to do whatever his master would have him do, and then should immediately go away and do the contrary.

III. They put the ordinances of God to a *profane use*. The ordinances of God are holy, as they are set apart of God to a holy use and purpose. They are the worship of God, instituted for the ends of giving honor and glory to him, and to be means of grace and spiritual good to us. But those persons who attend these ordinances, and yet live in allowed wickedness, aim at neither of these ends. They, in their attendance on ordinances, neither aim to give honor to God, or to express any love, or esteem, or thankfulness. Nor do they sincerely seek the good of their own souls. It is not truly the aim of any such persons to obtain grace, or to be made holy. Their actions plainly show that this is not their desire. They choose to be wicked, and intend it.

It is not therefore to these purposes that they improve the holy ordinances of God. But they put them to another and profane use. They attend ordinances to avoid that discredit which a voluntarily and habitual absence from them would cause among those with whom they live, to avoid the punishment of human laws, or for their worldly advantage, to make up for other wickedness, or for some other carnal purposes. Thus they profane the ordinances of God, by perverting them to profane purposes.

IV. When persons thus treat God's holy ordinances, it tends to *beget contempt* of them in others. When others see sacred things commonly used so irreverently, and attended with such carelessness and contempt, and treated without any sacred regard; when they see persons are bold with them, treat them without any solemnity of spirit; when they see them thus commonly profaned, it tends to diminish their sense of their sacredness, and to make them seem no very awful things. In short, it tends to embolden them to do the like.

The holy vessels and utensils of the temple and tabernacle were never to be put to a common use, nor to be handled without the greatest care and reverence. For if it had been

commonly otherwise, the reverence of them could not have been maintained. They would have seemed no more sacred than anything else. So it is in the ordinances of Christian worship.

### SECTION III *A call to self-examination.*

LET this doctrine put all upon *examining* themselves, whether they do not allow themselves in known wickedness. You are such as do enjoy the ordinances of divine worship. You come into the holy presence of God, attending on those ordinances, which God, by sacred authority, has hallowed and set apart, that in them we might have immediate intercourse with himself, that we might worship and adore him, and express to him a humble, holy, supreme respect, and that in them we might receive immediate communications from him.

Here you come and speak to God, pretending to express your sense how glorious he is, and how worthy that you should fear and love him, humble yourselves before him, devote yourselves to him, obey him, and have a greater respect to his commands and to his honor, than to any temporal interest, ease, or pleasure of your own. Here you pretend before God, that you are sensible how unworthily you have done by sins committed in times past, and that you have a great desire not to do the like in time to come. You pretend to confess your sins, and to humble yourselves for them. Here you pray that God would give you his Spirit to assist you against sin, to keep you from the commission of it, enable you to overcome temptations, and help you to walk holy in all your conversation, as though you really had a great desire to avoid such sins as you have been guilty of in time past. And the like pretenses you have made in your attendance upon the other ordinances, as in hearing the word, in singing praise, etc.

But consider whether you do not horribly defile and profane the public prayers and other ordinances. Notwithstanding all your pretenses, and what you seem to hold forth by your attendance on them, do you not all the while live in known wickedness against God? For all your pretenses of respect to God, of humiliation for sin, and desires to avoid it, have you not come directly from the allowed practice of known sin to God's ordinances, and did not at all repent of what you had done, nor at all sorry for it at the very time when you stood before God, making these pretenses, and even had no design of reformation, but intended to return to the same practice again after your departure from the presence of God? — I say, has not this, on many occasions, been your manner of coming and attending on the ordinances of divine worship? Not only so, but is it not still your manner, your common way of attending upon these ordinances, even to this very day? Do you not lie to God with your tongues, when you pretend, that he is a great God, and that you are poor, guilty, unworthy creatures, deserving his wrath by the sins of which you have been guilty? And when you pretend that you earnestly desire he would keep you from the like for time to come? Are you not guilty of horrid mockery of God in it, when at the same time you design no such thing, but the contrary?

