

Holiness and Grace

PART 2: FAILURE TO SACRIFICE (LEVITICUS 10:12-20)

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It is good to be with you this morning! We are glad you are here, and if you are visiting with us, we invite you to fill out a visitor card online using the QR code on the wall up here. It's also in the bulletin, or you can find it on our website at fourlakescoc.org/visitor. We do plan on partaking of the Lord's Supper right after we study the word of God today, so if you do not yet have the elements for the Supper, this would be a great time to get those.

As our custom has been, we are once again starting our service with a brief summary of God's plan for saving us. The gospel is the good news about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and we obey this good news by turning away from sin, by confessing our faith Jesus as the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be immersed with him, a burial in water, for the forgiveness of sins. At this point, the Christian life begins.

The first examples today come to us from somewhere in India, through Paul Renganathan, who says that "God still saves believers." He explains that four years ago they set up a podium at the end of a street in their city (in Narayanavan), and through a series of studies, fifty-five souls have become "new creatures," he says. He goes on to say, "[May] God be exalted always, everywhere, in everything." Amen to that! And I would add: This is one of the most colorful baptisms I've ever seen. I hope it's okay to notice this, but the clothing here is amazing, incredibly bright. But we are so happy to see this, and we certainly look forward to meeting these new brothers and sisters someday.

The next ones come to us from Jose Antonio Fernandez Munoz in Cuba, and I'm showing the empty baptistery first, because it is one of the most beautiful baptisteries I've ever seen. They posted this week with a quote from Acts 2:38, "Peter said to them: Change your way of thinking and living and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ. So God will forgive your sins and receive the Holy Spirit as a gift. (Acts 2:38)." They go on to say that "Marta, Josefina, Eliany and Roger today brightened the sky and our beloved church of Versailles. God is faithful." Great news from Cuba this week!

And then finally, we have a post from Avery, the woman on the right in these two pictures. This is what she says,

May I speak Boldly in Truth, in Truth alone may I walk. I was baptized in October 2021 at a community church. I was baptized on December 3, 2021 at [Katy church of Christ](#). Some will say

Avery, “Why did you get baptized twice? Wasn’t the 1st time sufficient to be washed in the blood of JESUS and to be added to the church?” Here is the answer: The first baptism was not a true baptism. I was baptized during a baptism day. Yes, it was a special event and there were cameras around and people full of hope signed up to be baptized. I myself was seeking the Lord and yet even after the first baptism something was missing. There was this lingering feeling every time we went to that church. I would bring my Bible into church and would maybe open it twice. When I did open up my bible the scriptures weren’t lining up with what the preacher was preaching about. I complained to friends that went there and was met with “I’m sure he didn’t mean it that way” or some excuse for what was being preached on. At that point something inside of me said get on your knees and pray. So that’s what I did: I prayed for GOD to show me where We needed to be. I’m known for a lot of things but just following blindly is not one of them. So later that week I turned on YouTube and the first video to pop up was [World Video Bible School](#) video on why are there so many churches. At the end of the video the gentleman stated that there is ONLY one church mentioned in the Bible and that’s the Church of Christ (Romans 16:16). That was all We needed to hear! I told my friends that we were heading to that church on Sunday. Morning service was amazing to say the least. I heard nothing but Bible. I was amazed I had never heard anyone speak like that man (John Baker) was speaking. I knew there was no way we were ever going back to the other church. So, we told the departments we were volunteering in that we would not be returning, and I told my friends there the same. Every time I had a question, at Church of Christ, I was met with let’s look at what the Bible says. I was not used to hearing that. I was used to hearing opinions by men, and not the word of GOD. I’m sharing because maybe there is a new believer out there. Who doesn’t know where they should be? My friend, ask for guidance from GOD and he will show you where to go. God has not changed he is still the same GOD. Just like he led the people from Egypt after they prayed to him, and that’s how he led us to his church.

Amen to everything Avery says here! And if you have similar concerns, we invite you to investigate for yourself. Check out World Video Bible School online, pull me aside after worship today, or get in touch with one of the elders of the church here, if we can help in any way. But we would invite you to obey the gospel just as Avery and her husband Robert have done.

