

OLD TESTAMENT LESSONS FOR NEW TESTAMENT RENEWAL

Sunday, September 12th, 2010, 10:00 a.m. & 6:00 p.m.

Part five - Teaching #'s 1403 & 1404

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HONORING GOD IN OUR WORSHIP IN HIS HOUSE

Leviticus 10:1-11 - "Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them. [2] And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. [3] Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord has said, 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.' " And Aaron held his peace. [4] And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come near; carry your brothers away from the front of the sanctuary and out of the camp." [5] So they came near and carried them in their coats out of the camp, as Moses had said. [6] And Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar his sons, "Do not let the hair of your heads hang loose, and do not tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the congregation; but let your brothers, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning that the Lord has kindled. [7] And do not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you." And they did according to the word of Moses. [8] And the Lord spoke to Aaron, saying, [9] "Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. [10] You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean, [11] and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the Lord has spoken to them by Moses."

Most of the time, when we used to sing "O Lord, send the power just now," this is not what we had in mind. This is one of those passages that leaves all of us feeling just a little uncomfortable. God seems so stern and unfair.

People do their best to explain it all away. "This must be one of those 'Old Testament God of wrath, as opposed to the New Testament God of love and grace' kind of stories." That kind of works until we remember Annanias and Saphira in the book of Acts. But at least they *knew* they were lying to God. Nadab and Abihu, as far as we can tell, were trying to do what they thought was *right*.

At the core of this passage lies a message that is just a little different from the one we hear about in church today. We all understand that God loves to have His people draw near to Him. But this passage teaches a less popular truth. God cares about *how* people draw near to Him. It's not just any kind of coziness that He's after. Perhaps those theme words from **verse three** ought to be inscribed above the doors of every sanctuary in the nation: "**Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified**"(Lev.10:3).

And there's something else very important and timely in these words. They are given to a people who were intensely concerned about renewal and living in the presence of God and seeing God work. Look at the occasion of this whole incident in the tenth chapter of Leviticus. It comes right on the heels of one great time in the presence of God. You can read all about it at the end of **chapter 9**:

Leviticus 9:22-24 - "Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. [23] And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. [24] And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces."

Say what you want, that's some worship service. What we need to notice today with great carefulness is this: *the biggest mistake these people made came right in the middle of high spiritual experience and excitement*. This wasn't a case of God's people dancing around the *golden calf* in some idolatrous frenzy. This was God's people *responding to a wonderful time of a clear manifestation of the glory of the Lord*.

And what we see happening in this passage is this. A group of people, who are truly experiencing God's presence in very visible, manifest ways, become more *enthusiastic* than *wise*. And more interested in the *emotional zest of the presence* of God than the *reverencing of the God they wanted to be close to*.

And it's right in the middle of all of this that God, in a way they could never forget, reminds them that if they were going to come before Him at all, they would have to treat Him as holy (3). That's the message of this whole chapter. Let's hear it

clearly once again today. If you're going to come before **this** God, you can't just **say** He's holy. You have to **treat Him** as though He is holy.

Let's look at some of the details of this fascinating story:

1) **WE KNOW THAT SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY, THERE WAS A FAILURE TO TAKE SERIOUSLY THE INSTRUCTION OF THE LORD ON HOW HE WAS TO BE APPROACHED**

Leviticus 10:1-2 - "Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them. [2] And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord."

Scholars debate exactly what Nadab and Abihu did wrong. While no one is certain, there are some clues from the story itself. The text says they offered "**unauthorized fire**" to the Lord (1). The best explanation has to do with the **source** of the fire they brought to the Lord with incense.

We know from other passages in the OT that the fire was supposed to come from the altar of the Lord - **Leviticus 16:12** - "And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil."

This same kind of instruction is repeated in the book of Numbers: **Numbers 16:46** - "And Moses said to Aaron, "Take your censer, and put fire on it from off the altar and lay incense on it and carry it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone out from the Lord; the plague has begun."

So it seems pretty clear that God had repeatedly given instruction that not just any fire was to be used when He was being approached in worship. The fire was to come from the altar of the Lord itself. The idea being sown is preparing the path for the yet to come atoning work of Jesus Christ. Man doesn't get to **choose** his approach to God. Our approach is tied to the altar - the place where God deals with human sin. And our **sincerity** doesn't validate our approach. God must make the way.

This was clearly instructed right from the time of the building of the altar of incense in **Exodus chapter 30**:

Exodus 30:7-9 - "And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it. Every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, [8] and when Aaron sets up the lamps at twilight, he shall burn it, a regular incense offering before the Lord throughout your generations. [9] You shall not offer unauthorized incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering, and you shall not pour a drink offering on it."