Do you not even the same day that you come into God's house, and to his ordinances, allow yourselves in known sins? Do you not with consent and approbation think of the sinful practices, in which you allow yourselves, and in which you have been exercising yourselves in the week past? Do you not the very day in which you attend ordinances, allowedly please and gratify a wicked imagination? And are you not then perpetrating wickedness in your thoughts, and contriving the further fulfillment of your wickedness? Yea, are you not guilty of these things sometimes even in the very time of your attendance on ordinances, when you are in the immediate presence of God? And while others have immediate intercourse with God, and you likewise pretend to the same? Do you not, even in these circumstances, allow yourselves in wicked thoughts and imaginations, voluntarily wallowing in known wickedness?

Are not some of you guilty of allowedly breaking God's holy Sabbath, in maintaining no government of your thoughts, thinking indifferently about anything that comes next to mind; and not only thinking, but talking too about common, worldly affairs? And sometimes talking in such

a manner, as is not suitable even on other days, talking profanely, or in an unclean manner, sporting and diverting yourselves in such conversation on God's holy day? Yea, it is well if some have not been thus guilty in the very time of attendance on the ordinances of worship.

Examine yourselves, how it has been with you. You all attend many of the ordinances of divine worship. You come to the house of God, attend public prayers, singing, and preaching of the word. And many of you come to the Lord's supper, that holy ordinance, instituted for the special commemoration of the greatest and most wonderful of all divine acts towards mankind, for the special and visible representation of the most glorious and wonderful things of our religion, for the most solemn profession and renewal of your engagement to God, and for special communion with Jesus Christ. Let such examine themselves whether they do not allow themselves in known sin, to the horrid profanation and pollution of his most sacred ordinance.

Examine and see whether you do not allow yourselves in some way of dealing with your fellow-men, which you have sufficient light to know to be evil; or whether you do not allow yourselves in a known evil behavior towards some person or persons of the families to which you respectively belong, as towards your husbands, your wives, your children, or servants; or your neighbors, in your spirit and behavior towards them, or in your talk of them.

Examine whether you do not some way willingly indulge an unclean appetite, in less or grosser acts of uncleanness, or in your discourse, or in your imagination. Or do you not give way to a lust after strong drink, or indulge yourselves in some vicious excess in gratifying some sensual appetite in meat or drink, or otherwise? Are you not willingly guilty of vanity, and extravagance in your conversation?

Do you not, for all your attendance on ordinances, continue in the allowed neglect of your precious souls, neglecting secret prayer or some known duty of private religion? Or do you not allow yourselves in Sabbath-breaking? — In all these ways are the ordinances of God's sacred worship polluted and profaned.

Men are apt to act very treacherously and perversely in the matter of self-examination. When they are put upon examining themselves, they very often decline it, and will not enter into any serious examination of themselves at all. They hear uses of examination insisted on, but put them off to others, and never seriously apply them to themselves. — And if they do examine themselves, when they are put upon it, they are exceedingly partial to themselves. They spare themselves. They do not search, and look, and pass a judgment according to truth, but so as unreasonably to favor and justify themselves — If they can be brought to examine themselves at all, whether they do not allow themselves in known wickedness, although they attend on divine ordinances, they will not do it impartially. Their endeavor will not be indeed to know the truth of their case, and to give a true answer to their consciences, but to blind themselves, to persuade and flatter themselves that they do not allow themselves in known sin, whether it be true or not. There are two things especially wherein persons often act very perversely and falsely in this matter.

I. Persons very often deal very perversely in pretending that the sins in which they live are *not known* sins. Nothing is more common surely, than for persons to flatter themselves with this concerning the wickedness in which they live. Let that wickedness be almost what it may, they will plead to their consciences, and endeavor to still them, that there is no evil in it. Men's own consciences can best tell how they are wont to do in this matter. — There is hardly any kind of wickedness that men commit, but they will plead thus in excuse for it. They will plead thus about their cheating and injustice, about their hatred of their neighbors, about their evil speaking, about their revengeful spirit, about their excessive drinking, about their lying, their neglect of secret prayer, their lasciviousness, their unclean dalliances. Yea, they will plead excuses for very gross acts of uncleanness, as fornication, adultery, and what not. They have their vain excuses and carnal reasonings in favor of all their evil actions. They will say, What harm, what evil is there in such and such an action? And if there be a plain rule against it, yet they will plead

that their circumstances are peculiar, and that they are excepted from the general rule, that their temptation is so great, that they are excusable. Or something will they find to plead.