Before we get to our study this morning, I’d like to share one more piece of good news, of a different variety. Several days ago, my friend Mark Reynolds posted from the Towne Acres congregation in Muncie, Indiana. He says, “My father-in-law, Mel Botkin, taught his first adult Bible class tonight and did a wonderful job! Teaching for the first time can be intimidating at any age, but he taught his first class at the age of 87!” This is almost as awesome as all of the baptisms this week, and we certainly pray that Mel has a long and distinguished career as a Bible class teacher. And again, if you would like to follow Mel’s example here, in teaching a class, please reach out to John sometime today.

This morning, we return to our two-part series of lessons on some rather interesting characters from the Old Testament. Two weeks ago, I started by asking whether anyone was familiar with the names Eleazar and Ithamar – Eleazar and Ithamar. These names are probably unknown to most of us, until we learn that their older brothers are Nadab and Abihu. And at this point, many of us are now able to identify these four men as the sons of Aaron. And it is important that we study all four of these men, because if we only study Nadab and Abihu, there’s a danger that we come away from Leviticus 10 with a rather unbalanced view of God. I would invite you, then, to turn back with me to Leviticus 10. We will have the text on the screen briefly (as we read through it), but it’s

important that we have it open in front of us throughout our study today. In Leviticus 10, we are looking at both the HOLINESS and the GRACE of God.

To review just a bit of background, the book of Exodus describes God leading his people out of slavery in Egypt, God gives the Law on Mount Sinai, and then he gives the instructions for building the tabernacle, and the tabernacle is completed in the last chapter. Well, in Leviticus, the Levites are given the responsibility for serving as priests in this new tabernacle. God is holy, the people are not, so the Levites are the go-betweens. The book of Leviticus, then, is basically a manual for those who were serving as priests: This is how you do it! I would see the theme of Leviticus in Leviticus 11:45, where God says, ***“For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy.”***

Well, the priests are dedicated, consecrated, set-apart, in Leviticus 9, starting with Aaron (Moses’ brother) and Aaron’s four sons – Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. They have the instructions from God, and they carry out those instructions perfectly. We end Leviticus 9 with Moses and Aaron leading the people in worship, they offer sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord appears to the people, with fire coming out from before the Lord and consuming those offerings. In response, the people shout and fall on their faces in worship. And if it had ended right here, this would have been an awesome day. However, this brings us to Leviticus 10.

Let’s look together again at all 20 verses of Leviticus 10,

¹ Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. ² And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. ³ Then Moses said to Aaron, “It is what the LORD spoke, saying, ‘By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored.’” So Aaron, therefore, kept silent.

⁴ Moses called also to Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Aaron’s uncle Uzziel, and said to them, “Come forward, carry your relatives away from the front of the sanctuary to the outside of the camp.” ⁵ So they came forward and carried them still in their tunics to the outside of the camp, as Moses had said. ⁶ Then Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, “Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, so that you will not die and that He will not become wrathful against all the congregation. But your kinsmen, the whole house of Israel, shall bewail the burning which the LORD has brought about. ⁷ You shall not even go out from the doorway of the tent of meeting, or you will die; for the LORD’S anointing oil is upon you.” So they did according to the word of Moses.

⁸ The LORD then spoke to Aaron, saying, ⁹ “Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you will not die—it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations— ¹⁰ and so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean, ¹¹ and so as to teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them through Moses.”

¹² Then Moses spoke to Aaron, and to his surviving sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, “Take the grain offering that is left over from the LORD’S offerings by fire and eat it unleavened beside the altar, for it is most holy. ¹³ You shall eat it, moreover, in a holy place, because it is your due and

your sons' due out of the LORD'S offerings by fire; for thus I have been commanded. ¹⁴ The breast of the wave offering, however, and the thigh of the offering you may eat in a clean place, you and your sons and your daughters with you; for they have been given as your due and your sons' due out of the sacrifices of the peace offerings of the sons of Israel. ¹⁵ The thigh offered by lifting up and the breast offered by waving they shall bring along with the offerings by fire of the portions of fat, to present as a wave offering before the LORD; so it shall be a thing perpetually due you and your sons with you, just as the LORD has commanded."