The fire on this altar would be kept burning "**throughout your generations**"(8). No other flame would be used to ignite it. It would not be mixed in any way with other sources of combustion.

Probably there was another factor involved in God's judgement of Nadab and Abihu. Many people feel that they brought the fire and incense **inside** the veil of the holy place. And a good case can be made for this argument. At the institution of the annual day of atonement, God gave very clear instruction to Moses, **and referred back to this very act of sin by Nadab and Abihu**:

Leviticus 16:1-2 - "The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the Lord and died, [2] and the Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat."

Which of these explanations is best, or whether it's combination of both, the point is the same. **Somewhere along the way, God had spoken and these people weren't being careful to listen**. They were more excited about being **blessed** than they were interested in **obedient**. They were more interested in being **happy** than in being **holy**.

2) **ENTHUSIASM IN WORSHIP AND EXCITEMENT IN PRAISE CAN SOMETIMES BE THE VERY THINGS THAT CAUSE CARELESSNESS BEFORE THE LORD**

Leviticus 9:22-24 - “Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. [23] And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they *blessed the people*, and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. [24] And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.”

I know we’ve looked at a lot of Scripture already in this teaching. But there’s a momentum between those words and the first two verses of **chapter 10: Leviticus 10:1-2** - “Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them. [2] And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.”

The people are excited. God is obviously moving among them. Nadab and Abihu are caught up in the moment. So much so that they forget the clear instructions God had given.

It’s amazing how God’s blessing and presence can sometimes cause people to simply be *excited* about His nearness, without being *mindful* about what His nearness means. The problem with that is the same presence that *blesses obedience judges disobedience*. That very same fire that fell on the altar at the end of **chapter nine** now reaches out to **consume the lives of sin and disobedience**.

And all of this begs the key question: Do I just long to be *emotionally near* to the Lord (“I Long to Worship You”) or, does being in His Presence automatically *force my mind* to the issues and priorities of holiness and purity that His Presence requires (“By those who *come near to me*, I will be treated as holy”).

Don’t get me wrong. It’s a wonderful thing to draw near to the Lord and to *know* the reality of His presence. The question is *why* does God draw near to us? What is the *point* in being in God’s blessed presence?

I think Jesus tells us. It seems Jesus at least tried to lean my mind in the right direction when, in teaching us how to *begin* our time before Father God in prayer, the first words He puts upon our lips are “*Hallowed by Your Name*.” I’m not *ready* for God’s presence until I’m ready to *hallow* His Name.

3) SOMETIMES A MANIFEST SENSE OF GOD’S BLESSING ON A PEOPLE CAN LEAD TO A NUMBING OF CONSCIENCE AND A RELAXING OF HOLINESS

Let me explain. While the text is silent about it, my opinion is that neither Nadab nor Abihu brought any ill intention into the things they did. I don’t think they were trying to be sinful or rebellious. I think they regarded their actions as being motivated by passion for God and love for His presence.

But neither their *feelings of euphoria* nor their *lack of inner conviction* made any difference to the outcome of God’s judgement. They were guilty of disobedience to the Lord and only obedience to the Lord could make things right.

More worship wouldn’t change the situation. That’s where they were wrong. It wasn’t a matter of offering sacrifices. It wasn’t a matter of more intensity. *More worship can never fix disobedience*. And we live in an era of church life where people believe that worship fixes everything. The right song, the coolest band, the best lighting. None of those fixes the heart, even if they soothe or trance out the mind.

That’s where the message of this text is so meaty. It overflows with the message that worship was a matter of honoring the God whom they were approaching. The path to God is always hedged in by sheer obedience to His commands. Biblical worship is the *fruit and sacrifice* of a changed, obedient, compliant heart. It can never be offered as *compensation* for an obedient heart.

Worship is never a *substitute* for knowing the truth. Properly understood, worship is the overflow of a heart steeped in a deep, holy, passionate understanding of the character and word of God.

So our text calls for caution. In the atmosphere of praise and blessing and spiritual warmth and excitement, people can sometimes come to believe that God must approve of what's going on, otherwise we wouldn't be feeling so blessed. Or, they can use the means God ordained for the **removal of sin** (sacrifices in the OT and trust in God's grace in Jesus Christ in the NT) to actually presume a pardon while **continuing in sin**.

I know a young lady. You don't know her. She doesn't live in this part of the country at all. She has left her husband, had an affair, and is sustaining the sinful relationship. The way she blindly justifies it is by saying, "***I know God wants me to be happy. And I wasn't happy in my marriage.***" So she erases the effect of years of Christian upbringing by telling herself God cares more about her happiness than her holiness and obedience. That's fake Christianity. And it rests on a make-believe God.

