

“Just a Little Off”

Before you respond to the title, “No,” this is not an article about my mental state- though it may be a good description of the same! Instead, this is a piece about the dangers of being “just a little off” in our religion. Many “play” at religion the same way they “play” at horseshoes: with the notion that “close” is good enough to be successful. You’ve probably heard the old expression, “Close is good enough in horseshoes and hand grenades,” but does it really apply to our faith and the practice of it?

Let me illustrate the problem of being “just a little off” this way: What if, while I was typing this article, one of my hands was just one key position off on the keyboard? The phrase “just a little off” would have instead read, “judy s liyylr ogg”! Get the picture? “Just a little off” can make all the difference in the world, and in the next world too.

A biblical example of being “just a little off” is found in Leviticus 10:1. Two priestly sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, found that “being just a little off” religiously can be very costly. God specified that fire for the burning of incense should come from the altar, cf.16:10. But, our text says they utilized “*strange fire*” to make their offering. Evidently, their fire did not come from the altar as God had commanded (it is also probable that they weren’t supposed to be the one(s) making the offering in the first place). Perhaps they reasoned that “fire was fire,” and that being “just a little off” wouldn’t matter in the worship service to the Lord. If so, **THEY WERE WRONG!** The next verse says that “*fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.*” Obviously, being “just a little off” wasn’t “close enough” for God!

Are we then really comfortable with the notion that “as long as you’re honest and sincere” being “just a little off” is good enough in our worship today? In John 4:23-24, Jesus indicated that worship must not only be “*in spirit*”- that is, with the right emotion and intention, but that it must also be “*in truth*”- or, according to the dictates of truth as revealed by God. We must worship God as He says, and are not at liberty to perform some act that is convenient for us, or to our liking, call it “worship,” and presume that He will accept it. Instead, we had better be sure that our efforts to worship our great God come from Book, Chapter, and Verse authority, rather than our own desires and tastes. In worship, being “just a little off” is still “off,” and wrong, even when well intended.

Let’s back this up a little further. If “just a little off” isn’t close enough in our worship, even when sincerely given, then is it somehow sufficient for salvation? Can we do “most” of what God says is necessary to be saved, and still be acceptable to Him? Is “close” good enough for salvation? Note the words of Jesus in these passages regarding God’s requirements for salvation: John 8:24, “*for unless you **believe** that I am He, you will die in your sins;*” Luke 13:3, “*unless you **repent**, you shall all likewise perish;*” John 3:5, “*unless one is **born of water and the Spirit**, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*” **Belief** is a change of mind (intellect) and heart (affection) that leads to **repentance**, which is a change of direction of and in life. **Baptism** is being “*born again*” as a “*new creature*” (2Corinthians 5:17) in Christ.

If we just believe, but do not repent, we’ve changed our minds without really changing our lives. We’re *close*, but “just a little off”! If we come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, and we allow that knowledge to truly change the course and direction of our lives, we’ve changed our minds and our lives, but have not changed our *Father* by being *born again* through baptism, cp. John

8:44 → Galatians 3:26-29. Again, we're close, but "just a little off." Now, you tell me: which one of these commanded actions can we omit, or be "just a little off" on so to speak, and still be "close enough" to be acceptable with God?

Please carefully consider 1John 2:3-5a, *"And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected."* So what about it? Are you willing to "keep His commandments," or will you instead content yourself with "close is good enough" and being "just a little off"? Think carefully, your eternity may well be at stake. (Philip C. Strong; Viking Drive Church of Christ; 3791 Viking Drive, Bossier City, LA; online at vikingdrivechurchofchrist.com; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)