¹⁶ But Moses searched carefully for the goat of the sin offering, and behold, it had been burned up! So he was angry with Aaron's surviving sons Eleazar and Ithamar, saying, ¹⁷ "Why did you not eat the sin offering at the holy place? For it is most holy, and He gave it to you to bear away the guilt of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD. ¹⁸ Behold, since its blood had not been brought inside, into the sanctuary, you should certainly have eaten it in the sanctuary, just as I commanded." ¹⁹ But Aaron spoke to Moses, "Behold, this very day they presented their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD. When things like these happened to me, if I had eaten a sin offering today, would it have been good in the sight of the LORD?" ²⁰ When Moses heard that, it seemed good in his sight.

I. Last week, we focused on God's HOLINESS, demonstrated in that incident with Nadab and Abihu.

We learned that God is holy, giving him every right to tell us how to worship. There are times when God gives some very specific instructions, and where God has specified, we do not have liberty to add to God's instructions. We compared it (very crudely) to ordering a sandwich. If I go out and order a BLT somewhere, and if I specify bacon, lettuce, tomato, and mayo, nobody has any right to add pickles to that sandwich! There may be a time and a place for pickles, but on a BLT is not it! And if I specify what I want on the sandwich, I don't have to tell somebody everything I do NOT want on that sandwich. And this is what we have in the first half of Leviticus 10. Nadab and Abihu offer "**strange**" or "**unauthorized**" fire before the Lord. The Lord tells them specifically where to get the fire for the offering, and fire from any other source is "**unauthorized.**" You may remember we had multiple sources of fire on the table up here – torches, and matches, and strikers, and stones, and lighters, and fire starters – and we noted that if God had simply said, "start a fire," we would have freedom, but if God specifies the source of fire, then we are limited. Well, Nadab and Abihu sinned presumptuously, they presumed that God would not care (even though he had specified), but God did care, and they paid for it immediately, being burned alive with fire from heaven, right there on the spot. And God's response was, "**By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored.**" And this is a general principle we find here in Leviticus 10. In his holiness, God tells us how we are to approach him in worship, and he does not need to tell us every possible way that we are NOT to approach him in worship. We applied this to the use of instruments in worship. If you would like to know more, I continue to highly recommend the two books by Dan Chambers in the back of our building, *Where's the Piano?* and *Churches in the Shape of Scripture*. Beyond this, we also noted the reference to alcohol in this passage, perhaps indicating that this might have been a "hold my beer" moment. Nadab and Abihu see the shock and awe at the end of Chapter 9, they offer this "**unauthorized fire,**" and God immediately gives the reminder that priests are not to be drinking on the job. It's a rather strange reference, until we realize that there is probably a reason for it.

In the meantime, we had just a quick preview of the rest of this chapter, as God reminds the two younger brothers that they are not to touch the bodies (defiling themselves in the process), because they still have work

to do. They are now the only two remaining priests who are already consecrated. Stay sharp and sober, because you have work to do.

II. And this leads us to the second half of this passage as we focus on the GRACE of God.

So, let's try to put ourselves in the place of these two younger brothers. Nadab and Abihu have been burned to a crisp very publicly before the Lord in worship, and God basically says to the two younger brothers: You're next! You are now "on deck" to pick up leading in worship where these two left off. We have the instructions from Moses (starting in verse 12). Aaron, and his two surviving sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, are to take the still smoldering offering that is left over, and they are to eat it beside the altar. Moses gives some very specific instructions here as to how they are to do this. And then (in verse 16), Moses seems to be hovering (almost like a manager or a supervisor). After what just happened to Nadab and Abihu, Moses seems to be walking around making sure they don't have another incident, and he suddenly realizes that instead of eating the goat as they had been instructed, the sacrifice (instead) had been completely burned up. So, instead of the remnants of a massive potluck dinner (as he was expecting to find), he instead finds that the goat had been completely burned up. It was gone! Moses, then (in verse 16) is **"angry."** And in verse 17, he confronts them on this, ***"Why did you not eat the sin offering at the holy place? For it is most holy, and He gave it to you to bear away the guilt of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD."*** So, something has gone wrong here. It seems that Aaron, and Eleazar, and Ithamar have failed to follow God's instructions. At the end of the chapter, though, Moses ultimately seems to approve of what happens here. And obviously, Eleazar and Ithamar are not torched by God like their brothers. Some people, then, have looked at this passage and have concluded that maybe "precision obedience" isn't actually too important to God after all. As we think about the grace of God, though, I'd like for us to take a closer look at what happens here. Why are Nadab and Abihu killed, while Eleazar and Ithamar are allowed to live? Why the difference? Is God holy, or is he a God of grace? Or, more specifically, can we use the second half of this chapter to ignore what happens in the first part of this chapter?