There's another story in the OT that reinforces this idea, though in a less direct fashion:

1 Samuel 15:13-23 - "And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed be you to the Lord. I have performed the commandment of the Lord." [14] And Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?" [15] Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the Lord your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction." [16] Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stop! I will tell you what the Lord said to me this night." And he said to him, "Speak." [17] And Samuel said, "Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. [18] And the Lord sent you on a mission and said, 'Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' [19] Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the Lord?" [20] And Saul said to Samuel, "I have obeyed the voice of the Lord. I have gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. [21] But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal." [22] ***And Samuel said, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. [23] For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king."***

The bottom line in this story is simply this. Saul had received the Lord's gracious help in defeating the Amalekites. God had ordered that when He granted His people victory, no spoil should be taken. All of the animals were to be destroyed. ***Saul didn't do that.*** He ***disobeyed***. He took the best sheep and livestock and preserved them to offer them to the Lord in sacrifice.

When confronted by Samuel about his sheer disobedience to the Lord, Saul made his case. He said he spared the animals so the people could have a special time of celebration and worship to the Lord - **1 Samuel 15:15** - "Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the Lord your God...." That's what Saul said. He kept the animals to offer them as sacrifices. He kept the animals for ***worship***.

Do you see the same sin being repeated here? He kept the animals to offer as sacrifices. The sacrifices (in faith) were to be offered to obtain pardon for sin. But Saul ***continues*** in the very sin the sacrifices are offered to pardon. He plans on using sacrifices to ***justify his clear disobedience to the commandment of the Lord***. But no amount of worship can compensate for disobedience.

Listen, ***Saul loses everything because he forgot that.*** His kingship comes to an abrupt end: **1 Samuel 15:22-23** - "And Samuel said, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. [23] ***For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king.***"

You may not have the kingly office Saul had. But there is a ***rule - a dominion - a kingdom presence and fruitfulness*** - that God wants to see fulfilled in your life. And nothing of His grace and might and power, or the accomplishment of what He could do in and through your life, will come to fruition if this basic issue of holiness is treated lightly.

And one of the reasons this service in Leviticus chapters nine and ten takes such an abrupt change in tone and

content as the flames of holy judgement begin to burn, is simply that right at the beginning of the teaching of worship in the OT, God refuses to allow people to become confused about what His presence *means* to the state of their hearts. It's *never* enough just to sing about how much we *long* for His presence. We have to *come to terms* with His presence.

That's what **Leviticus 10** is all about.

4) **MY FUNCTION AS A PRIEST BEFORE THE LORD IN WORSHIP IS NOT ONLY TO RECEIVE FROM GOD, BUT TO DISPLAY HIS HOLINESS IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS CORRUPT CULTURE**

Actually, there are *two portions* in this passage that relate to this point: First, read **Leviticus 10:3** - "Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord has said, 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.' " And Aaron held his peace."

The other passage relates something strange that happened *after* God's judgement was demonstrated: **Leviticus 10:4-7** - "And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come near; carry your brothers away from the front of the sanctuary and out of the camp." [5] So they came near and carried them in their coats out of the camp, as Moses had said. [6] And Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar his sons, "Do not let the hair of your heads hang loose, and do not tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the congregation; but let your brothers, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning that the Lord has kindled. [7] And do not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you." And they did according to the word of Moses."

At any given moment in my life, there are a thousand ways in which my lifestyle can say something entirely different from the way God is in His nature and character. I can be mean when God is kind. I can be unforgiving when God is forgiving. I can be greedy when God is giving. I can be careless when God is pure. And whenever that happens - ***whenever my life says one thing while God says something else*** - God isn't glorified.

Now that is frequently the case out in the world. In fact, God is rarely glorified by the lifestyle of non-Christians. But it is a great tragedy whenever this happens in the church. The people of God should ***reflect the glory of God one to another***. We ought to "***stimulate one another on to good works***" by the way we live among each other. That, according to the New Testament is what church is all about:

Hebrews 10:19-25 - "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, [20] by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, [21] and since we have a great priest over the house of God, [22] let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. [23] Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. [24] And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

Notice, drawing near to God can't be done at all without regularly coming together with God's people - the church. ***Why not?*** Because we're meant to receive courage to display the glory of God's holy will and way in this compromising age by what we see of the faithfulness of ***other*** Christians who take a courageous stand for Christ - who are faithful in the face of ridicule and persecution. Then we come to believe ***we*** can be faithful too!