If it be some thing upon which their lusts are much set, and about which they feel remorse of conscience, they will never leave studying and contriving with all the art and subtlety of which they are masters, till they shall have found out some reason, some excuse, with which they shall be able in some measure to quiet their consciences. And whether after all they shall have made it out to blind conscience or not, yet they will plead that their argument is good, and it is no sin. Or if it be a sin, it is only a sin of ignorance. — So men will plead for the wickedness which they do in the dark. So without doubt some very *gross* sinners plead to their consciences, as would appear, if we could but look into their hearts. When indeed the strongest argument they have, *that in such a thing there is no evil*, is the strongest lust they have to it, the inordinate desire they have to commit it.

It was the saying of one, *Licitis perimus omnes*; that is, *We all perish by lawful things*; which is as much as to say, man commonly live wickedly and go to hell, in those ways which they flatter themselves, that they are sins of ignorance, they do not know them to be unlawful. — Thus, I make no doubt some will be apt to do, in applying to themselves this use of examination, if they can be persuaded to apply it to themselves at all. Whether these things be true of you, let your own consciences speak, you that neglect secret prayer; you that indulge an inordinate appetite for strong drink; you that defraud or oppress others; you that indulge a spirit of revenge and hatred toward your neighbor. — Here I desire you to consider two or three things.

*First*, not all sins, which one knows not with a certain knowledge to be sinful, are justly called sins of ignorance. Men often will excuse themselves for venturing upon a sinful action or practice, with this, that they know not that it is sinful, which is at most true no otherwise, than as they do not know it to be sinful with a *certain* knowledge, or with the evidence of absolute demonstration; although at the same time it is a sin against their light, and against great light. They have been so taught, that they have had light enough to make them sensible that it is displeasing to God, and not warranted or allowed by him. And they do in their consciences think it to be sinful. They are secretly convinced of it, however they may pretend the contrary, and labor to deceive themselves, and to persuade themselves that they do not think there is any evil in it.

Those sins which are contrary to sufficient information and instruction, and contrary to the real dictates of their own consciences, or to the judgment of their own minds, whether there be certain or demonstrative knowledge or no, these are what I would be understood to mean, when I speak of known sins. Such light as this, whether there be absolutely certain knowledge or no, is sufficient to render the action utterly inexcusable, and to render it, when allowed, a horrible profanation and pollution of the holy ordinances of God.

*Second*, it is vain for persons to pretend that those are sins of ignorance, which they have often and clearly heard testified against from the Word of God. It will be found to be so at last. It will be found to be a vain thing for persons who have lived under the light of the gospel, and where all manner of iniquity is testified against, if they live in immoral and vicious practices, to pretend that they are sins of ignorance, unless the case be very peculiar and extraordinary.

*Third*, it is in vain for you to pretend that those are sins of ignorance, of which you would not dare to proceed in the practice, if you knew that your soul was to be required of you this night. Persons do many things, for which they plead, and pretend they think there is no evil in them, who yet would as soon eat fire, as do the same, if they knew that they were to stand before the judgment seat of Christ within four and twenty hours. This shows that persons do but prevaricate, when they pretend that their sins are sins of ignorance.

II. Another way wherein men deal falsely and perversely in this matter is in pretending that they do *not allow* themselves in those sins which they practice. They either pretend that they know them not to be sins, or if they cannot but own that, then they will say, they do not allow themselves in them. And so they hope God is not very much provoked by them. They pretend



this, though they make a trade of them. They go on repeating one act after another, without ever seriously repenting of past, or resolving against future acts. But take heed that you do not deceive yourselves in this matter. For such pretenses, however they do something towards stilling your consciences now, will do nothing when you come to stand before your righteous and holy Judge.

#### SECTION IV

*Address to such as attend ordinances, and yet allow themselves in known sin.*

Consider how holy and sacred the ordinances of God are. What mockery you are guilty of in making such a show, and such pretenses in attending ordinances, and yet voluntarily acting the reverse of what you pretend. Consider that there is no sort of sinners with whom God is so provoked, and who stand so guilty before him, as the profaners of his ordinances. The fire of God's wrath is kindled by none so much as by the polluters of holy things. They are represented as those who are especially guilty before God, in the third commandment: "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." Why is this annexed to this command, rather than to any other of the ten, but because the breach of it especially renders a man guilty in the sight of God?