To understand what happens here, we need to remember that Nadab and Abihu sinned presumptuously. They seem to have had the attitude, "Surely, God will not mind. Yes, he commanded this, but surely, he will not mind if we do this instead." And God's response confirms that by sinning in this way, they had failed to treat God as holy. So, they weren't just careless in worship, but they were almost arrogant, "Who does God think he is to limit our creativity here?" Nadab and Abihu had failed to treat God as holy.

On the other hand, Aaron almost seems to go in the other direction. To me, Aaron almost seems terrified here. When Moses calls him out on why they hadn't eaten the sacrifice, notice Aaron's response (in verse 19), ***"Behold, this very day they presented their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD. When things like these happened to me, if I had eaten a sin offering today, would it have been good in the sight of the LORD?"*** In other words, instead of sinning presumptuously (as Nadab and Abihu had done), Aaron seems to be almost completely overwhelmed with God's holiness. Aaron's attitude is: After everything that has happened today, how could we possibly even dare to approach God in worship? Aaron is overwhelmed here. And in this fragile state before the Lord, my understanding of this is that Aaron didn't see himself as being worthy of this. He doesn't deserve the "privilege" of worship on this occasion.

As I was preparing today's lesson, I ran across an interesting story about Paul Stanley, the lead singer for KISS. You may be thinking: What in the world does Paul Stanley have to do with Aaron, and Eleazar, and Ithamar? Here's the headline on Fox News this week, "KISS frontman Paul Stanley auctioning historic Chevrolet Corvette because it's too good for him." Many years ago, when he first made it big, Mr. Stanley had said that he would

buy an American car as soon as he found one worth buying. Well, years ago, he found the Corvette, and I think he's owned several through the years. Last year, he ordered a new 2022 Chevrolet Corvette Stingray convertible, but it turns out that the one he ordered was the very first one for this model year, with VIN 001, making it especially unique. And Mr. Stanley now says: This car is too special for me! He can't "do it justice," he says, and so he is letting it go. You know, I think I might give it a shot – at least I could give it a try! But do we see how this applies in some small way to what we are studying this morning? Aaron has just lost his two oldest sons, God wants him to continue on as priest, but when it comes to eating the sacrifice, this is too much! Aaron doesn't see himself as being worthy of this.

And this is where we get back to Moses' actual instructions. I hope you will look back with me to what Moses says in verse 13. He says, ***"You shall eat it, moreover, in a holy place, because it is your due and your sons' due out of the LORD'S offerings by fire; for thus I have been commanded."*** He says again (in verse 14), that the breast and the thigh of the offering, ***"you may eat in a clean place, you and your sons and your daughters with you; for they have been given as your due and your sons' due out of the sacrifices of the peace offerings of the sons of Israel."*** Did we notice how Moses uses the word ***"due"*** in this passage? This is their ***"share."*** This is basically their payment for serving. This is how the priests would survive. Ultimately, the Levites weren't given land like the other tribes, but they were to serve God and they were to live off of the sacrifices. This was God's plan for taking care of his priests. They would offer a goat for the sins of the people, for example, and they and their family would have a goat bar-b-que that night!