That's what Peter means when he says we are "***living stones, being built together unto a spiritual habitation***" (**1 Peter 2:5**). That's how God is glorified in His church. Like bricks fastened together with mortar, we strengthen each other unto Godliness.

The glory of God is really what this strange Leviticus passage is all about. And it puts sense into some of the strangest words in it: **Leviticus 10:4-6** - "And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come near; carry your brothers away from the front of the sanctuary and out of the camp." [5] So they came near and carried them in their coats out of the camp, as Moses had said. [6] And Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar his sons, "Do not let the hair of your heads hang loose, and do not tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the congregation; but let

your brothers, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning that the Lord has kindled.”

I can't imagine how hard it must have been for this father and two brothers to watch as other people gathered up the dead bodies and then be told not to even attend the funeral or show any sign of mourning. And the point God makes crystal clear is that as priests, they were to publicly demonstrate they were so closely aligned to God that they couldn't even afford the **appearance** of endorsing or sympathizing with the disobedience of their son and brother.

We need to pause and think about this. As priests, their commitment to God was highly **visible**. The rest of the people would put their own spin on the priests' actions. The normal, human reaction to this tragedy is to mourn the loss of two good boys **more** than to mourn the disobeying of God. So they had to appear completely **uncompromised** in their alignment to the will of God. As priests, God's ways were always to be unquestionably revered and obeyed.

“Don't, in your mourning, give anyone the impression that what your sons did wasn't that bad because the people will think their punishment was the real tragedy here rather than the disobedience they committed. If people just feel sorry for your loss and grief they might vastly underestimate how holy I am and how wretched sin is. And if people don't deeply feel the weight of sin and the unbelievable nature of my holiness, that will be a much greater disaster than the loss of these two boys.”

What a mind-bending truth! Now, how does it relate to you and me We don't even burn incense. The NT makes it absolutely clear that you and I, as believers, are raised up as a **“kingdom of priests unto our God.”** Most of us have rightly understood that to mean that we now have access ourselves through the atoning work of Christ into God's presence.

But I'm not sure we've given equal weight to the concept of just how fully the priest in the OT **belonged totally to the cause of God alone, and to no one else**. If the priesthood meant anything in the OT it meant this - these people were **totally set apart for God**. They were **marked** as being separated from everyone else. They were not allowed any other equal loyalties with God.

If Aaron and his sons had mourned the death of Nadab and Abihu with the rest of the people, the rest of the people might have **thought** that Aaron and his living sons **were more broken about the loss of family than the displeasure of God**. And a priest's first loyalty is to God. And a priest's first love is God's glory. And a priest's first fear is sin. A priest must have a heart that trembles at God's Word more than the trembling of mere human emotion. Priests have an eye toward God in everything. They represent Him in everything. They long for His glory in everything.

Let me explain what I mean when I say priests long for God's glory in everything. And this very passage in Leviticus ten is really a good example. Everyone who is even remotely religious and decent longs for God's glory in a certain way. I mean, everyone fell on his face when the glory of the Lord filled the temple at the end of chapter nine. Everyone liked to see the cloud of God's glory leading by day and the pillar of fire by night.

As far as I know, very few people don't like to see God move, healing and delivering people. And we should rejoice in those things and pray for them. But this passages shocks and drags us into a kind of longing for God that probes deeper than feelings and emotion. It displays a certain kind of closeness - a **moral** closeness - to God's glory. It's the kind Aaron demonstrates when two of his sons are taken from him by a direct act of the Lord. And Aaron won't even open his mouth to argue with God about it. And Aaron will continue to obey even the harder instructions about not mourning over his sons' death. All because God must be **seen** to be honored at all cost.

That's where a true, priestly passion for God's glory is most striking - **when it's most costly to my own self-expression**. Most Christians want God to glorify Himself in turning around the abortion issue and in deflating the cause of gay rights. Most Christians want God glorified in reaching godless nations with the gospel. Most Christians want God to glorify Himself when Jesus comes to turn this corrupt world up on its head.

But the real test comes when God puts His almighty finger on the part of your heart you cherish most and says, **“Mine! That's mine. And I want you to yield it to me right now without so much as a question or complaint.”**

You glorify God most when something you've grown accustomed to is revealed as unholy and God tells you to make it holy. And, like it or not, you do it - ***immediately***.

God is most glorified when He comes and brings some point of His revealed will to bear on your life that forces such changes that those around you can explain your actions only by bringing God into the picture. Think about that the next time, accompanied by beautiful, soft background keyboard, you close your eyes, raise your hands, and in trance-like tranquility find yourself singing, "In My Life Lord, Be Glorified Today."