The taking of God's name in vain includes the profanation and pollution of ordinances and holy things. They do in a very dreadful manner take God's name in vain, who attend on his ordinances, and yet live in known sin. For, as we have shown, they manifest the greatest irreverence for him, and contempt of divine things. They manifest a contempt of his authority, a contempt of the business and design of his ordinances, and a most careless and irreverent spirit in things wherein they have immediate converse with God. Ordinances, as we have shown, are attended in the name of God. And therefore, by such an attendance on them, the name of God is greatly profaned. You that attend ordinances in such a manner, take the name of God so much in vain, that you use it only in mockery, and so as to expose it to contempt. Such a way of attending ordinances is a trampling of all that is sacred under foot.

We have in Scripture scarce any such awful instances of the immediate and miraculous vengeance of God, as on the profaners of holy things. How did God consume Nadab and Abihu, for offering strange fire before him! How did he break forth upon Uzza, for handling the ark with too much irreverence! 2 Sam. 6:6, 7. And how did he break forth on the children of Israel at Bethshemesh, for profaning the ark! "He smote of the people fifty thousand threescore and ten men," as in 1 Sam. 6:19.

And God has threatened in the New Testament, that if any man "defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy: for the temple of God is holy," 1 Cor. 3:17. There is an emphasis in the expression. God will destroy all sinners, let it be what sin it will which they commit, and in which they continue; and yet it is said, "If any man defile the temple of God, *him* shall God destroy," as if it had been said, there is something peculiar in the case, and God is especially provoked to destroy such, and consume them in the fire of his wrath. And he will indeed destroy them with a destruction especially dreadful.

So God has declared, Gal. 6:7, "That he will not be mocked;" i.e. if any presume to mock him, they will find him by experience, to be no contemptible being. God will vindicate his holy majesty from the contempt of those who dare to mock him, and he will do it effectually. They shall fully find how dreadful a being he is, whose name they have daringly profaned and polluted. Defilers and profaners of ordinances, by known and allowed wickedness, provoke God more than the heathen, who have no ordinances. Thus the wickedness of Judah and Jerusalem is said to be far worse than that of Sodom, though the inhabitants of Sodom were, as we have reason to think, some of the worst of the heathens. See Eze. 16:46, 47, etc. The sin of Sodom is here spoken of as a light thing in comparison with the sins of Judah. And what should be the reason, but that Judah enjoyed holy things which they profaned and polluted, which Sodom had

no opportunity to do? For it is not to be supposed, that Judah otherwise arrived to the same pass that Sodom had.

Consider therefore, ye who allow yourselves in known wickedness, and live in it, who yet come to the house of God, and to his ordinances from time to time, without any serious design of forsaking your sins, but, on the contrary, with an intention of continuing in them, and who frequently go from the house of God to your wicked practices, consider how guilty you have made yourselves in the sight of God, and how dreadfully God is provoked by you. It is a wonder of God's patience, that he does not break forth upon you, and strike you dead in a moment. For you profane holy things in a more dreadful manner than Uzza did, when yet God struck him dead for his error. And whereas he was struck dead for only one offense. You are guilty of the same sin from week to week, and from day to day.

It is a wonder that God suffers you to live upon earth, that he has not, with thunderbolt of his wrath, struck you down to the bottomless pit long ago. You that are allowedly and voluntarily living in sin, who have gone on hitherto in sin, are still going on, and do not design any other than to go on yet. It is a wonder that the Almighty's thunder lies still, and suffers you to sit in his house, or to live upon earth. It is a wonder that the earth will bear you, and that hell does not swallow you up. It is a wonder that fire does not come down from heaven, or come up from hell, and devour you, that hell-flames do not enlarge themselves to reach you, and that the bottomless pit has not swallowed you up.

However, that you are as yet born with, is no argument that your damnation slumbers. The anger of God is not like the passions of men, that it should be in haste. There is a day of vengeance and recompense appointed for the vessels of wrath. And when the day shall have come, and the iniquity shall be full, none shall deliver out of God's hand. Then will he recompense, even recompense into your bosoms.

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