In this case, however, Aaron and the remaining two sons just aren't feeling it at this point. They are in no condition to eat. It just doesn't seem right. And this is Aaron's question (in verse 19). He's wondering: How can I do this with a good conscience? Our family has really blown it here: How can we benefit personally from this massive failure? And in fact, we do have two passages earlier in Leviticus (in Chapter 4 and in Chapter 7) that appear to prohibit priests from eating the sacrifice if they are making the sacrifice for their own sin. We understand: As a priest, I sin, then I sacrifice to be forgiven, followed by, "Woohoo! Goat BBQ!" So, maybe there is a lack of clarity here. They aren't guilty, but Nadab and Abihu were guilty. And yet, Moses has told them to eat the sacrifice, but they don't. And so, they appear to sin, not presumptuously, but on the side of caution. One preacher I respect compares it to a mechanic who accepts payment for fixing a car, but as he digs in he's unable to fix it, he realizes he's in over his head, so he returns the payment. In a similar way, eating the sacrificial goat is their ***"due,"*** this is ***"owed"*** to the priests, but they just can't at this point. It just doesn't seem right to offer a sacrifice for my own sin (or the sin of my family) and then to benefit from that sacrifice.

Do we see a difference, then, between the attitude of Nadab and Abihu and the attitude of Aaron and Eleazar and Ithamar? Nadab and Abihu sin presumptuously, but Aaron and the other two sons fail to follow through here because they are overwhelmed with a sense of their own weakness as they serve a most holy God. There's a big difference here between these two attitudes. And that's why one results in death and the other results in an expression of God's grace. Aaron, and Eleazar, and Ithamar are spared. In fact, Eleazar will go on to serve as high priest after Aaron's death later on. So, even though they fail, they live to serve another day, because their hearts are right. It seems to me that Aaron has the attitude of King David in Psalm 51:16-17, *****PPT***** where David comes before God in worship with a broken heart and says,

***For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;
You are not pleased with burnt offering.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.***

So, yes, God is a God of holiness, but he is also a God of grace. And his response in the second half of Leviticus 10 certainly reflects this. And his attitude here is certainly in keeping with what we learn in Exodus 34:6-7, where God says, ***“The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished...”*** So yes, God punishes the guilty, but he is also compassionate and slow to anger. And we see this in Leviticus 10. On one hand, we have Nadab and Abihu (we’re going to worship God how we please, and there’s nothing anybody can do about it), and on the other hand, we have Eleazar and Ithamar, the other sons of Aaron, and these men have the utmost respect for God, even to the point where they apparently feel completely unworthy to approach God in worship. The first attitude God condemns, but the second attitude God appreciates. Aaron finally understands ****PPT**** what God would say later in Hosea 6:6, ***“For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”***

Conclusion:

So we need to ask ourselves this morning: Where are we in this account? In 1 Peter 2:9, Peter says that we as God’s people are a ***“royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession.”*** And so, as we come before God in worship, we need to ask whether we are more like Nadab and Abihu, or are we more like Eleazar and Ithamar? How do we view worship? Is God lucky to have such awesome people like us here this morning, or have we assembled here this morning with the utmost respect and reverence? As priests, our job, our mission, is to ***“proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light, for we once were not a people, but now we are the people of God; we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy.”*** God loves us, but he is holy, and so, it is important that we worship carefully and according to God’s instructions. At the same time, we also learn in this passage that God is a God of grace and mercy. He wants us to worship from the heart. He’s not out to get us, looking for an excuse to strike us down, but by those who come near to him, he will be treated as holy. I hope that our study of Leviticus 10 has helped us come to a more complete understanding of who God is and what he wants from us.

Before we sing a song to prepare our hearts for the Lord’s Supper, let’s go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the one and only holy God. Today, we ask that we would see you as you truly are, deserving of our respect and obedience. As your priests, we ask that would serve you faithfully and carefully, from the heart, in spirit and in truth. Thank you for saving us from our own sin. We do not deserve this salvation that you have offered in your Son, but we are so thankful. We pray that our worship today will be acceptable in your sight. We pray for open and honest hearts.

We come to you this morning in the name of Jesus. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com